

Srebrenica: a 'safe' area

Part III - The fall of Srebrenica

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Chapter 1

The military and political situation in spring 1995

1. Introduction

A proper understanding of the series of events that resulted in the fall of Srebrenica on 11 July 1995 is not possible without a further discussion of the political and military-strategic developments since the spring of that year. Even within the United Nations some heated discussions took place. After all, there are arguments to support the conclusion that the Safe Area policy had become a failure. The Safe Areas had not been demilitarized as intended but, on the contrary, the warring factions were misusing them for military purposes.

That also made the UNPROFOR mandate and organization subject of discussion once again. In May 1995, the UN Secretary-General, Boutros-Ghali, and Force Commander General Janvier, presented their ideas to the UN Security Council. However, their ideas stranded in the interplay of political forces in New York and in the capitals of the troops-supplying countries. Nevertheless the ideas of Janvier as well as those of Boutros-Ghali will be discussed further because they provide an insight into the situation of the mission at the time and into the ambiguities in the UNPROFOR mandate as laid down in the various Security Council resolutions. Those ambiguities influenced the effectiveness of the UNPROFOR mission and the warring factions' perception and the public opinion regarding the UN presence.

The matter will be approached from the Bosnian angle. That means hardly any attention will be given to developments in Croatia and Republika Srpska Krajina, the 'serb Republic' proclaimed by the Croatian Serbs in the Krajina.

This chapter focuses on the military operational and strategic aspects. That is because after the rejection of the Contact Group plan by the Bosnian Serbs, political activities to end the conflict in Bosnia were on the backburner. The cease-fire agreed on 31 December 1994, known as the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, that should have lasted until 1 May 1995, had not put a stop to the fighting. On the contrary, the hostilities continued with renewed intensity, also before the end of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. The political vacuum in which UNPROFOR found itself will also be discussed in detail. The political activities that did continue, such as the creation of the Rapid Reaction Force, will also be addressed.

In spring 1995 the military-strategic balance between the warring factions in Bosnia was shifting. That had two causes: firstly the creation of a military alliance within the Muslim-Croat Federation but, more importantly, the shift in balance between the military forces of the Bosnian Muslims (the ABiH) and those of the Bosnian Serbs (the VRS). This balance shifted in favour of the Bosnian Muslims: the ABiH had considerably more manpower than the VRS and over the course of time they became better armed, equipped and trained, while the VRS became more and more exhausted.

Also from an economic point of view the Serb Republic in Bosnia, Republika Srpska, proclaimed by the Bosnian Serbs, was taking a beating. The effect of the sanctions became apparent and fuel shortages had an impact on the mobility of the VRS.

In addition to visions of the military-strategic situation that prevailed in Zagreb, Sarajevo and other capitals, this introduction will also discuss the strategy of the Bosnian Muslims and the Bosnian-Serb intentions. Particularly the latter was an unknown element for UNPROFOR, just like for the ABiH. A major cause of that was that UNPROFOR did not have a properly functioning intelligence organization. Interviews by UNPROFOR representatives with politicians and soldiers of the warring factions, and interpretations of those, had to lead to the best possible assessment of the intentions of

the warring factions. In several cases that caused differences of opinion between the UN headquarters in Zagreb and Sarajevo.

Moreover, since 1995 these UN headquarters were under new command. Newcomers in 1995 were the French general Bernard Janvier, as Force Commander of UNPROFOR based in Zagreb, and the British general Rupert Smith in Sarajevo as Commander Bosnia-Herzegovina Command. They had to find their role at the Yugoslav scene amidst the players who were already there, including: the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (abbreviated: the SRSG), Yashusi Akashi from Japan; general Ratko Mladic at the Bosnian-Serb side; and general Rasim Delic on the side of the Bosnian Muslims. For UNPROFOR an important official within NATO was the American admiral Leighton Smith (not to be confused with general Rupert Smith). As Commander in Chief Allied Forces Southern Europe he was one of the people holding the key to Close Air Support.

Their visions, the differences between those, and the resulting disputes regarding the assessment of the military-strategic situation will receive special attention in this chapter. That is because these visions had an impact on the policy and its implementation. For that reason we will start with a characterization of the main players on the military-strategic stage. The two newcomers in Zagreb and Sarajevo have a prominent position among them: generals Janvier and Smith.

2. Force Commander general Bernard Janvier

Opinions differ widely on the French general Bernard Janvier who took office in February 1995. His way of acting can be described as careful and cautious, for which he was both praised and abused.

Among journalists, Janvier would soon be regarded as the man who later refused Srebrenica Close Air Support, thus causing the onset of the fall of the enclave. That left a mark on the appreciation for Janvier in later days.

However, on such qualifications it was often too easily forgotten that Janvier had a military responsibility that not only covered Bosnia, but also included Croatia and Macedonia. That means his assessments were also based on conditions outside Srebrenica.

There was more admiration for Janvier in Dutch military circles. That was caused by the fact that the safety of the peacekeepers, who of course had not been sent to Bosnia to fight, had his continuous attention. On various occasions Janvier pointed out that the safety of the UN personnel was more important than the implementation of the mandate; that also determined his attitude regarding Close Air Support. Janvier always tried to protect the soldiers on the ground. That was one of the reasons why for instance his substitute (Deputy Force Commander), the Canadian General-Major Barry Ashton, highly respected him.¹

Other people in Janvier's staff did show a more critical attitude towards the Force Commander. Nobody had any doubts that Janvier's concern for the UNPROFOR troops was genuine, but at the same time some people of his Zagreb staff saw it as an excuse to do nothing.²

Also within NATO for instance, criticisms of Janvier's attitude could be heard, though those could partly be explained by the differences in roles between NATO and UN. NATO Secretary-General Claes resented the fact that Janvier - and with him Akashi and Boutros-Ghali - were continuously holding back when it came to military action, though according to Claes it had not been much different with Janvier's predecessors Cot and De Lapresle. De Lapresle took the position that the peacekeeping character of the mission had to be maintained and, moreover, he did not want to put his troops at risk. For that reason he too resisted NATO's call for air strikes.³ Claes thought that firmer action had to be taken towards the Bosnian Serbs, but he got irritated by the lingering and the willingness to compromise on the part of Janvier and Akashi, the more so because Janvier had once

¹ Interview Barry Ashton, 30/05/00.

² Interview Tony Banbury, 05/06/00.

³ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87302, File 3200-5, Vol. I, Air Strikes, 6 Aug 93-19 Dec 94. Interoffice Memorandum, De Lapresle to Akashi (Only), 25/11/94, UN Confi.

told him: 'I don't owe you an explanation: I am the UN'. Janvier could sometimes really pull rank, according to Claes.⁴

Janvier spent about half his time in Zagreb and the other half travelling. The latter for talks in the UN framework in Geneva or New York, with his subcommanders in Sarajevo, or in Croatia or Macedonia.

In addition to strictly military aspects, Janvier was also expected to be engaged in the link with the political-strategic decision-making process. Janvier considered his staff in Zagreb to be suitable for military affairs only. The military staff in Zagreb was hardly or not consulted regarding negotiations or direct contacts with Mladic or others. Janvier handled that with Akashi's political advisor.⁵

The language barrier

Generally speaking, the performance of French officers in peacekeeping operations and international staffs could sometimes be a problem, because mainly the higher officers in many cases did not speak any foreign languages. That hampered their performance in the communication with other members of international staffs. Working with interpreters was not always a solution.⁶ For instance, general Gobilliard, substitute of general Smith in Sarajevo and acting commanding officer of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command at the time of the fall of Srebrenica, did not speak any English at all.⁷ Janvier did not speak English fluently either, which had consequences for his work: meetings were in English, but Janvier apparently did not understand English as medium of communication sufficiently to take control of discussions and to recognize subtle differences. For that reason he surrounded himself outside official meetings with a number of confidants who did speak French.⁸

That mechanism also made itself felt more widely: also in New York Janvier had close relations with UN Undersecretary-General Annan and Director of Communications and Special Projects, Tharoor, mainly because the latter spoke French fluently. Conversely, people at the UNPROFOR head office in Zagreb who spoke English, preferred to discuss matters outside meetings with other English-speaking people and within the staff there was a strong tendency to quickly discuss minor matters with the Deputy Force Commander or the Chief of Staff without calling in an interpreter. Maybe that also resulted in Janvier not being aware of all ins and outs. But whatever could be said about Janvier: according to the military advisor to the UN Secretary-General, general-major F.H. van Kappen, he did not manipulate.⁹

One of Akashi's assistants, Tony Banbury, even went as far as stating that the language problem also influenced Janvier with regard to his perception of the Bosnian-Serb way of thinking. Partly due to the language problem, Janvier would hardly be able to handle the day-to-day affairs, according to Banbury. On occasions he would not have understood the situation because he often refused to use an interpreter at meetings and briefings so he could not properly follow the discussion and made few contributions¹⁰. EU negotiator Carl Bildt also mentioned Janvier's English as a problem. Sometimes he could not follow a line of thought and, according to Bildt, that caused him to become isolated. Janvier's predecessor De Lapresle didn't have Janvier's language problem.¹¹

However, not everybody considered Janvier's inadequate knowledge of the English language a problem for his performance. The Canadian major David Last, Military Assistant to the Deputy Force Commander, for instance, who often accompanied Janvier, thought positively about Janvier. According

⁴ Interview W. Claes, 12/03/00.

⁵ Interview Michel Guesdon, 07/06/00

⁶ Interview Michel Guesdon, 07/06/00

⁷ Interview F.H. van Kappen, 21/06/00.

⁸ Interview H. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

⁹ Interview F.H. van Kappen, 21/06/00.

¹⁰ Interview Tony Banbury, 11/05/00.

¹¹ Interview Carl Bildt, 12/12/00.

to him the general was ‘mentally fine’. He saw a connection with the circumstances: everybody in Zagreb was exhausted in those days in July, said Last. They made days from six in the morning to late at night, while in many cases they were on the telephone with their international capitals till all hours. Last had never seen Janvier not alert or concentrated as a consequence, yet when Janvier was tired, his English gradually deteriorated and he had more trouble following the discussions.¹² Yet Janvier did realize that he had his shortcomings in this field. He insisted on appointment of an English-speaking Deputy Force Commander, after his predecessor De Lapresle pointed out to him that the position would no longer be held by a Canadian officer, but that it would be offered to the Netherlands. For that reason Janvier wrote to Annan: ‘I have a personal requirement for a native English DFC, due to my present lack of fluency in English.’ As a result, the Netherlands contributed the Chief of Staff (Kolsteren, as from June 1995), and Canada kept the position of Deputy Force Commander (Ashton got that post).¹³

In Kolsteren’s perception, Janvier didn’t miss much despite the language barrier and if he did miss anything, he asked his Military Assistant or his translator. Once when Janvier was accompanied by a different interpreter who still had to learn the jargon, he said: ‘No, that is not how I said it.’ That would lead the conclusion that he did have a reasonable command of English, but did not feel comfortable enough to speak it. Important briefings, such as those Janvier arranged for Akashi as his military adviser, were held by Janvier personally and alone, usually with an interpreter, Kolsteren said. Janvier did speak English with Kolsteren himself, but as soon as an Englishman or American was present, he didn’t, apparently for fear of being at a relative disadvantage due to the language problem. Then Janvier would speak French and his interpreter translated for him.¹⁴

Janvier as Force Commander

There have been speculations about the extent to which Janvier’s policy was spoon-fed by the French government. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Akashi, declared to the NIOD that Janvier was ‘under some pressure from his government’.¹⁵ Consequently, Janvier would have shown little initiative and would have followed the national line too closely. Other French Force Commanders, who adopted an attitude that was more independent from the French government, would have operated more effectively: general Cot would have achieved more, and someone like De Lapresle would even have had Akashi and Boutros-Ghali in his pocket. In addition, he would have been able to direct the minds of these two to a great extent because they had no military experience, according to UN Assistant Undersecretary-General Manfred Eisele.¹⁶ Bildt too called de Lapresle ‘extremely knowledgeable and intellectual’.¹⁷

However, when judging Janvier it should not be forgotten that he had great doubts about the effectiveness of Close Air Support, as he had to deal with it in more difficult circumstances than Cot and De Lapresle. The use of Close Air Support did not yield much tactical advantage in the opinion of Janvier, but did entail substantial risks for the UNPROFOR units.¹⁸ A similar story was heard from the Dutch military adviser to the UN Secretary-General, Van Kappen. In his opinion Janvier set great store by the proportionality and subsidiariness principle, and his judgement on requests for Close Air Support were based on that principle. Janvier adhered to the concepts thought out in New York, said Van Kappen. Only when UNPROFOR was under fire from heavy weapons and there were no other methods to solve the problem, Janvier was prepared to call in air power. In his opinion Janvier was

¹² Interview David Last, 05/06/00.

¹³ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 06/03/95, No. Z-376.

¹⁴ Interview A.M.W.W. M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

¹⁵ Interview Yasushi Akashi, 25/11/99.

¹⁶ Interview Manfred Eisele, 14/10/99.

¹⁷ Interview Carl Bildt, 12/12/00.

¹⁸ Confidential interview (4).

strongly focused on ‘doing things right’ rather than on ‘doing the right thing’. He wanted to remain impartial as long as possible and not be carried away by the emotions of the moment. Janvier’s staff, as well as Smith in Sarajevo, were prepared to go much further than Janvier.¹⁹ However, Janvier himself was not a Machiavellian and he felt a strong responsibility for the soldiers.²⁰

The ideas about this attitude of Janvier seem to be obscured, at least in his environment. There the image prevails that Janvier had great problems taking part in the discussions and had little to contribute. That way Janvier created the impression that he didn’t have much to say. Yet that was not correct. Janvier did prove to be a good analyst, but he could not show it very often due to the language barrier.

Of course Janvier’s personality also had an impact. He had problems gaining people’s confidence²¹ and he was not easy to approach.²² Neither should he have been a man with ‘beaucoup de finesse’ who was always in control of the situation.²³

This meant that Janvier was of a whole different breed than general Smith in Sarajevo who came under him. Differences of opinion between Zagreb and Sarajevo were not purely of a strategic nature. Philip Corwin, Head of Civil Affairs in Sarajevo, pointed out the differences in background and character of the leading military figures. According to Corwin, Smith had known nothing but successes as a soldier. He had been shaped by his experience in the Gulf War and the Falklands War. In both operations the use of military force against a military inferior opponent had paid off. As an advocate of more forceful action, Smith felt supported by popular sentiments and the international press.

Janvier on the other hand, felt the pressure of the international community in Zagreb stronger than Smith felt it in Sarajevo. In addition, Janvier was wary of what he called Smith’s American-type ‘cowboy’ diplomacy and he was strongly influenced by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The French were shaped by a less glorious military past and the experience of Dien Bien Phu. According to Corwin, Dien Bien Phu had not been a coincidence and Janvier was aware of that, just like general André Soubirou, the Commander of the Rapid Reaction Force, on which more in section 13. Soubirou had emphasized the considerable similarity between the geographical circumstances in Sarajevo and Dien Bien Phu. That was because both Sarajevo and the three eastern enclaves were situated in valleys surrounded by mountains and, consequently, they were indefensible.²⁴

Janvier adopted a more cautious attitude regarding forceful action against the Bosnian Serbs than the other leading figure at the UNPROFOR stage, general Rupert Smith. There were major differences between the ways of thinking of the two leading figures. Bildt judged that general Smith was ‘far more intellectual’ than Janvier. He was an intellectual who could also command troops.²⁵ Occasionally, the two generals had differences of opinion. Still Janvier said not to have harboured any animosity towards Smith but, on the contrary, spoke highly of him. Smith was in favour of hard action but never succeeded in convincing Akashi and Janvier. Smith wanted to fight and to take the side of the Bosnian Muslims, among other things by using force to open a corridor to Sarajevo. However, Janvier did not want to do that because UNPROFOR was not adequately equipped for such actions. The two had carried on a fundamental debate on the subject and, according to Janvier, Smith had known that Janvier would refuse.²⁶

¹⁹ Interview F.H. van Kappen, 21/06/00.

²⁰ Interview H. de Jonge, 30/05/00.

²¹ Interview Emma Shitaka, 11/05/00.

²² Interview F.H. van Kappen, 21/06/00.

²³ Interview Michel Guesdon, 07/06/00.

²⁴ Corwin, *Dubious Mandate*, p. 160.

²⁵ Interview Carl Bildt, 12/12/00.

²⁶ *Mission d’Information commune sur les événements de Srebrenica, Audition de M. Bernard Janvier*, 25/01/01.

3. Commander UNPROFOR general Rupert Smith in Sarajevo

The British lieutenant-general Rupert Smith, Commander in Bosnia after his predecessor, the also British general Sir Michael Rose, was the latter's counterpart in a number of respects. Rose mainly relied on his British personal staff and tended to ignore the rest of staff. Smith on the other hand did use his staff, which made the work pleasant for a Chief of Staff. That at least kept the staff informed and people could keep a grip on things. Apart from the fact that Smith was an extremely pleasant superior, he also was at a very nice human being, according to his Chief of Staff, the Dutch Brigadier-general C.H. Nicolai.²⁷

Also as regards vision and policy, Rose and Smith were somewhat on opposite sides. One of Akashi's policy officers called Rose a general who was not very receptive to advice: once he had taken in decision, he refused to deviate from it.²⁸ One of Akashi's other policy officers confirmed that Smith had been the better general of the two. Rose had continuously been busy embellishing the UNPROFOR image.²⁹ He would rather talk to the media than enter into a meaningful discussion. For Smith this was exactly the other way round.³⁰ Rose used Close Air Support with care³¹ while Smith advocated the use of more extensive force. In Smith's analysis UNPROFOR was the hostage of the VRS. That continuously put UNPROFOR in an inferior position while Smith on the other hand was trying to reach a superior position. According to Smith a psychological battle against the VRS was required rather than just military force. He wanted to take a number of subsequent measures to get the message across to the VRS that he was not be trifled with.³²

Shortly after he took office on 23 February 1995, Smith explained his way of thinking to his subcommanders during a Force Commander's Conference. He wanted them to think ahead and to elaborate on ideas on what could be done. Only few people had to be involved because of the sensitivity of the matter. His message was 'be creative, think and work options out'. Smith wanted to promote the following lines of thought about the VRS: 'if they do this, they might already have done what they could do if we would do something which they wouldn't like. So we should do this, because they played their cards already while we have ours in hand'. Realization of the actions was not so much his department: for actual implementation of an action he at least had to involve Janvier and Akashi.³³

One of Akashi's assistants considered Smith a wonderful analyst, a great soldier and 'intellectually dangerous'. In that respect he was no match for Akashi or Janvier, she admitted. Akashi was afraid that Smith was provoking a war. Smith would have made an excellent team with Janvier's predecessor, De Lapresle. He was 'brilliant' as well, he grasped the current situation of UNPROFOR and the negotiating process and in fact he was more than a troops general.³⁴

Smith versus Mladic: a war of nerves

General Smith and general Mladic were well-matched. A true war of nerves was going on between these two diehards. An example of the way Smith operated at the time of operation Deliberate Force (the operation against the Serbs that after the fall of Srebrenica brought the change that eventually would result in the Dayton Peace Accord) was, that he used six artillery guns (howitzers) for selected

²⁷ Interview C.H. Nicolai, 11/06/99.

²⁸ Interview Tony Banbury, 11/05/00.

²⁹ Interview Tone Bringa, 13/07/99.

³⁰ Interview Manfred Eisele, 14/10/99.

³¹ Interview George Joulwan, 08/06/00.

³² Interview Tony Banbury, 11/05/00.

³³ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 117, Civil Affairs SNE. Memorandum, Notes from Force Commander's Conference, 23-02-95. Compiled by colonel NLA J.H.M. Engelen.

³⁴ Interview Emma Shitaka, 11/05/00.

targets, and every time had a separate howitzer fire two grenades on Mladic's native town. This would not have remained without effect.³⁵

Meetings between the two generals could be rather heavy. After the air strikes at Pale late May, Smith said that it was not proper for a professional soldier to expose unarmed observers and to threaten them with 'televised death'. He demanded release and decent treatment, but did not want to negotiate about it. Smith urged Mladic to impose restrictions upon himself and his soldiers, and he also urged Mladic to think about the dangers of his course of action. Mladic urged Smith to do the same.

When two days later Smith took the opportunity to explain on the telephone that he did not command the NATO forces, but that he could only recommenced an action, and once more pointed out to Mladic what the difference was between air strikes and Close Air Support, Mladic hung up the phone. He said he didn't want to listen to these monstrous thoughts. Yet two days later Mladic still accepted Smith's offer to let the situation cool off, casually advising Smith to take a tranquilizer to enable him to take reasonable decisions.

Another illustrative moment in their relation happened when the French retook the Vrbanja bridge at Sarajevo. A number of Bosnian-Serb soldiers were killed there, after which Mladic said that Smith did not have the right to kill VRS soldiers. It weren't Africans like Smith had killed earlier in his career, Mladic said. If Smith were a civilized human being, he would have to write letters of condolence to the families of the dead VRS soldiers, after which Smith asked Mladic if he had done the same to the families of the French soldiers who were killed. After all, it had been the VRS that started the action.³⁶

The two were not only matched, but in a sense they were also condemned to each other. There was little development in the relations between the two generals. Late June for instance, in an interview in *Srpska Vojska* Mladic lashed out to UNPROFOR and general Smith. Because the West did not want to send troops to Bosnia, the Croatian and Muslim forces were executing the Western policy in the Balkans, Mladic alleged. UNPROFOR had made it clear that it considered the VRS as the enemy, encouraged the Bosnian Muslims to continue fighting and provided them with food, fuel and ammunition. Mladic described Smith as a person who did not understand the situation. He came to Bosnia as an arrogant man, showered with glory from the Gulf War. According to Mladic he needed time to switch from fighter to peacemaker. Mladic also contended that Smith had recommended the Muslim-Croat Federation to jointly wage war, and that the Bosnian Serbs were the enemy.³⁷ The latter was exactly what UNPROFOR was frenetically trying to avoid. On the contrary, it had to become clear to the Bosnian Serbs that UNPROFOR was not at war with them and had no wish to be so. The Bosnian Serbs seemed to live in a world of their own and to have confidence in their ability to resist NATO and the UN.³⁸

After some time Mladic understood that Smith was 'something entirely different' than Janvier. He may have thought he would be able to overcome Janvier, unlike Smith. For that reason Mladic decided not to talk to Smith anymore, but to Janvier.³⁹ Smith on this part also refused to do business with Mladic for some time, for a number of reasons: out of principle; because of the hostages that were being held; because Smith himself was holding four VRS soldiers; and because he believed that the VRS would not be interested in talking to him.⁴⁰ After the last hostages were released in June, Janvier subsequently asked Mladic to resume normal relations with Smith and his staff.⁴¹

³⁵ Interview Emma Shitaka, 11/05/00.

³⁶ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Telephone Conversation Gen Smith / Gen Mladic: 28/05/95 UN Confi, attached to Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 29/05/95, No. Z-883.

³⁷ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Telegram Belgrade to FCO, 2616161Z June 95.

³⁸ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Fax Deyan Mihov, Acting D-SRSG/CAC BH Command Sarajevo to Yasushi Akashi and Michel Moussali, HCA Civil Affairs, HQ Zagreb, Situation Assessment May 29 1995 mailed with Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 29/05/95, No. Z-889.

³⁹ Interview Tony Banbury, 11/05/00.

⁴⁰ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. SRSG's Meeting in Split, 09/06/95, Confi.

⁴¹ DPKO, UNPF Code Cables 14 June 1995-30 June 1995. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 20/06/95, No. Z-1025.

In fact the opposite was going on of what Mladic observed in the interview. UNPROFOR generally did not behave as an enemy of the Bosnian Serbs, but generally showed willingness to come to arrangements. For that reason a Western ambassador in Sarajevo concluded: 'UNPROFOR tended to side with the Serbs.' UNPROFOR's tendency to do business with the VRS rather than with the ABiH can partly be explained from the fact that the Bosnian Serbs had an organized army (uniforms and regular units), according to the standards of the soldiers who were in command of UNPROFOR. The VRS were 'soldiers like us', unlike the moderately equipped and less organized ABiH army. Another reason for that implicit choice was the continuous complaining by the Bosnian Muslims.

In fact, Smith was the first of the UNPROFOR Commanders who adopted a different attitude and chose the side of the victim: de Bosnian Muslims. Smith qualified this intervention with the words: 'I have broken the machine and nobody can repair it'. However, saying this he overestimated his own role a little; Smith's problem was that the Force Commander in Zagreb, Janvier, took the decisions and in many cases ignored the advice from the Bosnia-Herzegovina Commander, Smith.⁴²

Smith and politicians

Smith had some reservations regarding politicians, who according to him did not always really have an idea of what was actually happening in Bosnia, and regularly failed to consult the military when taking decisions that did have military consequences. Before he was appointed in Bosnia, Smith in his position of British Operations Officer in London had become involved in the possible deployment of NATO forces in the former Yugoslavia. He had opposed it: in his opinion it was impossible for UN and NATO to operate at the same time in the same area. According to him, at the time no politician had consulted the UN desks or the military on declaring the No-Fly-Zone above the former Yugoslavia. That was an invention by politicians and, said Smith, the soldiers were then left to implement it.

Those politicians did make themselves heard in the meantime; Smith indeed had the problem that time and again he had to convince the government in London that his vision was correct, and that was not always easy.⁴³ Yet Smith was very open about those contacts with London. He quite regularly showed his Chief of Staff Nicolai messages he had exchanged with London.⁴⁴

An example of Smith's vision regarding political plans was that already at an early stage for military-operational considerations he was not enthusiastic about the plans NATO was designing to get UNPROFOR out of Bosnia in case of an emergency. The question he repeatedly asked was: how fast can we get away? His experience in the Gulf War had taught him that it could take four to six months to remove all vehicles and heavy equipment from the operating area. Another worry with regard to this was whether sufficient staging areas for the troops and the equipment could be found, i.e. places to take the troops and equipment on board, and whether sufficient vessels were available.⁴⁵

Another example of the different approaches of politicians and the military which Smith was dismayed at, was that the UN did not allow him to move artillery to Sarajevo. The British had artillery available, but that had to remain embarked on vessels in the Adriatic Sea and the UN did not allow it to be put ashore. In his opinion artillery would have been more useful than airplanes. Smith adopted a pragmatic approach in military affairs.⁴⁶

⁴² Confidential interview (3).

⁴³ Interview Tony Banbury, 11/05/00.

⁴⁴ Interview C.H. Nicolai, 09/07/99.

⁴⁵ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 117, Civil Affairs SNE. Memorandum, Notes from Force Commander's Conference, 23/02/95. Compiled by Colonel NLA J.H.M. Engelen.

⁴⁶ Interview R.A. Smith, 12/01/00.

4. The differences between Smith and Janvier

That also had an impact on his relation with Janvier. A clear example happened as regards the political decision to set up what was called the Rapid Reaction Force for Bosnia in June 1995. This Rapid Reaction Force will be discussed in more detail in section 13; what it roughly comes down to is that this Rapid Reaction Force was a ‘forceful’ military unit – read: with artillery and attack helicopters - with the objective of strengthening UNPROFOR in order to reduce the mission’s vulnerability. Janvier’s estimate was that the Rapid Reaction Force could be used for defensive purposes, but that it would be of little use for offensive action.⁴⁷ Janvier at least showed to be prepared to help thinking about the deployment of this unit.

However, it was also clear that a considerable risk existed that this Rapid Reaction Force would not be able to keep away from the battle that was going on. For instance sending supplies to the eastern enclaves was of course in conflict with the attrition strategy pursued by the Bosnian Serbs for these enclaves. It was also clear that general Smith anticipated extensive discussions on the exact implementation of the Rapid Reaction Force. For that reason Smith took the following clear position on this force: ‘if I can’t use it to fight, I don’t want it’.⁴⁸

The - very broad - idea was that Smith mainly took the position of a soldier who thought that politicians did not sufficiently allow for the military reality in taking their decisions. Janvier on the other hand in his position of Force Commander had to take into account the political reality to a greater extent. Smith did not feel supported by Janvier and Akashi either, but as an exception he did by Annan in New York, although he said not to have sought support from the UN in New York. Smith admitted that there were differences between him and Janvier, although these were not in the first place personal according to him.⁴⁹

Differences of opinion between Smith and Janvier remained, but according to Smith they only really disagreed on two occasions. The first time a conflict between them developed ‘about being forceful’ regarding the use of helicopters for supplying the enclaves; see the extensive Appendix ‘supplying by air’ to this report. The second time the problem was the solution of the crisis regarding UN personnel taken hostage in May/June 1995. Smith thought that Janvier should not make a ‘deal’ with the Bosnian Serbs who had taken UN people hostage. More about this alleged ‘deal’ in Chapter 3.⁵⁰

However, the fact remained that Smith and Janvier fundamentally differed in their ideas about a more ‘forceful’ course of action against the Bosnian Serbs. For instance when the VRS stopped UN convoys, Smith wanted to use force to get them to their destination, but Akashi and Janvier prevented that.⁵¹ More in general Smith opted for a tougher course of action against the Bosnian Serbs, and he expected results from that. He thought that UNPROFOR had lost much of its credibility, and he certainly had a point there. For instance, the Bosnian Serbs (as well as the Bosnian Muslims) had set up many checkpoints for UN personnel. It had started with one checkpoint, but at a certain moment all of Bosnia was riddled with checkpoints. As a consequence, UNPROFOR had lost its Freedom of Movement, one of the starting points of the mission. More and more UN vehicles were seized. UNMOs were taken from their vehicle, undressed and robbed, and then they came walking back barefoot. All the time there were shooting incidents and these also deteriorated into shooting incidents towards UNPROFOR. And on top of all that it not only became impossible to supply the population, but it even became impossible to send supplies to the own UN personnel. For that reason Smith wanted to take a stand in order to change things radically. In his opinion there was only one language the Bosnian Serbs would understand: the hard hand. However, Janvier en Akashi were afraid of

⁴⁷ NIOD Coll. Banbury. SRSG’s Meeting in Split, 09/06/95, Confi.

⁴⁸ Interview R.A. Smith, 12/01/00.

⁴⁹ Interview R.A. Smith, 12/01/00.

⁵⁰ Interview R.A. Smith, 12/01/00.

⁵¹ Interview Tone Bringa, 13/07/99.

hostage-takings. The political leaders in Zagreb preferred the solution of bringing in a new negotiator to keep the staff in Sarajevo quiet for some time. People had to accept that, certainly while there still were hostages.⁵² According to Philip Corwin, Head of Civil Affairs in Sarajevo, Smith would rather face the battle with the Bosnian Serbs and he felt that he had the moral weight of the international community behind him.⁵³ However, it would appear that having a case was not the same as winning it.

There is no agreement on the question how far the opinions of Janvier and Smith differed. Akashi for instance thought that messages about major differences of opinion between Janvier and Smith were exaggerated.⁵⁴ He saw no reason to let his judgement on the relation between the generals be influenced by newspaper messages about major differences between Janvier and Smith.⁵⁵ Yet other people said that Janvier and Smith did not hit it off. Also according to a UN spokesman Smith and Janvier had a 'normal relationship', although he remarked on Janvier that rank and intellectual capacity did not match and that this had also been heard from French circles.⁵⁶ Swedish UN officers on the other hand were positive about Janvier: brilliant, honest, the safety of the troops always came first and he was a good Commander.⁵⁷

EU negotiator Carl Bildt analyzed that Janvier was mainly a troops Commander. Smith was less of a troops man than Janvier. He tried to be more analytical, to take everything in and to make proposals. Sometimes that clashed, but the lines between Sarajevo and Zagreb were open and operative. There was no other possibility, because the UN headquarters in Sarajevo could do nothing without that in Zagreb, for instance when calling in Close Air Support, for which the key was in Zagreb.⁵⁸ According to the American admiral Leighton Smith the relation between Smith and Janvier could be described as reasonable, although the two generals did have heated debates from time to time.⁵⁹

In practice the difference in attitude between Janvier and Smith appeared to solve itself because most decisions were taken in Zagreb. For that problem Smith, like Rose before him, tried to find a *modus vivendi*, for instance because he 'did not fully report on his thinking to Akashi and Janvier'⁶⁰. Zagreb took the decisions and several times Smith had to face the fact that he was overruled by Janvier or that his advice was ignored. Janvier, and other Force Commanders before him, should have been insufficiently open to the special situation in Sarajevo and the rest of Bosnia. For instance only after the fall of Srebrenica a UN office was established in Sarajevo with an own Mission Chief, which restored the balance somewhat and a more or less 'customized' policy for Bosnia could be pursued. On taking decisions, Zagreb strongly depended on the reports supplied by Smith from Sarajevo and the events in Sector North East were far away.⁶¹

Smith confirmed to the NIOD that this had put Zagreb 'out of the loop' as regards the events in Sarajevo and the eastern enclaves. Consequently, information about the situation in Sarajevo and the eastern enclaves reached Zagreb less and less adequately. There was not much contact between Smith and Janvier or Akashi, and Smith himself did not go to Zagreb very often. Moreover, contacts were hampered by the fact that the UN satellite connections were not secure;⁶² once the UN had lent a UN-secured fax machine to the VRS to enable them to maintain secure connections with the Bosnian-Serb regime in Pale. Later the Bosnian Serbs had refused to return this fax machine

⁵² Interview C.H. Nicolai, 11/06/99.

⁵³ Corwin, *Dubious Mandate*, p. 160.

⁵⁴ Interview Yasushi Akashi, 25/11/99.

⁵⁵ Interview Yasushi Akashi, 25/11/99.

⁵⁶ Confidential interview (56).

⁵⁷ Interview Jan Inge Svensson, 04/11/99.

⁵⁸ Interview A.M.W.W. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

⁵⁹ Interview Leighton Smith, 06/06/00.

⁶⁰ Interview Tony Banbury, 11/05/00

⁶¹ Interview K. Bache, 29/10/99.

⁶² Interview R.A. Smith, 12/01/00.

In conclusion it can be said about the relation between Smith and Janvier that in general Smith was advocate of a hard line towards the Bosnian Serbs, because he thought they were not sensitive to ‘softer’ means; Janvier was much more cautious with a view to the safety of the UN troops. On the basis of his responsibility, Janvier also had to take into account the political world in which the decisions on UNPROFOR were taken. Smith from his responsibility also didn’t have to worry so much about the political *Umwelt* of UNPROFOR than Janvier had to. In addition, Janvier seemed to have a less analytical attitude than Smith, but his analyses and the resulting solutions were in many cases checked by Janvier’s cautiousness and political reservations. Eventually Smith increasingly appeared to have seen it correctly, but that was not until after the fall of Srebrenica. During the preceding period Janvier repeatedly overruled Smith’s military initiatives. To sum up: differences of opinion remained, but it was not impossible for them to work with each other. There was not much consultation, also due to a lack of properly secure means of communication.

5. The Split meeting: *split visions?*

By way of illustration of the various ideas within the UNPROFOR top, first an explanation follows about the meeting in Split on 9 June 1995. That was a highly important meeting because that was where Smith, Janvier and Akashi were going to synchronize their watches. The meeting took place in an atmosphere that was crisis-like for UNPROFOR. That was mainly caused by the fact that since the end of May UN personnel had been held hostage by the Bosnian Serbs. That had happened after NATO had carried out air strikes on ammunition depots in Pale, the ‘capital’ of the republic in Bosnia that had been proclaimed by the Bosnian Serbs. The meeting was intended to ensure that the analysis of the situation in Bosnia and its approach by these three leading figures (and then mainly between Smith on one side and Janvier and Akashi on the other) would be the same, but in fact it only illustrated the differences between their way of thinking.

The discussion was mainly carried on between Smith and Janvier, with Smith playing first fiddle. The few times Akashi contributed to the discussion, it would be typical of his attitude: he did not commit himself. Akashi’s only real contribution to the discussion was that it would be a problem to get the hostages released, unless the Bosnian Serbs would get the assurance that no more air strikes would follow, and that was impossible. Small numbers of hostages had been released earlier, but now the situation was different, said Akashi. In his opinion the Bosnian Serbs were more isolated than they used to and the scale of air strikes had been more massive than ever before. Not much had changed to the framework in which UNPROFOR operated. Modifications to the Safe Areas regime had appeared a controversial issue in the Security Council, Akashi reported (later in this Chapter the cautiousness of the Security Council will be discussed in detail). Any proposed new actions had to be acceptable to the Security Council and the troop contributing nations. New proposals also had to fit in within the context of peacekeeping. Akashi once more listed the relevant requirements: consent of the warring factions, impartiality, use of force only in self-defence and freedom of movement.

If elements of peace enforcing were to creep into the mission, it would reach the edge of the ‘Mogadishu line’, according to Akashi. He said that with reference to the failed UN operation in Somalia; since then crossing the ‘Mogadishu’ line meant crossing the border between peacekeeping and peace enforcing. Crossing this border results in chaos and unpredictable consequences for the peacekeepers, or forced withdrawal.

As peacekeeper UNPROFOR had to talk to all parties, and small steps were better than a combative approach, said Akashi. If UNPROFOR would not cross the ‘Mogadishu’ line, it would be accused of being too mild and pro-Serb. On the other hand, if the line was crossed, they would be accused of recklessness and endangering the peace process. That way Akashi merely described the problem for UNPROFOR, without giving much indication for a solution to it.

At this meeting Smith recognized the major problems UNPROFOR was facing as a consequence of the current hostage crisis. He also reported major problems in the enclaves, in the sense that it was not possible to send supplies to the population there. Moreover, in Zepa and

Srebrenica there were UNPROFOR observation posts (OPs) that could easily be run over. Many UNPROFOR compounds, including those in the eastern enclaves, were within artillery range of the VRS. Every form of endorsement by the Bosnian Serbs for the UNPROFOR actions was a lost case. The Bosnian Muslims cooperated less and less too. In fact the UN had been neutralized and the Safe Areas were under increasing threat. The VRS still held UNPROFOR by the throat and Smith didn't believe that the VRS wanted a cease-fire. He believed that the VRS would no longer tolerate UNPROFOR in its vicinity and would also continue neutralizing NATO. The Bosnian Serbs would want to show the international community that they were not to be kept under control. That could strengthen the hold of the VRS on Sarajevo or lead to an attack on the eastern enclaves.

The Bosnian Muslims too were increasingly fed up with the UN, said Smith. When Pale was bombed, they hoped that the world came to their rescue, but now they saw that such was not the case. Their army, the ABiH, would want to continue what they started in May: entering into battle with the VRS, and in the meantime at the political front sticking to the Contact Group plan. All in all UNPROFOR had gradually been marginalized and developments for further marginalization went faster than UNPROFOR could keep up with. Things were looking bad for air strikes as well. More in general the Air Power instrument had been neutralized because the air strikes at Pale had not had the desired effect; on the contrary, it had caused the hostage crisis.

Despite the described problems, Smith still showed a certain amount of optimism. It would also be possible to take advantage of the situation that had developed. The air strike on Pale had surprised the VRS for various reasons. For once the UN had done what they said they were going to do. Also the scope and precision of the bombings had surprised the VRS. Advantage could be taken from that.

Nevertheless Smith thought that this action had failed because the VRS had not returned the heavy weapons around Sarajevo to the Weapon Collection Points. But that was a failure that could be converted into a gain. It was no longer necessary to deal with the VRS, after they had suspended their endorsement of the UNPROFOR operation in response to the bombings. Smith saw a wide range of opportunities: the fact that the UN was also holding four VRS soldiers gave UNPROFOR something to barter with and at least they showed the Serbs that they could not get away with everything. Smith did not seem to worry so much about the UN people who were being held hostage.

Janvier had a gloomier view of the situation than Smith. UNPROFOR was being frustrated more than ever, said Janvier. The Bosnian Serbs were master of the situation. Janvier was not amused that he had to ask permission from Mladic to let convoys pass. For him the main issue was to get the hostages released and to send supplies to the enclaves. Mladic now considered UNPROFOR as the enemy, although he had said that he would not fire at the UNPROFOR positions. Mladic knew that this was not in his interest.

However, Smith thought that Mladic did not see UNPROFOR as the enemy as long as everything happened on his terms, but that entailed the problem that if actions were carried out on Mladic's terms, he would succeed in neutralizing UNPROFOR. If UNPROFOR would just show its teeth, Mladic would make concessions, in Smith's opinion.

Janvier on the other hand considered UNPROFOR a peacekeeping force whether they wanted it or not. That also caused the scheduling problems for the Rapid Reaction Force, that had a more 'forceful' character which would be at odds with the peacekeeping character of UNPROFOR. It was highly important that the political process would start, said Janvier. As long as it did not, a confrontation was out of the question. If UNPROFOR should leave the enclaves, that would mean giving the Bosnian Serbs what they wanted, said Janvier.

Smith's analysis of the intentions of the Bosnian Serbs was different than Janvier's. Janvier thought that the Bosnian Serbs had a military-strategic advantage, and were not going to overplay their hand. Smith remained convinced that the VRS wanted to end the war that same year and would do everything in their power. As long as the sanctions along the Drina against the Bosnian Serbs were maintained, the VRS gradually weakened compared to their opponent, but the Bosnian Serbs would only accept a cease-fire when their political identity was guaranteed. Smith's analysis also was that the Pale regime would realize that the main issue now involved the hostages, not the solution of the

Bosnian problem. For that reason Smith supposed that the Bosnian Serbs could now gain more by a military offensive attitude, also to emphasize their political identity, than by sitting down at the negotiating table and letting a political process start. Though Bildt had been appointed as negotiator, it was not clear what his mission was and for that reason Smith did not really expect that Bildt would be able to achieve anything through negotiations. Moreover, it was difficult to make military peacekeeping plans as long as it was not clear what the peace UNPROFOR should support was going to look like.

Janvier shared Smith's analysis that Bosnian Serbs felt the need for international recognition and the lifting of the sanctions along the Drina. In view of the gravity of the situation, Janvier hoped that this would soon be realized. However, Janvier did not believe that the Bosnian Serbs were trying to create a crisis. He believed that they were prepared to adjust their behaviour and to become good discussion partners. For that reason the discussion with them had to be continued to show how important it was to behave normal. Yet Smith didn't believe either that the Bosnian Serbs wanted to force a crisis. What they did want was to neutralize the UN and NATO to be able to fight the ABiH to create a military advantage.

For Smith the problem remained that he didn't know what the political course was going to be. Therefore, he was at a loss what to do with the announced Rapid Reaction Force. Could it be used to fight or couldn't it? He reiterated that if the unit was not allowed to fight, it wasn't very welcome as far as he was concerned, because it would create expectations it could not live up to.

How to go on?

Smith feared that after the bombings on Pale the status quo would return, but then with UNPROFOR as demanding party. There had not been freedom of movement before the air strikes either, and now that should have to be realized, Smith urged. At least it should be possible to supply food to the enclaves.

Smith wanted two things to stabilize the situation. Smith thought that the risk of provocations by the ABiH was controllable. Therefore, now first of all the Bosnian Serbs should be tackled, but that was only sensibly possible if the risk that the UN people were taken hostage was reduced and their safety would be guaranteed. That would require UNPROFOR to withdraw from the eastern enclaves to safe positions that could be defended until help was available. 'In the field' only some UNMOs (military observers) should remain with what was known as Forward Air Controllers, necessary to guide NATO aircraft to their target. Smith's intention also was to hold out the prospect of massive air strikes in the event the VRS would subsequently still attack a UN base. That would greatly reduce the threat of the new hostage-takings.

However, this plan had considerable consequences for the UNPROFOR mandate and Smith did not have the authority to decide on the subject. In the Security Council, Janvier and Boutros-Ghali had already advocated a plan to withdraw UNPROFOR, but that had not been accepted (see sections 7 and 8). Smith's military ideas were politically water under the bridge.

Smith also wanted to have the Security Council determine routes along which the UN could move freely, comparable to the routes to Berlin during the Cold War. Janvier rejected that idea too: he saw no possibility to impose a corridor upon the Bosnian Serbs. That could only be achieved through political negotiations.

Smith considered negotiations on the subject a loss of time. New York had to impose the rules. If UNPROFOR was not prepared to fight, the VRS would get the best of the situation, he estimated. The fact that in that event the 'Mogadishu' line would be passed, was not a problem for Smith. In his opinion this line had already been passed because the Bosnian Serbs no longer saw UNPROFOR as peacekeepers. Turning back across that line was only possible either by doing nothing, getting UNPROFOR increasingly in the power of the Bosnian Serbs, or by showing the will to fight, which would mainly come down to bluff because it would not be possible to implement this will.

Janvier didn't want to hear about the fighting option: 'I insist that we will never have the possibility of combat, of imposing our will on the Serbs'.

Smith repeated that he considered the situation around Exclusion Zones, Weapon Collection Points and the Safe Areas a major problem, because military-strategically the Serbs had a very advantageous position in an absolute sense. This could cause crises, even before the Rapid Reaction Force would be available. Smith predicted actions, mainly by Bosnian Serbs, who would make a fool of his political superiors. He anticipated situations in which UNPROFOR would be forced to ask for Close Air Support.

Janvier's approach was different. Janvier wanted to reinstate contact with the Bosnian Serbs to explain that there were things they just couldn't do. Smith's assessment remained that they wouldn't want to listen. Janvier argued that the Bosnian Serbs were in a politically favourable situation which they wouldn't want to compromise. They would realize that cooperation had its advantages. Unless provoked by the ABiH, the Bosnian Serbs wouldn't act, Janvier thought.

The end of the discussion was that Janvier saw no other option than going back to the negotiating table, to realize a cease-fire and to resume the UNPROFOR operations.

Smith predicted that in that event UNPROFOR would be forced to take decisions within a month. Smith assessed the situation as in the interest of the Bosnian Serbs. All this would also confirm the belief of the Bosnian government that they would rather see the arms embargo lifted (that was being discussed mainly from the American side) than to rely on UNPROFOR. Smith considered all this short-term decisions, which would have implications for the long-term, but of which no one knew what they would lead to. As long as the enclaves remained in existence, UNPROFOR remain neutralized to a certain extent.

Janvier then took the position that the ABiH rather than UNPROFOR would have to defend the enclaves in the event of an attack by the VRS. They were strong enough to be able to do that. He had also said that in New York, but that idea was not appreciated.⁶³

It was remarkable that Akashi's contributions to the discussion remained minor. He didn't draw conclusions and didn't indicate a direction. This is surprising because exactly Akashi emphasized the importance of a uniform analysis of the situation and approach of the problem. On the other hand there was not so much difference of opinion between Akashi and Janvier regarding their approach: adhere strictly to the practice of peacekeeping, and believe in negotiations with the Bosnian Serbs.

Even if history would prove Smith to be more or less right, he was their inferior and had to comply with the judgement of Zagreb and New York.

6. The strategic field of forces spring 1995, seen from UNPROFOR

The rather hopeless situation in which UNPROFOR found itself at the time of the meeting in Split, had not appeared out of the blue. In spring 1995 there were numerous developments that indicated a worsening situation for UNPROFOR.

Incidentally, the name of UNPROFOR was changed on 31 March 1995 because on that date the Security Council adopted a number of resolutions on the subject. The overall command (for all of Yugoslavia) of general Janvier in Zagreb, called UNPROFOR until that moment, was given the name UNPF (United Nations Peace Forces). The UN operations in Croatia and Macedonia were given different names and no longer came under UNPROFOR but under UNPF. The term UNPROFOR was reserved for the UN operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, old names were still being used for a long time. To prevent confusion, the name Bosnia-Herzegovina Command (BH-Command) or 'sarajevo' will still be used hereinafter, although it officially had been transferred to UNPROFOR on 31 March 1995. The sector division in Bosnia-Herzegovina remained unchanged.

Consequently, in the rest of this report UNPROFOR in a general sense refers to the UN operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the (former) Bosnia-Herzegovina Command ('sarajevo') of

⁶³ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. SRSG's Meeting in Split, 09/06/95. Conf.

general Smith was in charge. When reference is made in the text to 'Zagreb', that refers to general Janvier's UNPF command.

The state of affairs in the struggle between ABiH and VRS

Late 1994 at headquarters of Sector North East of BH Command in Tuzla they were taking stock of the situation. In a general sense they concluded that a stalemate situation had developed in East Bosnia. The warring factions along the confrontation line made little progress. Neither party had the military power to impose its will on the other or to force a breakthrough. Little indicated that the stalemate could be broken.

However, it was important that the VRS were at a relative strategic disadvantage: time was in favour of the Bosnian Muslims. The VRS had lost the initiative in North and East Bosnia. Whether that was the consequence of the fuel shortages that the VRS were confronted with, remained unclear to the UN. In any case it seemed that VRS had had to change their tactics and could not longer deploy the full potential of its mechanized forces.

This strategic advantage also had a political impact for the Bosnian Serbs. That is because the Bosnian Serbs became increasingly politically isolated after the rejection of the Contact Group plan. As a result of the embargo measures the Bosnian Serbs also got more and more economically isolated from Yugoslavia. The economic situation in the Republika Srpska, bad as it already was, made it impossible to mobilize more men and to tip the military scales, a situation that could cause friction between political and military leaders.

In absolute terms the VRS did maintain its superiority regarding heavy weapons and ammunition supplies. However, the VRS had the problem that they had won more terrain than they could control. With 60.000 men they had to hold a front that stretched over 1600 km and, consequently, the VRS troops were 'overstretched'. Sector North East identified the following areas as strategically the most important to the VRS in East Bosnia (see map East Bosnia):

- the Ozren mountains; controlling the northern approach to Sarajevo from Tuzla;
- the Posavina corridor at Brcko; a corridor of only a few kilometres wide that formed a vital connection between the western and eastern part of the Republika Srpska;
- the communication tower of Stolice, north of the Majeвица hills; this tower was an indispensable chain in the communication network of the Republika Srpska;
- the corridor north of Zvornik; here the ABiH front line was not even 10 kilometres from the Drina, which made it possible to drive a wedge into the territory of the Republika Srpska and to sever the connections between the northern and southern parts of Eastern Bosnia.

The prospects for the leaders of the Bosnian Muslims improved over the course of time. The ABiH gradually got more and better equipment available. Fuel was not a limiting factor for the ABiH, unlike for the VRS. The ABiH increasingly took the offensive, but lacked the heavy weapons the VRS did have to gain real strategic advantage. In addition, at the operational level they lacked capacity to adequately support military operations.⁶⁴

All in all the military-strategic balance between ABiH and VRS and the resulting political relations between Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Serbs were anything but static late 1994. In absolute terms the VRS still had a major military-strategic advantage, but they were increasingly experiencing problems to control the area they had taken. The ABiH used the time to build its military strength and could take advantage from the political vacuum in which the other party found itself.

⁶⁴ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. HQ SNE, Chief G2/G3 (Lt Col. C.A. Le Hardy). Revision of HQ Sector North East Operation Instruction, 05/12/94.

The cease-fire as dead letter



In the meantime the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Akashi, was worried about the position of UNPROFOR in relation to the warring factions. He reported on the subject to the UN in New York on 1 March.

In a general sense Akashi concluded that the Bosnian government was increasingly resisting the peace process and UNPROFOR. He stated that the attitude of the Bosnian government regarding UNPROFOR was changing. Because there was no prospect of a political solution it was not likely that the Bosnian Muslims would be prepared to renew the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. Through radio and television the Bosnian government in Sarajevo made it clear that certain cities in Bosnia had to be retaken.

This change in attitude of the Bosnian Muslims had already started in January 1995. Akashi thought he detected 'an orchestrated campaign of obstruction'. An indication of that Akashi saw in the fact that though the ABiH had accepted the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, they still obstructed attempts by UNPROFOR to separate the troops of ABiH and VRS and to observe the confrontation lines. In addition, the ABiH imposed limitations upon UNPROFOR's freedom of movement, said Akashi. He also concluded that not only did the Bosnian Serbs impose restrictions on sending fuel supplies to UNPROFOR, but the Bosnian Muslims were doing the same: supplying the troops in the Sapna Thumb (where a Dutchbat company was stationed) and Srebrenica was hindered by the restrictions imposed by the ABiH.

The ABiH were getting ready for an offensive, Akashi concluded. He saw numerous indications: the pace of restructuring, training and supplying had been increased; fuel and logistic convoys that had not been seen before were moving towards the north of Sector North East; mobilization took place in Zenica and Tuzla; hospitals had been warned to expect wounded people; and lives of VRS officers had been threatened.

Of course an ABiH offensive would mean a violation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. However, Akashi got the impression that violating this agreement had a wider impact, also towards UNPROFOR: the ABiH refused to implement the arrangements of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. Indication for that was the circumstance that everywhere where the ABiH were preparing for battle, UNPROFOR were under pressure and their Freedom of Movement was limited: the ABiH refused the UN access to the front line. On the other hand UNPROFOR did not have access to the areas controlled by the VRS either. In addition, the VRS liaison officers stationed in Tuzla

and Gornj Vakuf were told by the ABiH that they had to clear out. These liaison officers should have played an important role in determining the demarcation lines and the separation of the troops.

In Akashi's opinion everything was aimed at an ABiH offensive as soon as the weather conditions would improve. The Bosnian government had not explained the reasons for this obstruction against the arranged Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, but Akashi did have the impression that the Bosnian government wanted to make it clear to the international community that the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement had no effect, with the purpose of discrediting the Bosnian Serbs. However, in reality it was the Bosnian government that failed to fully comply with it. That had put UNPROFOR in a deadlock. In addition, the Bosnian government used the relatively quiet period to financially squeeze UNPROFOR for rent of facilities (buildings for accommodation and logistic installations).⁶⁵

There were many more signs like this that a continuation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement for the period after 1 May 1995 was not very likely. In the middle of March 1995 it began to become clear that Akashi's attempts to achieve a continuation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement after 30 April were going to fail. Both the Bosnian Muslims and the Bosnian Serbs were preparing for a continuation of the war. General Smith expected that already by the end of March the ABiH would take the offensive. The VRS should first want to find out which way the wind would be blowing, to determine a central area where they could best send their troops, and also to avoid being considered the party violating the cease-fire.

In Sarajevo general Smith already saw it coming that the hostilities would be resumed. Smith took precautions: he tried to prepare his troops for the end of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement: commanders had to be prepared that as soon as the fighting started, the ABiH would be carrying out operations from the Safe Areas. In addition, pending UN guidelines, Smith issued a Directive for the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command. In it, he voiced his opinion that, in so far as practically possible in wartime, the population ought to be protected. Finally Smith tried to define a number of criteria, under the heading: 'avoiding'. Avoiding a worsening of the situation for the population through UN actions; avoiding that the conflict would spread further or that the violence level would increase; avoiding that the UN would get involved in the fighting; and avoiding that UN personnel would be put at risk. Smith reiterated that UNPROFOR did not have a mandate to fight a war on the side of one of the warring factions. The safety of the UN personnel was of the highest importance, according to Smith. So in this regard Smith agreed with Janvier. Taking action to enforce a Safe Area was only permitted if the population was under threat, and if the criteria for 'avoiding' were observed'.⁶⁶

Resumption of the hostilities by the ABiH

The ABiH strategy appeared to be aimed at gaining ground over a wide front, before the end of the Cessation of Hostilities. That could be intended to increase the distance of the VRS guns to the area of the Bosnian Muslims in the Tuzla area; it could also have the limited objective of keeping the VRS occupied over the widest possible front, without the ABiH exhausting itself. The ABiH possessed the manpower for this strategy. This tactic stemmed from weakness, but if it were to succeed, it would keep the VRS with its weaker manpower busy along its much too long front lines. The strategy also involved compensation for the lack of artillery and mobility, the ABiH took advantage of the adverse weather conditions and favourable mountainous terrain, which slowed down the VRS response.

In March the ABiH indeed resumed the battle, and that at one of the four places that were strategically important to the VRS: the communication tower of Stolice, north of the Majejica hills. However, this attack revealed the limitations of the ABiH and the superiority of the VRS in fire power. Although they did achieve surprise, the operations were badly planned, commanded and executed. That caused major losses for the ABiH that affected morale.

⁶⁵ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 01/03/95, No. Z-341.

⁶⁶ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Commander BHC Directive 1/95, 15/03/95, Confi.

These ABiH operations elicited a worried reaction from general Smith. It was not only a violation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, an attack had been set up from the Safe Area Tuzla. That had to trigger a countermove by the VRS. Smith feared that the ABiH action would cause more civilian victims and that it would endanger the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement elsewhere in Bosnia.⁶⁷ Indeed the VRS reacted in the usual manner by firing at villages in the area.⁶⁸ The Bosnian Prime Minister Siladjic called the ABiH attacks a counteroffensive and stated that all ABiH actions were self-defence.⁶⁹

In addition, the Bosnian government justified the ABiH attacks in the Tuzla region by referring to the Bosnian-Serb interference with Bihac. That worried Akashi, but what annoyed him the most was that the Security Council hardly reacted to these violations of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. The effect was that both warring factions were starting to consider UNPROFOR an irrelevant factor, Akashi warned.⁷⁰ Indeed that was exactly what happened.

Does the VRS also take the initiative?

In the meantime, the question remained whether the VRS would also take the offensive, in particular against the three eastern enclaves, including Srebrenica. Assessments on the subject differed. The Senior UNMO in Bosnia, colonel G.M. Mohatarem, didn't consider it very likely in March 1995 that the VRS would start an offensive to reduce the size of the enclaves Gorazde and Srebrenica. In view of the difficult terrain and a considerable ABiH presence, an offensive would cost them dearly, he estimated. It was more likely that the VRS would try to gradually break the will of the ABiH by a blockade with second-rate troops.⁷¹

General Smith on the other hand was not so sure that the eastern enclaves would remain in existence. On 7 March Mladic had said to him on their first meeting in Vlasenica that the eastern enclaves bothered him. On this occasion it became clear to Smith that Mladic wanted to get rid of those. For that he had two military-strategic considerations.

The first consideration was that the VRS were keeping these three enclaves surrounded and Mladic thought that it held too many of his troops tied up. Zepa, Srebrenica and Gorazde caused a constant 'drain' of an estimated 10% of all VRS troops to the eastern enclaves that Mladic could not afford. After all, the battle of the Bosnian Serbs had to be fought at the same time in central Bosnia and the Krajina.⁷² With all attention going to Bosnia, Croatia was silently preparing to retake areas in the Krajina from the Croatian Serbs. Both Croatia and the Republika Srpska Krajina ignored Resolution 981.⁷³ That called for a 'negotiated settlement' that could guarantee all groups of the population, majority or minority, that they could live in safety within the Croatian republic. Both parties were frustrating all attempts by negotiator Stoltenberg to implement this resolution. With this resumption of the fighting in the Krajina, the VRS needed troops there too. From that moment on the strategy of the VRS was aimed at freeing troops and equipment from the eastern enclaves. That was reason for Smith to think that Mladic and Karadzic had an interest in ending the war; the VRS simply didn't have the manpower to hold the terrain they had taken. That assessment proved correct.

Smith also saw this strategic problem of lack of manpower with his own eyes. He had noticed that the Republika Srpska was such an empty country. You could drive for a long time without seeing anyone or passing any villages. There was no depth behind the VRS lines, from which Smith concluded that indeed the VRS had problems defending their front line of 1600 kilometres and that Mladic

⁶⁷ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Lt Gen. Rupert Smith to General Delic, copy to Dr E. Ganic, Minister Muratovic, 21/03/95.

⁶⁸ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 22/033/95, No. Z-452.

⁶⁹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 25/03/95, No. UNPROFOR Z-473.

⁷⁰ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 28/03/95, No. Z-495.

⁷¹ CRST. UNMO HQ BH Comd to UNMO HQ Zagreb, 151700 March 95, Outgoing Fax no. 1512733. UN Conf.

⁷² Interview R.A. Smith, 12/01/00.

⁷³ United Nations. S/RES/981, 31/03/95.

probably used the same units over and over again for his military operations. Sending troops back and forth that way to stop gaps elsewhere or to concentrate at a different point, usually doesn't do the morale of the troops much good. That was a problem for Mladic.⁷⁴

The other military-strategic reason for Mladic to want to get rid of the enclaves, was that he was afraid that the ABiH would attack the VRS front in the back from the enclaves. If then at the same time the ABiH would attack from the Tuzla area, a corridor to the enclaves might be opened, and Mladic wanted to prevent that. Mladic had informed Smith during the first meeting that he feared an ABiH attack in the direction of the eastern enclaves over two axes. One axis would run from Tuzla to Srebrenica and Zepa, the other axis from Trnvo to Gorazde. Mladic would not permit the development of such corridors, he announced: if such a corridor was going to be opened, Mladic informed Smith, he was going to attack the enclaves to knock out in the ABiH there.⁷⁵ Plans for a corridor will be discussed further in the Chapter 'The events between 25 May and 6 July.'

Mladic further informed Smith as regards Srebrenica that he would respect the Safe Area there. However, the problem was the lack of agreement on the external borders of this enclave. Mladic interpreted it as a small area around the city of Srebrenica.

Smith interpreted this as a signal from Mladic that he was still considering to attack the enclaves. He said he understood the military reasons for such an action, but he warned that the international community would consider that a violation of the Safe Areas and that this would not be in the interest of the Bosnian Serbs. Mladic appeared to interpret this remark by Smith as a threat to use Close Air Support, which caused a series of threats to take countermeasures.

For Smith this outburst by Mladic was a sign of his concern that he indeed did not have the means to fight on two fronts in the event of a Croatian attack on the Krajina, and by the ABiH in Central Bosnia. Mladic might want to have his back covered at an early stage, and the eastern enclaves were worrying him.⁷⁶

So from a military point of view Smith came to the assessment that Mladic had a major problem with the eastern enclaves. Yet at the time he did not hear that the VRS were actually going to attack the enclaves, it was merely his personal vision. Only by small things, by analyzing conversations and by knowing backgrounds could he try to assess whether the enclaves would be attacked. That information certainly was not hard military intelligence, but it only involved minor matters that fitted in the general picture of Bosnia.⁷⁷

The situation in April: an attack by the VRS on the eastern enclaves?

Gradually, Smith's ideas about what Mladic was going to do developed further. He had already concluded that the eastern enclaves were a problem for the VRS. Early April 1995 he went one step further, by posing what Smith called his 'thesis'.⁷⁸ Smith's thesis was that for political and military reasons Mladic was going to round up the eastern enclaves, or at least to reduce their size, while simultaneously fully shutting off Sarajevo. Smith estimated that Pale wanted the Bosnian Muslims to directly accept negotiations and the international community to come up with an acceptable peace plan. If that would not happen, Pale would have no choice but to let the VRS attack. That way the ABiH could be weakened and forced to give up their positions, and subsequently be forced to start negotiations, Smith estimated. The Bosnian Serbs could then link political and military targets to force a solution to conflict, he thought.

⁷⁴ Interview R.A. Smith, 12/01/00.

⁷⁵ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 215, File BHC95 0703/95 – 14/03/95. Meeting Gen Smith and Gen Mladic 7 March 1995, Ref 8594; BHC FWD to DOKL. 091100A March 95. Outgoing fax No. 122/95. UN Conf.

⁷⁶ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 215, File BHC95 0703/95 – 14/03/95. Meeting Gen Smith and Gen Mladic 7 March 1995, Ref 8594; BHC FWD to DOKL. 091100A March 95. Outgoing fax No. 122/95. UN Conf.

⁷⁷ Interview R.A. Smith, 12/01/00.

⁷⁸ Interview R.A. Smith, 12/01/00.

The political objective of an attack to reduce the size of the enclaves was, still according to Smith, to hit the Bosnian government and to demonstrate that the ABiH did not have the power to reinforce the enclaves. An additional political objective would be that the VRS would want to prevent a response by the UN and NATO, to demonstrate the indecisiveness of these organizations; Smith suspected that the assumption in Pale was that there would be no response if the enclaves were only reduced and not fully rounded up. Later that assumption proved to be correct.

The military objective was, according to Smith, to reduce the enclaves to an area with a 3-kilometre radius. That way the population would be concentrated, the ABiH resistance would be broken, the length of the confrontation line could be limited, subsequently the situation could be consolidated, and then demilitarized to free six brigades for the fight of the VRS elsewhere. If the high areas around the enclaves were in the hands of the VRS, one brigade for each enclave would suffice to control them. The tactic to pursue that purpose, still according to Smith, would be an attack by manoeuvring units from the west. In the meantime the already present units could form a blocking force against break-outs by the ABiH from the enclaves. With rapid, concentrated and simultaneous attacks using massive firepower it was possible to attack with company groups from various sides. This would require only a limited number of additional VRS troops. Such an operation would require no more than seven to ten days from start to finish, and should preferably be carried out in bad weather because that would hamper NATO's observation possibilities.

Before or simultaneously with the attack on the enclaves, Sarajevo would be shut off. It would be a siege, without forcing entry into the city, because that would entail major losses and the risk of a NATO response. The Weapon Collection Points in the eastern enclaves and in Sarajevo would be cleared out. UNPROFOR would then have their hands fully tied by a worsening situation around Sarajevo.⁷⁹ It would appear that Smith's thesis was not far off the mark.

Early April Smith analyzed further. In preparation of the visit that Akashi and Janvier were going to pay to the Security Council in New York, he wanted to present his vision of the situation in Bosnia. He also wanted to indicate at what points he expected guidelines from the UN.

Smith assumed that the international community was not going to find a solution to the conflict, and neither would it be prepared to use force to impose a solution. He thought that the Contact Group offered little news and was only redrafting old proposals. That left him with the impression that the political process was bogging down. He concluded that the Bosnian government were not prepared to negotiate on the basis of the existing situation, but only tried to get the international community on their side by saying to accept the Contact Group plans. That had to keep the international sympathy on the side of the Bosnian Muslims, was the idea. Furthermore, the Bosnian government tried to capture the attention of the world by loudly protesting against the violations of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement by the Bosnian Serbs, and mainly by dramatizing the situation in the enclaves and Bihac.

Smith thought that the Bosnian government tried to isolate the Bosnian Serbs by making common cause with the Croats in Bosnia. In the meantime the Bosnian government were openly preparing for a continuation of the war; it was clear that they wanted more territory than the Bosnian Muslims were holding at that moment, Smith analyzed. There were signs that the will among the population to continue the war was dwindling, but that could quickly swing around in the event of the Bosnian-Serb attack.

Relations between the Bosnian Serbs and UNPROFOR were also getting disturbed because the Bosnian government were making requirements that were impossible for the UN to realize. The Bosnian government demanded: a new agreement with the UN on the conditions of the Bosnian Muslims; their own special representative of the Secretary-General; a new mandate for UNPROFOR but then with peace-enforcement tasks; and Armed forces that could realize it.

⁷⁹ NIOD, Coll. Smith. A memo on the subject bore the name of the American head G2 of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command, Lieutenant-Colonel Powers: 'Assessment of Areas of Concern 1-7 April 1995'. The following pages are based on this source.

Smith's analysis further shows that in his opinion the Bosnian Serbs were having problems holding the conquered areas. Therefore, the Bosnian Serbs wanted to negotiate on the basis of the areas they were holding. The Bosnian Serbs were in a bitter mood against the international community, as well as against Milosevic. That was caused by the failure of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, by the isolation in which the regime of the Republika Srpska in Pale found itself, the effect of the sanctions (in particular from Serbia already since September 1994), and the feeling to be left in the lurch by Serbia.

The purpose of the Bosnian-Serb regime remained an autonomous Republika Srpska, with a certain right to associate with Serbia. The Bosnian Serbs wanted to end the war by fighting. In Pale the Contact Group plans were considered dead, so that from Pale's political perspective fighting seemed the only solution. It seemed that they had come to the conclusion that the factor time was against them, and that the military scales were turning to the advantage of the ABiH. That could be a sign for a decisive result in summer. Smith saw the announcement of a full-scale mobilization and calling back the VRS reservists (conscripts in the Republika Srpska who had moved to Serbia) as the beginning of the end of the war in Bosnia, though with a favourable starting position in the negotiations for the VRS.

Though there were signs of battle fatigue, that would still rather lead to the will to force a solution than to negotiate. That is because there was a certain confidence among the population that Mladic and the VRS would be able to defeat the ABiH. The UN was finished in the eyes of the Bosnian Serbs; they felt betrayed by the UN and the international community. The Bosnian Serbs had imposed their own sanctions against the UN as countermeasure: fuel convoys were refused, unless the Bosnian Serbs received half the fuel.

Smith saw as the objective of the ABiH offensive in the Majeвица hills that had started late March: dramatizing the situation to introduce the international community to force a solution by trying to involve them in the conflict and to have them put pressure on the Bosnian Serbs. From an operational point of view, the ABiH offensive in the Majeвица hills had three objectives: reducing the pressure on Bihac by moving the centre of the battle; securing strategic roads at Brcko for future operations; and forcing the VRS to spread out over a wide front to prevent them from concentrating. Due to lack of equipment the VRS would not be able to do much more than fight on one front and consolidate on another.

If the VRS would have to face attacks on various fronts, they would have no other choice than to stem the ABiH attacks and to try and hold as much ground as possible. Another possibility for the VRS was to force a decision. In view of the political situation that was the most likely option in Smith's opinion. Then the VRS could consolidate the front in vital areas - such as Sarajevo - and secure it, to shift the attention elsewhere and forcefully defeat the ABiH there.

In Smith's opinion, from an operational point of view Mladic had to make a choice. He either had to concentrate his troops in the west - the Krajina and Bihac - or on the eastern front. Smith was betting on the latter, for the following reasons: the VRS had problems with fuel shortages; the proximity of Serbia; and Sarajevo as strategic target. To be able to concentrate his troops on the eastern front, Mladic would want to make one or all eastern enclaves harmless to the VRS. That way six brigades and support arms could be freed to strengthen the siege of Sarajevo. Moreover, Mladic could start these attacks on his own terms because the ABiH could not easily reinforce the enclaves.

Smith furthermore expected that it was not going to be easier for UNPROFOR. Both warring factions would keep frustrating UNPROFOR and putting them out of action. They would keep denying the enclaves the supply of fuel and possibly also other supplies. The frequency of the shooting incidents would increase, just like shootings for retaliation. That increased the risk of UNPROFOR personnel becoming a target. The Bosnian government would try to make the most out of every situation and scream on every occasion that the Safe Area and Exclusion Zone regime had to be enforced.

Smith's expectation remained that as a consequence of going ahead with an ABiH offensive, the VRS would start an offensive against one or more Safe Areas or Exclusion Zones. Against a background of loud cries for action and threats, Smith would find himself forced to take decisions, he

anticipated. He would have to face procedures that were geared for handling minor violations and these would no longer be appropriate.

Air strikes would not really solve anything, because due to their nature they would change the relation with parties and would be considered biased. Neither would such attacks serve to protect the population in the Safe Areas, according to Smith.

Smith finally portrayed the essence of the problem for UNPROFOR: in fact there was no longer a cease-fire. The Cessation of Hostilities Agreement was on the verge of collapse, with still a month to go. The only option left for UNPROFOR was to strongly and openly demonstrate their belief in the mission. UNPROFOR should not be seen as the failing party. That was not the simplest of matters in practice. The Bosnian Serbs no longer wanted to talk with UNPROFOR and the Bosnian government didn't want to hear about a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. That resulted in an asymmetric strategy and because the political process in the Contact Group had halted, there was no political framework within which to operate.⁸⁰

Indeed early April it looked like the conflict would sooner take a military course than a political, although in various ways international pressure was being exerted on the warring factions.

For instance the Security Council did that with resolution 987 on 19 April 1995. That, once more, emphasized that a military solution to the problem was not acceptable and that negotiations on the basis of the Contact Group plan had to be continued. However, that plea fell on deaf ears.⁸¹

Members of the Contact Group also made a last attempt to achieve an extension of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. In their response to that the Bosnian government appeared to be mainly after international goodwill, rather than an actual extension of the cease-fire. The fact is, the Bosnian government declared not to oppose an extension, but subjected it to conditions that were not acceptable to the Bosnian Serbs. A statement by the Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Siladjic that the ABiH would only take action in response to an attack, seemed a doubtful promise: on the contrary, during the previous period the initiative for offensive military action had in most cases been taken by the Bosnian Muslims.⁸²

7. After the end of the cease-fire

After the end of the cease-fire (the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement) on 1 May, Smith expected the Bosnian government to continue the pressure on the VRS, where a complicating factor could be that by now the VRS had to shift its attention to the western front because now the fighting in the Krajina had flared up again. It is of great significance that Smith, who had a keen eye for the military-strategic aspects of the conflict, saw as main strategic objective of the Bosnian Muslims breaking the siege of Sarajevo and forcing back the Bosnian-Serb artillery around the city. In this respect Sarajevo, as capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, seemed to be of greater importance than the eastern enclaves, if the ABiH would have to make choices.

Smith thought that breaking the siege of Sarajevo would proceed at a slow pace that the ABiH could keep up with for a long time. That was based on various reasons. First of all economic interests were at stake; also within the ABiH every soldier could only fight at one place at a time. Moreover, the morale of ABiH had to be handled with care. Finally, in the eyes of the world the victim role had to be preserved, and so simultaneously with the ABiH actions, the loud cry to NATO, UN and the world would still be heard to allow the Bosnian Muslims to fight and to lift the arms embargo.

The VRS too had to make choices where to deploy their troops, for the event fighting would start raging again. The VRS was facing the difficult choice to preserve a certain balance in troops and equipment. As regards the troops: to defeat the ABiH the VRS had to concentrate troops and to

⁸⁰ NIOD, Coll. Smith. BHC Situation Report signed Lt Gen R.A. Smith, 05/04/95.

⁸¹ United Nations, Resolution 987(1995), 19/04/95.

⁸² MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, no. 20/95, completed 021400 May 1995.

synchronize their actions with the forces of the Serb-proclaimed republic in the Krajina, the Republika Srpska Krajina. The problem was whether first the own interest of the Republika Srpska had to be protected by striving after a military decision in the fighting with the ABiH, or that they had to come to the rescue of the Serb brothers in the Republika Srpska Krajina in their struggle against the Croats. As regards the means: in that respect the VRS strongly depended on a steady support flow from the VJ. Indeed this support was substantial, and stole past the border checks between Serbia and the Republika Srpska; probably part of it went through Croatia. This involved spare parts for military equipment and its maintenance, fuel, specialized personnel (probably artilleryists), and personnel that kept the integrated air defence systems going. In addition, there was a VJ signals unit in Han Pijesak. Finally, the VJ paid the officers from Serbia.

It took time to decide where the troops could best be deployed. In the meantime the events in Bosnia or the Krajina might get the better of the Bosnian Serbs, Smith suspected.

As far as the international position of the Bosnian Serbs was concerned, Smith anticipated a further alienation between UN and VRS. The Bosnian Serbs were getting increasingly isolated and estranged from the world, Smith analyzed. They were actively punishing their international enemy by refusing further shipments of supplies to the enclaves, by considering the UN as a target and by taking UN personnel hostage. As soon as NATO would attack the VRS, the VRS would have an excuse to take UN soldiers hostage and to 'punish' the UN. In the past such methods had already successfully been used to paralyze the decision-making process in NATO and the UN.⁸³

Smith's assessment of this political position of the Bosnian Serbs was confirmed rather soon: on 9 May he had a secret meeting with Karadzic in Pale. On this opportunity Karadzic announced a blockade of the UN that would only be lifted if the Bosnian Serbs received fuel. If NATO was going to attack the Bosnian Serbs from the air, then the Bosnian Serbs would treat UNPROFOR as the enemy. Karadzic said that his position partly was the result of the disappointment about the UN attitude at the Croatian attack on Western Slavonia. The UN had let themselves be walked over. Karadzic emphasized that he would no longer respect the Security Council resolutions: 'The Security Council is the enemy of the Serbian people and the instrument of hostile US policy'. From that moment on he would only have eye for the interest of the Serb people. The Bosnian Serbs no longer wanted to cooperate with the international community.

Also from a military-strategic point of view the meeting created some clarity, for what it was worth: it became clear to Smith that the VRS would restrict themselves to carrying on the defence against the ABiH offensives and were not going to take the initiative themselves. That was in line with the VRS response to a possible ABiH offensive: the VRS had heard rumours that the ABiH were organizing an offensive to break through the siege of Sarajevo. If the Bosnian Muslims were going to attack, the VRS would hit back, no matter what the Security Council might say. Karadzic wanted to prevent UNPROFOR from rushing to the assistance of the ABiH in this scenario to defeat the VRS; by the way, a fear that can hardly be called founded because UNPROFOR wanted anything but become a party to the conflict. Karadzic did not deny that the position of the VRS towards the ABiH would gradually be weakened also without interference by the UN, but he expected help from friendly governments and the VRS was sufficiently equipped to continue the fighting for another few years. As regards the Safe Areas, Karadzic said that these had to be demilitarized. Removing the weapons of the ABiH soldiers in the enclaves was a wish that had repeatedly been expressed by the Bosnian Serbs, but it had never been met. Consequently, Karadzic no longer wanted to respect the Safe Areas until that condition had been satisfied.⁸⁴

Otherwise hostilities not only threatened to be resumed in the eastern enclaves, but also in the other Safe Areas such as Sarajevo. That was pointed out by the Sector Commander for Sarajevo who

⁸³ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Lt Gen R.A. Smith, Comd UNPROFOR - Post COHA Guidelines, 03/05/95, No. 8800.

⁸⁴ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 92, File 4.2.1 Sarajevo Government Authorities 10/09/94 – 15/08/95. The Office of the Commander BH Command to UNPF Zagreb attn Mr. Akashi, Gen Janvier, 091900B May 1995 and 091615B May 1995.

came under Smith, the French Major General H. Gobilliard. Mid-May he signalled that the actions of the warring factions were changing. According to him the warring factions no longer trusted UNPROFOR to be able to realize their mandate, and the aggression against UNPROFOR had increased.

Gobilliard noted a pattern that would be seen more often over the weeks and months to come: agreements were a dead letter for both sides. The warring factions tried to involve UNPROFOR in the conflict and to dictate them how to carry out their mandate. The ABiH increasingly used UNPROFOR as a shield, by setting up positions close to UN observation posts. That attracted VRS fire, also hitting the observation posts, and that became a daily event. The risks for the population and for the peacekeepers increased accordingly.

The Bosnian government became more critical of UNPROFOR and at the same time demanded that more be done against the VRS. The VRS also demanded action from UNPROFOR: the Safe Areas had not been demilitarized, but instead they had become a base of operations for the ABiH, and thus provoking the Bosnian Serbs. The consequence was that the VRS were taking the Safe Areas under fire and demanded that UNPROFOR should take measures against the ABiH. That didn't happen and that had now turned UNPROFOR into a disappointment, not only for the Bosnian Muslims but also for the Bosnian Serbs, also because the Bosnian Serbs did not believe that UNPROFOR was impartial. The Bosnian Serbs now only saw UNPROFOR as an enemy and an obstacle they wanted to get rid of to be able to settle the score with the Bosnian Muslims.

According to Gobilliard it was simply a matter that both parties wanted to fight: the Bosnian Muslims to regain ground, the Bosnian Serbs to keep what they had as negotiating object. The eastern enclaves were not the only areas with supply problems: also for Sarajevo the Bosnian Serbs systematically refused to let fuel convoys pass since 2 March. All this required an analysis of the mandate, Gobilliard said with a sense of understatement. In his opinion the existing mandate could only be implemented if the warring factions cooperated. That was not to be expected. Therefore, Gobilliard wanted clarity for the future,⁸⁵ a wish shared by everyone in UNPROFOR.

All in all it seemed that UNPROFOR in Bosnia had ended up in a hopeless situation. According to the *Nederlandse Militaire Inlichtingendienst* (MID) (Dutch military intelligence service) that could not remain without political consequences. The MID had noticed that the Bosnian president Izetbegovic was calling for a special session of the Security Council, aimed at changing the UN approach of the Bosnian conflict, but without providing insight into the contents of such an approach. In the meantime, France and the United Kingdom were also trying to find a different approach: they said they wanted to withdraw their units from Bosnia. Izetbegovic was not impressed by that threat, for he made it clear that he would do nothing to keep countries wanting to withdraw from Bosnia to do so.⁸⁶

The awkward situation UNPROFOR was now getting into also had its impact on the relation between Smith and Janvier. They were in disagreement on the question: 'do we go for a status quo plus or minus', in other words: maintaining the status quo, but then without the possibility to use force. Smith assumed that it would be to the benefit of UNPROFOR if the pressure on the Bosnian Serbs could be maintained: 'We bomb you unless we get freedom of movement'. In this respect Janvier was much more reluctant, as explained earlier in this chapter.

It is interesting that Janvier stated that he was not under French pressure. He had once been asked whether he often felt Paris breathing down his neck, but Janvier had replied to that: 'surprisingly little'. In so far as can be established, the French President only once gave Janvier direct instructions, not as regards Close Air Support, but as regards regaining the Vrbanja bridge in Sarajevo (on which more in section 11).⁸⁷ This also was in line with the general picture the British military in UNPROFOR

⁸⁵ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Letter Major-General H. Gobilliard to Lieutenant-General R. Smith, 11/05/95, Confi.

⁸⁶ MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, no. 22/95, completed 161200 May 1995.

⁸⁷ Interview Jim Baxter, 16/10/00.

had of the French policy: it was characterized by a lack of confidence in soldiers, and placed little confidence in the military attachés at the French representations abroad. The French government preferred to use diplomatic channels to obtain information. At Janvier's briefing before the Security Council, the French UN representative, MÉRIMÉE, seemed to treat Janvier with public contempt (on which more in section 9). The British had a different tradition in this respect: they valued the military more and did business with them. The British Prime Minister Major called Smith twice, Portillo (Secretary of Defence) several times and his successor Rifkind from May 1995 regularly.⁸⁸ Consequently, the statement by the British Minister of Defence Rifkind to Kofi Annan that the United Kingdom was proud, unlike the French President, never to issue instructions to their soldiers under UN command, should be put into perspective.⁸⁹

So Janvier did not in the first place feel the pressure from Paris, but he certainly was under pressure from Boutros-Ghali: not only to have the problem the former Yugoslavia solved, but more in particular to do that without using any force. That was also the reason why Boutros-Ghali was reluctant to delegate the authority to deploy NATO air power, the more so if that authority would come into the hands of 'hawk' Smith, as Boutros-Ghali saw him.⁹⁰ Boutros-Ghali in turn was under enormous pressure by the American representative to the UN, Albright, to act more forcefully and to make more use of air power.

8. Boutros-Ghali's move in the Security Council

In May it was the task of Janvier and Boutros-Ghali to convince the UN Security Council of the problems with the mission of UNPROFOR and, subsequently, get everybody behind a solution. As preparation for this task there had been a meeting in Paris on 12 May between Janvier and Boutros-Ghali, at which Akashi was also present. Janvier once more pictured the gloomy situation, on the basis of an extensive briefing paper. According to him the situation was explosive. Attempts to isolate the Bosnian-Serb regime in Pale meant that they had lost all influence on the Bosnian-Serb regime. In addition, air power had lost all the deterring effect it had had two years earlier. The UN were wearing too many hats at the same, and reacted too strongly to the various national agendas. For that reason Janvier came up with four options on how to proceed in Bosnia.

The first option Janvier mentioned was to maintain the status quo. The general suggested to set a high threshold for air strikes, as there had in fact been so far. The demilitarization of the Safe Areas, as had already been provided for in the mandate but had remained a dead letter, still had to be initiated in an attempt to separate civilians from military targets. Ukrainian units would have to replace the Dutch and British units in the enclaves. In this connection Janvier said that in fact it would not be possible to maintain the status quo; that would mean getting deeper and deeper into the morass. If this option was going to make any sense, a new peace process would be required as well as continuous political pressure on all parties; that seemed unfeasible at that moment.

The second option was a more forceful military attitude, including a more extensive use of air power. Transport helicopters could set up an airlift to the enclaves; to prevent those helicopters from being fired at by the VRS, NATO airplanes would have to keep this air corridor open. According to Janvier this option would prove to be too expensive and, moreover, because of the risk of escalation of conflict, it would not get much support in the UN, except from the Islamic countries. These countries might want to supply troops, but it was highly questionable whether the international community and mainly the Bosnian Serbs would be going to support the idea.

⁸⁸ Interview Jim Baxter, 16/10/00.

⁸⁹ Confidential information (50).

⁹⁰ Interview Manfred Eisele, 14/10/99.

The third option was: limit the mandate. The underlying idea was that UNPROFOR would completely withdraw from Bosnia. The UNHCR would then have to be given the opportunity to freely continue its humanitarian operations.

The fourth option was to withdraw UNPROFOR from ‘certain areas’. UNPROFOR would then concentrate on the continuous area of the Muslim-Croat Federation (and so withdraw from the eastern enclaves), in order to prevent complete withdrawal from Bosnia. Then a new mandate and a new structure for UNPROFOR could be introduced.⁹¹

The idea behind this option was that it might put a stop to the blundering on. A tougher attitude towards the Bosnian Serbs would become possible without a major risk of UN personnel being taken hostage in the vulnerable eastern enclaves. For now Janvier considered this scenario the most advisable option. It had been Smith who had convinced Janvier that the eastern enclaves were indefensible and Boutros-Ghali had agreed. The UN Secretary-General preferred a ‘workable mission’ and left Paris with a preference for this option.⁹²

This option was also followed in a Non Paper under the title ‘Current position. Where we stand’ by the UN staff in Zagreb. Two days before the meeting in Paris, it once more explained to Janvier what the current conditions for UNPROFOR were. They were deplorable: the UN mandate in its current form was no longer considered applicable; there was no prospect of a military or political solution; losses among UNPROFOR soldiers were increasing; in some areas the UN personnel were potential hostages; and use of air power entailed the risk of losses among UNPROFOR personnel.

The political pressure to accurately pursue this option was considerable for Janvier. During their meeting in Paris, Boutros-Ghali had told him that he didn’t want to risk his own credibility and that of the UN: ‘after 3 years, the mission cannot end in a stark failure’. Therefore, Boutros-Ghali wanted to present the Security Council a solution ‘(even an intermediate, temporary or stalling one) which would allow him to not lose face’.⁹³

In another, additional Non Paper of that same day the UN staff in Zagreb portrayed the ‘Logic of New Deployment’. It provided a clear picture of the potential risks of this option. This new deployment of troops would have to take place in three stages. The first, preparatory stage, would have to end on 15 July. During this stage political agreement would have to be reached on the eastern enclaves and on evacuation of the population and the Displaced Persons in the enclaves, mainly in exchange for a corridor to Sarajevo. On an enclosed map all three eastern enclaves were marked as areas to be retreated from (‘Retrait UN’). For the second stage, Redeployment, the deadline was set at the beginning of the winter. UNPROFOR would only be stationed in the Muslim-Croat Federation, making the troops less vulnerable to hostage-takings by the VRS. During this stage the number of troops should have been reduced by at least 50%. The last stage was the Operational stage. During this stage an escalation of the conflict was considered a real possibility, as appeared from the rest of the document. If the VRS should use military force to attack the Muslim-Croat Federation, NATO would be ready to launch air strikes to break the military infrastructure of the VRS. That would be the first step on the escalation ladder. Then probably the arms embargo against the Bosnian Muslims would also be lifted without delay. That would mean complete withdrawal by UNPROFOR from Bosnia because the NATO withdrawal plan would be put into operation and the American and European NATO troops would replace the UN.⁹⁴

Boutros-Ghali in the Security Council: withdrawal from the eastern enclaves

On 16 May Boutros-Ghali briefed the Security Council. He was clear and gloomy on the situation in Bosnia. He reported that the fighting had already started again, even before the end of the Cessation of

⁹¹ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. ‘Briefing to sec.-gen. Options in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Paris – 12/05/95’, Secret, 12/05/95.

⁹² Interview Jim Baxter, 16/10/00.

⁹³ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Non-paper for FC/DFC Only, Secret, ‘Current position. Where we stand’, 14/05/95.

⁹⁴ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Non-paper for FC/DFC Only, Secret, ‘Current position’, 14/05/95.

Hostilities Agreement, and that both parties were increasingly firing at UNPROFOR. With 137 people killed and 1420 injured among UNPROFOR, an unacceptably high number of casualties had been reached. The Safe Area concept was not clear, and it was contradictory in itself. Both parties misused the concept and insufficient troops had been made available for the mission. Twice Boutros-Ghali had asked for clarification,⁹⁵ but the Security Council had not responded.

The idea to withdraw from the enclaves was not entirely new; already in December 1994 and January 1995 a discussion had started within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the UN in New York on giving up the enclaves, but that discussion had never really become serious. Now Boutros-Ghali and Janvier continued on the chosen path that UNPROFOR had to withdraw from the eastern enclaves.⁹⁶

Boutros-Ghali presented the four options of Janvier to the Security Council. The last of the four, redeployment and reduction of UNPROFOR - read: withdrawing UNPROFOR from the eastern enclaves - was his personal preference. That would reduce the number of UNPROFOR casualties and increase the chance that the troop contributing nations would be prepared to maintain their contribution to the mission. Moreover, this option would yield major financial savings, which would come in handy in view of the demand of the United States to reduce their contribution to the UN by 25-31% - a rather cynical consideration.

Boutros-Ghali also argued in support of his vision that the civil and military leadership in Zagreb and Sarajevo, just like the political leaders in Europe, had come to the conclusion that under the current circumstances it would no longer be possible for UNPROFOR to carry out their mandate.⁹⁷ Boutros-Ghali had been in touch with the Russian president Jeltsin, the Spanish Prime Minister Gonzales, the Canadian Prime Minister Chrétien, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs Juppé, and the British Minister of Foreign Affairs Hurd. In 2001 Boutros-Ghali could no longer remember why he had not consulted Washington, the pillar of the Bosnian Muslims; the fact that Washington hadn't been consulted did appear to have major consequences for his ideas.⁹⁸

In the event of the probably imminent escalation, UNPROFOR would certainly not be able to carry out their mandate. Both warring factions were preparing for an escalation of the fighting in summer. Along the confrontation lines the risks for UNPROFOR personnel were the highest; that's where their presence would have to be reduced first. Ideas for a redeployment of the troops would be detailed in a report to the Security Council.⁹⁹

Boutros-Ghali took the position that the troops in the eastern enclaves had to be replaced by UN observers and Forward Air Controllers; that way air power could be used against the Bosnian Serbs and the risk for the UN would be minimized. From Boutros-Ghali's perspective clearly a turning point for the mission had been reached; in any case it couldn't go on like this.¹⁰⁰

Reactions to Boutros-Ghali's plea: the US, Great Britain and France

In a general sense Boutros-Ghali's plea before the Security Council came as a surprise: after all, what it came down to was that he felt the mission had ended in disaster and that message was highly confronting. That was certainly true for the United States: Washington felt passed over, so that was the side from which directly the first, negatively worded, response came. The American Permanent Representative to the UN, Albright, said that a redeployment that would make UNPROFOR more effective would be appreciated, but that this should not mean that they were going to leave the Safe

⁹⁵ United Nations, S/1994/555 en S/1995/1389.

⁹⁶ Interview Manfred Eisele, 14/10/99.

⁹⁷ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 16/05/95, No. MSC-1735.

⁹⁸ Interview Boutros-Ghali, 31/01/01.

⁹⁹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 16/05/95, No. MSC-1735.

¹⁰⁰ *Reuter*, RTR 0359 3 OVR 243, 162315 GMT May 95 and RTR 0373 3 OVR 529, 170058 GMT May 95.

Areas.¹⁰¹ Albright noted that Boutros-Ghali was calling for a ‘complete change in direction’, but that was a matter for the Security Council to decide – with Washington taking the lead, Albright said.¹⁰²

Boutros-Ghali had to try and live with it that the Americans were doing everything they could to influence the UN organization. He referred to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations as a glass house that had extensively been infiltrated by the Americans and, thus, in fact received direct recommendations from Washington. That also was the reason why Undersecretary for Political Affairs, Goulding, was the one negotiating with NATO: his Department of Political Affairs had not been infiltrated by the Americans to such an extent. Neither was it a secret that Boutros-Ghali sometimes clashed with the American representative to the UN, to whom he referred as ‘my girlfriend’ Albright.¹⁰³ Other sources emphasized that the Americans were reading the coded messages and e-mails of the UN.¹⁰⁴

Not only the Americans, also the French and British were busy determining their position after the briefing by Boutros-Ghali, in anticipation of his report with further proposals on the redeployment of UNPROFOR. The Dutch Permanent Representative to the UN, Biegan, described that as ‘keeping their powder dry’ (see below for Biegan’s report). The United States had not determined their exact position, but in all events they opposed withdrawal because then the warring factions could fight it out among themselves. The problem was that president Clinton had promised NATO 25,000 ground troops for the withdrawal plan, known as Oplan 40104. The Americans did not consider that a formal decision, but the NATO Council had already accepted the promise so de facto the Americans could not really back out anymore. The American mediator in Bosnia, Holbrooke, painted a vivid picture of the American position in this scenario: ‘Using American troops to fight the war was (...) out of the question’. However, the United Kingdom and France actively kept the pressure on, by describing what would happen if the United States would not supply troops for the withdrawal plan: ‘The resulting recriminations could mean the end of NATO as an effective military alliance, as the British and the French had already said to us privately.’¹⁰⁵

So what the position of the US came down to was that they realized that UNPROFOR was not ideal, ‘but without UNPROFOR life in Bosnia would be terrifying’. The American Permanent Representative Albright, supported by Vice-President Gore, said to be going to strive after a more forceful course of action, though it was not clear what that meant exactly.

That way the Americans shoved the problem back to the UN and the European troop contributing nations. Great Britain and France in particular had problems with that. The British felt that they had to take into account the majority of French casualties among UNPROFOR, but withdrawal was ‘not desirable, not feasible’. The British seemed to like the idea of a combination of more forceful action and redeployment, but they too realized that this more forceful action could not mean peace-enforcement, for the presence of UNPROFOR had to remain based on the consent of the parties. For the British the main point was that they wanted to minimize the risk for their own troops; that was emphasized time and again by the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Consequently, the British Permanent Representative could only suggest one course: the Safe Area concept had to be detailed and implemented again. If that would make it possible to convince parties to demilitarize the Safe Area, more forceful actions could become possible. It would become easier to respond with air power to attacks from outside because those attacks could only be aimed at civilian targets.¹⁰⁶

The position of the French government remained unclear for a while, to the British and the others, mainly because the day after Boutros-Ghali’s plea, 17 May, the new French President Chirac was installed. It was remarkable that despite the uncertainty, an indication of the French opinion

¹⁰¹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 16/05/95, No. MSC-1735.

¹⁰² UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 17/05/95, No. MSC-1743.

¹⁰³ Interview Boutros-Ghali, 30/01/01.

¹⁰⁴ Confidential interview (57).

¹⁰⁵ Holbrooke, *To End a War*, pp.65-67.

¹⁰⁶ DCBC, 1413. Code Biegan 452, 19/05/95.

appeared rather soon,¹⁰⁷ that was during the conference of the Chiefs of Defence Staff of the troop-contributing nations and other NATO countries in Soesterberg on 19 May. There the French Chief of Defence Staff Lanxade proved to be the strongest critic of a policy of reduction of UNPROFOR presence. He thought the French government would not agree to that. It would only be an invitation for further fighting, with the result that the remaining personnel would run even greater risks. According to Lanxade the only option was: reinforcement of UNPROFOR. UNPROFOR had left the initiative to the Bosnian Serbs and France wanted a deadline, mid-summer 1995, on which a cease-fire should have been achieved and political progress should have been realized. If the deadline was not met, France wanted to withdraw UNPROFOR under NATO cover. Partial withdrawal was incorrect.¹⁰⁸

The French position that the effectiveness of UNPROFOR had to be reinforced, was also the unanimous decision of the Chiefs of Defence Staff. They had considered five options for the future. ‘(1) continue as at present; (2) enhancing UNPROFOR’s effectiveness and security within its present mandate; (3) reduced presence; (4) total withdrawal en (5) military intervention.’ Improving the effectiveness was urgent to prevent a partial or complete withdrawal from becoming inevitable. Although such measures would not have ‘strategic impact’, there was a chance of progress if these reinforcements went hand-in-hand with a revitalized political process.¹⁰⁹

However, Boutros-Ghali didn’t want to consider the opinion of the French Chief of Defence Staff as the official French opinion; he wanted to be sure of the support of the French government, for his report on redeployment of the troops, and for this reason he waited for the official position of the new French government. He also wanted to evaluate the results of the meeting of the Chiefs of Defence Staff; he wanted to be sure that the position of the Chiefs of Defence Staff was backed by their respective governments.¹¹⁰ This did fit in with his general attitude, that can be characterized as careful. Boutros-Ghali thought about himself as ‘not that much different from a general who carries out the orders from his political superiors’, in this case the Security Council and governments.¹¹¹

It wasn’t until 26 May that Chirac informed Boutros-Ghali of the French position: this was more or less in line with what Lanxade had said in Soesterberg. France wanted to do more justice to protection of the troops, though unlike Lanxade, Chirac did think it necessary to amend the UNPROFOR mandate. Yet Chirac didn’t make it clear either how that should be done exactly; increasing the effectiveness of UNPROFOR seemed to have become a kind of magic spell. Chirac also added that the mandate should get more ‘focus’ and that spreading out the troops should be prevented. If the Security Council did not agree to that, Chirac said – also in accordance with Lanxade - France would withdraw its troops.¹¹²

Reactions to Boutros-Ghali’s plea: the Netherlands

The Dutch Permanent Representative to the UN, Biegman, reported to The Hague about the plan launched by Boutros-Ghali. To a certain extent he went along with Boutros-Ghali’s analysis, but not with his solution.

His report started with a bold statement: according to him, the UN didn’t feel much for the Safe Area concept, also because the means (in the form of troops) to carry out the mission had never been made available. Biegman also argued that the generals thought that UNPROFOR could no longer carry out their tasks properly, and that Boutros-Ghali himself opposed larger-scale deployment of air power, because that would put the safety of the troops at risk and would intensify the fighting. However, Biegman did not consider redeployment of the troops a solution, because according to him

¹⁰⁷ ABZ, DEU/ARA/03356. Code Veenendaal 776, 17/05/95.

¹⁰⁸ Confidential information (59).

¹⁰⁹ Confidential information (59).

¹¹⁰ DCBC, 1413. Code Biegman 452, 18/05/95.

¹¹¹ Interview Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 31/01/01.

¹¹² ABZ, DPV/ARA/02110. Code Biegman 478, 26/05/95; ABZ, DEU 05243, Code Wijnaendts 165, 28/05/95.

that would come down to giving up the Safe Areas with all its consequences for the population. Biegman saw it as a gift to Karadzic, wondered what was going to happen to the population, and finally how the troops could be withdrawn: with or without NATO? Maintaining the status quo - undesirable as it seemed - was the most probable outcome, according to Biegman.¹¹³

On the same day that Boutros-Ghali briefed the Security Council, Minister Van Mierlo of Foreign Affairs had been called to Parliament in connection with the Bosnian affairs for the so-called question time on Tuesday afternoon. Van Mierlo stated that the situation in Bosnia was very worrying. There was little hope for a political solution, and work in the Contact Group advanced with difficulty. The situation on the ground deteriorated visibly. That day the heaviest shelling of Sarajevo of recent times took place, according to Van Mierlo initiated by the Bosnian Muslims and answered by the Bosnian Serbs. For Dutchbat the situation also became increasingly difficult. According to Van Mierlo, internationally the feeling grew that this could not continue, but the Dutch starting point was that withdrawing UNPROFOR from Bosnia and thus withdrawing from the eastern enclaves was not an option for the Dutch government. That would leave hundreds of thousands of people to fend for themselves, and a withdrawal entailed risks. Partial withdrawal had to be seen as a redeployment that eventually should lead to a safer situation. The Netherlands thought that the UN had to make their presence more credible by protecting the troops better, defending more effectively and taking action more effectively. Van Mierlo and Chirac were thinking on the same line: that was easier said than done.

Van Mierlo reported that the problems with UNPROFOR had been subject of discussion in Paris between Boutros-Ghali, Akashi and Janvier, but the Netherlands had not been informed of what was discussed. A text prepared for Minister Voorhoeve only stated that the UN Secretary-General wanted to thoroughly evaluate the mission.¹¹⁴

Some MPs expressed their concerns about the multitudes of international bodies dealing with the conflict: the Contact Group for the former Yugoslavia still existed, a French-British axis seemed to be developing and of course there was the UN. However, Van Mierlo didn't seem to worry about that very much and discussed each of the three bodies referred to.

He said the contacts with the members of the Contact Group were good, although he added that at that moment the group was not functioning. More in general there was no prospect of achieving a political solution, Van Mierlo said.

The worries about a French-British axis were not quite imaginary, as the previous day, 15 May, the French and British ministers of Foreign Affairs had failed to appear at a WEU meeting in Lisbon. Still Van Mierlo did not give a direct answer to question whether a French-British axis was developing. He obviously couldn't, because at that moment he didn't know yet that his British and French colleagues, Hurd and Juppé, had been discussing the plan to withdraw from the eastern enclaves. Hurd had expressed his concern about the French statements on withdrawal (see below). Apparently, the Netherlands was not fully informed of the positions of these members of the Contact Group and the Security Council.

Nevertheless Van Mierlo said that he thought the Netherlands had nothing to complain as regarded decision-making in the UN.¹¹⁵ Yet that optimism was belied that same day, when Boutros-Ghali delivered a plea to the Security Council which the Netherlands was very unhappy about.

It did become clear in the Netherlands rather soon what Boutros-Ghali had proposed in the Security Council, for instance on the occasion of the NATO council of the next day, 17 May. There the British representative gave a briefing on the options presented by Boutros-Ghali. The Dutch representative at NATO, Veenendaal, considered withdrawal from the eastern enclaves 'definitely unattractive'. 'All efforts of the past 18 months to protect the civil population in these enclaves would have been in vain.'¹¹⁶

¹¹³ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05277. Code Biegman 436, 17/05/95.

¹¹⁴ NIOD, Coll. Princen. Question Time 16/05/95, the Former Yugoslavia

¹¹⁵ TK, 1994-1995, Handelingen, 16/05/95, 76 pp. 4553-4557.

¹¹⁶ ABZ, DEU/ARA/03356. Code Veenendaal 776, 17/05/95.

When it appeared that Boutros-Ghali wanted to withdraw UNPROFOR from the eastern enclaves, the Dutch government openly distanced themselves. The Ministers Voorhoeve and Van Mierlo gave notice of objection to the statements by the UN Secretary-General. They opposed reduction of UNPROFOR and the possible withdrawal from the eastern Safe Areas, because that would endanger the safety of the population. The Dutch commitment was that ‘of course’ the population in the enclaves deserved special attention, according to Voorhoeve. UN observers in the eastern enclaves, like Boutros-Ghali wanted, could offer the population insufficient safety, Voorhoeve thought. If the UN moved out, the Bosnian Serbs could take the enclave with hardly any resistance, which would cause an exodus of Displaced Persons.¹¹⁷

At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs they were also thinking creatively on the options Boutros-Ghali had. The Deputy Chief of the European Affairs Department, Hattinga van ‘t Sant, came up with an analysis of the options proposed by Boutros-Ghali. In his opinion all these options were a dead end, including the option chosen by Boutros-Ghali: withdrawal from the eastern enclaves. Though Hattinga van ‘t Sant did see the problem that the eastern enclaves were indefensible and had to be abandoned because otherwise the UN troops – as hostages – would hinder forceful action, still withdrawal from the eastern enclaves did not seem realistic to him because it would mean leaving the eastern enclaves to fend for themselves without offering any humanitarian aid or even psychological support in return.

So it threatened to come down to ‘blundering on’, but because that too was far from ideal, Hattinga van ‘t Sant wondered whether the international community should not politically, economically and militarily stand by the Bosnian Muslims through active military interference in the conflict. Recently in Soesterberg the Chiefs of Defence Staff had rejected military intervention too easily in his opinion; the option of active military intervention should at least have been assessed. In his opinion that didn’t have to mean that the UN or NATO would have to mobilize a large intervention army, but it did mean that the UN, NATO or a coalition of countries should help the ABiH to defend the area. That would involve defending the area to which according to the plan of the Contact Group the Bosnian Muslims were entitled, after the ABiH themselves had first taken this area. Joining offensive actions was not the intention, offering Close Air Support for ABiH ground actions should be possible. That way the international community could define a clear strategy again to force back the Bosnian Serbs behind the borders indicated in the plan of the Contact Group.

Hattinga van ‘t Sant did realize that this option also had its disadvantages. The international community would choose sides, while in contrast the essence of UNPROFOR was to refrain from that. Another drawback was that this option would result in casualties, and therefore that Parliament would be very reluctant to approve this strategy. Russia wouldn’t want that either, Hattinga van ‘t Sant thought. His assessment of these drawbacks was not only correct, it also outweighed its advantages: the memo with this option was offered to the high officials, but no response has been found.¹¹⁸

Also at the highest political level in the Netherlands the situation was a topical subject. The Council of Ministers of 19 May was worried about the political situation in the former Yugoslavia. The threat of a war between Serbia and Croatia made the situation even more complex. Due to differences of opinion between the French and the British the situation wasn’t very clear already, which not only applied to the eastern enclaves but also to the western front. Ministers Juppé and Hurd were having an emergency meeting on the subject on 15 May; at first this bilateral contact caused some resentment on the part of the Dutch, because it was kept out of the WEU talks in Lisbon on that same day. At this Council of Ministers meeting, the French policy was described as follows: because of the high number of casualties among French soldiers (37 killed) the French government wanted to withdraw their troops gradually starting in June, unless the UNPROFOR mandate was extended. This French policy was at

¹¹⁷ *De Volkskrant*, 18/05/95.

¹¹⁸ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05243. Memo with the subject ‘Bosnië, de VN op dood spoor. Is er nog een uitweg?, 27/05/95. (Bosnia, the UN at a dead end. Is there a way out?) The memo was presented to DGPZ, Plv DGPZ, Chief DEU, Chief DAV and DAV/MS.

odds with what Boutros-Ghali wanted, a reduction of the size of UNPROFOR as well as withdrawal from some areas, including Srebrenica.

However, so far the British didn't want to hear about withdrawal, and the Dutch government supported that at this meeting. It was expected that when this was going to be discussed in the Security Council, Boutros-Ghali would submit. The resentment about the French-British initiative was moderated because Hurd had explained to his Dutch colleague the importance of a united French-British position in the Bosnian issue. It convinced the Council of Ministers that it was indeed important, exactly because the Contact Group no longer functioned. Moreover, the French and British governments had stated that from now on they would not take any action without consulting the Dutch government.¹¹⁹

After his contact with Hurd, Van Mierlo had indeed come to the conclusion that a united French-British position was more important than Dutch anxiety about a French-British axis. Early May Hurd had already explained to Van Mierlo how serious the problems with France were: Paris had reached the limit, Hurd made clear to Van Mierlo. Juppé had thought that the existing situation in the former Yugoslavia could no longer be accepted and in his opinion three things were required: a new cease-fire, reinforcement of UNPROFOR and new diplomatic action. If not, Paris would already stop replacing their troops in June, which came down to withdrawal. Hurd did show understanding for this French position, because France had already lost so many soldiers, but he did call the French decision 'a dangerous course'.¹²⁰

Early May more disturbing sounds were heard from Paris that pointed in the same direction. According to British diplomats, on the day Chirac was elected president, Juppé had said that probably Chirac would soon announce his decision to start withdrawing French troops within two or three months, so indeed possibly without awaiting reinforcement of UNPROFOR and attempts to reach a political agreement. London had urged that consultation should take place before such a far-reaching decision was taken. Also the French had already informed the Canadians that the United Kingdom would also withdraw its troops, which was incorrect. British spokesmen noted that differences of opinion could be perceived in Paris. French politicians wanted to leave Bosnia because it was a hopeless case, but for now the military wanted to stay.¹²¹

9. Janvier in the Security Council and in consultation with the troop contributing nations

After the briefing by Boutros-Ghali on 16 May, on 24 May Force Commander general Janvier briefed the Security Council on the situation in Bosnia. For this meeting, general Smith once more summarized his ideas about the situation for Janvier on 21 May. Again it wasn't a very heartening story: both warring factions were prepared to fight to force a solution. The centre of the activities would be around Sarajevo and the eastern enclaves. Endorsement by the Bosnian Serbs for the UNPROFOR presence was a lost case; for the Bosnian Muslims that was not far away. The VRS held UNPROFOR hostage, while the ABiH increasingly used UNPROFOR as shield. If they didn't want the conflict to escalate, UNPROFOR had to keep trying to get endorsement by parties and should not give up their impartiality. That meant use of force exclusively in self-defence. Protection of the peacekeepers would be the priority. More powerful military actions by UNPROFOR, supported by NATO, would satisfy the Bosnian government and part of the international community, but that would turn UNPROFOR into combatants, while they still didn't have the weapons for that (UNPROFOR had no artillery). More powerful action was not a solution either for the problem of UN soldiers taken hostage. According to Smith the Security Council had to take a decision on the question whether UNPROFOR had to go

¹¹⁹ Objectified summary for the NIOD investigation of the meeting of the Ministerial Council of 19/05/95.

¹²⁰ Confidential information (57).

¹²¹ Confidential information (58).

beyond the principle of self-defence. Smith pleaded for a redefinition of the UNPROFOR mandate. Inconsistencies and ambiguities on the use of force had to be resolved. Smith saw no good of withdrawing UNPROFOR as a whole, as that would mean a reward for the Bosnian Serbs, against whom still more severe action had to be taken one way or the other. Moreover, Smith didn't believe that many governments wanted to support withdrawal. Withdrawal would cause too large practical and military problems for UNPROFOR.¹²²

Janvier thought, just like Boutros-Ghali before him, that partial withdrawal from the eastern enclaves was the only option left to UNPROFOR. However, he would be faced with similar problems in the Security Council as Boutros-Ghali before him.

It already started for the Force Commander the night before the briefing to the Security Council. That night, 23 May, the French and British Permanent Representatives, M rim e and Hannay, had dinner with Janvier. Janvier told them what he was going to say in the Security Council; what it came down to was what he had arranged with Boutros-Ghali, that was withdrawal from the eastern enclaves to increase the effectiveness of UNPROFOR as a whole. That message didn't go down very well, and it came out at once that Janvier wanted to change the mandate. Even before Janvier went to the Security Council, he was stopped in the hallway by UN Undersecretary-General Kofi Annan. He told Janvier that there was no political will to execute 'the line Janvier'. Instead the line should be: continue as is, but more forceful. Then Janvier had asked: 'but how can we?' Janvier was not going to get much support from Annan in those days. Annan 'tried to do an honest job', but he wasn't the man who could achieve much. He was 'the tea boy of the Security Council', according to colonel Baxter, Smith's Military Assistant who had been assigned to Janvier's delegation. Annan had a feeling for the political temperature, but he was only surviving, had little influence and mainly looked to the United States.¹²³ Janvier did not modify his briefing after this warning from Annan.

The briefing to the Security Council was in closed session. Srebrenica was not mentioned there and Janvier didn't even say explicitly that Srebrenica had to be abandoned. He did say that UNPROFOR could no longer execute their mission in Eastern Bosnia, which was generally explained as a plea for withdrawal.¹²⁴ That came as a bombshell: the Security Council was set against Janvier's ideas, because approval of his proposal would mean that the Security Council's idea of the Safe Areas had become a failure. For that reason the Security Council held on to the idea and rejected Janvier's suggestion to leave the enclaves. Then the Security Council would also have to design plans for a transition period, but they weren't ready for that yet, the more so because most members looked to the American representative Albright. The non-permanent members didn't seem prepared either to enter into battle with the five permanent members, including the US.¹²⁵

Albright feared that Janvier's plan could mean an escalation of the conflict, as also indicated in Janvier's own non-paper. That could mean that UNPROFOR as a whole had to be withdrawn and, consequently, that 25,000 Americans had to be sent to Bosnia. The American government still didn't feel like that at all. That's why Albright strongly opposed Janvier's idea, also in public: after the meeting she told the press 'my government does not see why air strikes would not be a suitable action in Bosnia at the moment'.¹²⁶

After briefing the Security Council, Janvier said that his career had now fallen to pieces: 'I have said what was politically not accepted'. Because the problem was mainly between Albright and Janvier, Albright took him aside after the meeting. They were in a side-room for two hours, where Albright asked why the UN could not act more aggressively and make more use of the UN units in the Safe Areas. Then Janvier had plaid a nationalist card by replying that when he was involved in the UN mission in Lebanon, the American soldiers had refused to patrol at night. He had had to use

¹²² NIOD, Coll. Smith. Smith to Janvier, 21/05/95, No. 8060.

¹²³ Interview Jim Baxter, 16/10/00.

¹²⁴ Interview Jim Baxter, 16/10/00.

¹²⁵ Interview Manfred Eisele, 14/10/99.

¹²⁶ Westerman en Rijs, *Het zwartse scenario*, p.131.

Norwegians and Swedes for that. The attending press officer, M. Rubin then gave Albright a note with the words: ‘walk out now’. Albright continued the conversation, but it remained a discussion between deaf people. Later Baxter judged that the two generals Smith and Janvier should have gone to the Security Council together; he thought that might have made more impression.¹²⁷

To the question why she had rejected the proposals of Boutros-Ghali and later Janvier, while those really offered possibilities for a more forceful use of air power as she advocated, Albright answered that for her it had been a ‘Hobson’s choice’: a choice in which there seemed to be alternatives, but where, in fact, only one course could be followed. That was because it was hard to imagine to leave the population of the enclaves behind without protection. The Security Council was divided as well, and for that reason something had to be devised that only met the needs of the UN and UNPROFOR halfway, Albright said.¹²⁸

Consultation Janvier with the troop contributing nations

On the same day as his briefing to the Security Council, Janvier briefed the representatives of the troop contributing nations, including the Netherlands. That was attended by all troop contributing nations, not only for Bosnia but also elsewhere in the former Yugoslavia. The meeting did not have an official status; the decisions were taken in the Security Council.

On the Safe Area concept Janvier said that the situation in the Safe Areas at that moment was completely different than at the moment they were set up. A number of factors obstructed the implementation of the concept. The UN soldiers in the Safe Areas were isolated, spread out, poorly armed, in fact hostages, and highly vulnerable. The Bosnian government used the Safe Areas as a basis to launch attacks at the VRS. Janvier didn’t consider the presence of UNPROFOR very useful. He wanted a substantial modification of the mandate. The only real guarantee for an improvement of the situation could come from negotiations and the prospect of a political settlement.¹²⁹

The Dutch representative, Biegman, was one of the first in the consultation between the troop contributing nations who responded to Janvier’s briefing. Biegman opposed withdrawal of UNPROFOR from the eastern enclaves. In particular with regard to the Safe Areas the mandate or strength of UNPROFOR should not be weakened. If UNPROFOR was seen as too weak, it had to be reinforced. Biegman referred to a statement by the American chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, general Shalikashvili, who had said that firm actions by NATO would make the Bosnian Serbs start behaving correctly. It was exactly the lack of such action that had caused the frustrations. With that Shalikashvili voiced the general attitude of the American government that a firm line had to be taken with the Bosnian Serbs from the air and Biegman agreed to that. Neither did Biegman think it fair to approach both warring factions at the same time. It had been the Bosnian Serbs who had frustrated the Contact Group plans.

In his reply Janvier emphasized the complex problems of the use of air power. There was no middle course between a ‘strong protest’ (a personal warning to the Bosnian Serbs) and the use of the Close Air Support. That had to be balanced against the risk of an effective implementation of the UNPROFOR mandate.

Consultation with the troop contributing nations indeed showed that most countries were not in favour of withdrawal from the enclaves. The Islamic countries indicated that they would only support air actions and the lifting of the arms embargo to help their fellow believers, the Bosnian Muslims, in their struggle against the Bosnian Serbs. Some western countries noted the vulnerability and risk of hostage-takings for the troops in the enclaves. That required concentration of the troops, in

¹²⁷Interview Jim Baxter, 16/10/00.

¹²⁸ Interview M. Albright, 28/09/01.

¹²⁹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Reunion des pays contributeurs de troupes 24 mai 1995, Exposé introductif du Général Janvier, Commandant les forces de paix de Nations Unies, attached to Outgoing Code Cable No. 1829. Minutes of UNPF TCN meeting on 24/05/95.

other words withdrawal from the enclaves.¹³⁰ Although Biegman did not speak according to instructions from The Hague, earlier public statements by the Ministers Van Mierlo and Voorhoeve had been perfectly clear. The intervention by Biegman also revealed the close ties that existed between the Netherlands and Bosnia, in particular in the person of the Bosnian ambassador to the UN, Sacirbey. In addition to the fact that Sacirbey regularly visited the Netherlands on his travels from New York to Geneva and Sarajevo and visited the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, Biegman sent him the text of his intervention in the consultation between the troop contributing nations.¹³¹

Later interpretations of Janvier's actions

Later the briefing by Janvier to the Security Council caused a row in the Netherlands when on 31 October 1995 *ANP*, *De Telegraaf* and *NRC Handelsblad* reported a reconstruction of the fall of Srebrenica by the British newspaper *The Independent*. This newspaper stated to possess documents that already on 24 May Janvier had proposed in New York to leave the enclaves to fend for themselves, but that some Islamic countries and the Netherlands would have opposed the proposal and Janvier's hostile attitude towards the Bosnian government. In addition, Westerman and Rijs wrote in their book *Het Zwartste Scenario* (the blackest scenario) that the Dutch government had 'spectacularly' missed the gist of Janvier's argument and that Permanent Representative Biegman had not understood or reported that Janvier wanted to get rid of the enclaves. Westerman and Rijs also wrote that Janvier's speech could not be found at the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence.¹³²

These reports in the newspapers raised the question what exactly the Netherlands had known about Janvier's appearance before the Security Council. Initially Minister Van Mierlo responded by stating that the report from the UN Secretary-General had already indicated that withdrawal was not a realistic option. But that did not appear until 30 May, six days after the meeting with Janvier in the Security Council.¹³³ Around that time Minister Voorhoeve publicly acknowledged that he still did not exactly know what Janvier had said about the enclaves during the closed session of the Security Council.¹³⁴ Van Mierlo on the contrary informed the lower house that the Permanent Representative at the UN had sent the report of the meeting with Janvier to the Ministry of Defence. However, this referred to Biegman's report on the meeting of the troop contributing nations that Janvier had addressed, also on 24 May.

Van Mierlo also made it clear that a number of UN ambassadors, including the Dutch ambassador, had criticized Janvier's plans: the Netherlands had rejected withdrawal from the Safe Areas, according to Van Mierlo, and the Dutch policy had always been aimed at maintaining UN units in the Safe Areas 'to discourage attacks and shootings'.¹³⁵

Van Mierlo did not specifically state that the Netherlands also knew what Janvier had said in the Security Council. Ambassador Biegman had certainly reported on the subject, even though the Netherlands had not been present. Janvier's argument had been roughly the same as his argument before the troop contributing nations. Before the Security Council he had just been a bit more specific on the possibility of redeployment; Janvier wanted to maintain the UN presence in Sarajevo, but he did not exclude withdrawal from Tuzla or Bihac, implying that the same was true for withdrawal from the eastern enclaves Srebrenica, Zepa and Gorazde. Biegman also reported that the positions within the Security Council had not come closer. The United States kept going on about a forceful UNPROFOR

¹³⁰ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 31/05/95, No. 1829. Minutes of UNPF TCN meeting on 24/05/95.

¹³¹ APPVN, Fax N.H. Biegman to Muhamed Sacirbey, 25/05/95, without number.

¹³² Westerman and Rijs, *Het zwartste scenario*, p. 131.

¹³³ *ANP*, 302350 and 311536 Oct 95.

¹³⁴ Vectra BuZa 02-11-1995 13:50, referring to ANP139 4 BIN 226 Van Lambalgen 808.

¹³⁵ TK, 1995-1996, 22 181, nr. 139 (11/12/95).

and maintaining presence in the Safe Areas, while France and the United Kingdom seemed to be heading for redeployment plus forceful action.¹³⁶

To sum up: the statement by Westerman and Rijs that the Netherlands had not known what Janvier had said in the consultation with the troop contributing nations and in the Security Council, was incorrect. Biegman had certainly reported on both meetings. He had also gathered sufficient information on the meeting of the Security Council at which he himself had not been present. There had not been much difference in Janvier's contribution at these two meetings. Because Janvier also delivered his plea for withdrawal from the enclaves at the meeting with the troop contributing nations, it wasn't really a problem that his actual text before the Security Council was not known. Biegman even was one of the first to react by saying that he opposed withdrawal from the enclaves, including Srebrenica.

In the parliamentary debate of December 1995 that was intended to close the subject, the matter of Janvier's contribution on 24 May was discussed once more. VVD spokesman Blaauw accused Van Mierlo of not having informed the lower house that Janvier had wanted to give up Srebrenica. Then the Netherlands would have had a clearer picture of what Dutchbat might be facing.¹³⁷

A lot could be said against Van Mierlo's reply that he had not heard Janvier say that he wanted to get rid of the enclaves, had not received confirmation of that and that he did not believe that Janvier would have said that like this.¹³⁸ After all, ambassador Biegman and thus the Netherlands had certainly not missed Janvier's appearance. Apart from the codes by Biegman to his Ministry, Minister Voorhoeve had also said on 19 May in a conversation with the American UN Representative, Albright: 'Giving up the enclaves, as suggested earlier by Force Commander Janvier, would result in a bloodbath.' That had also been reported to Foreign Affairs.¹³⁹ In addition, Biegman had already reported extensively on the briefing by Boutros-Ghali before the Security Council on 16 May, where he had voiced his preference for redeployment.

In the debate Blaauw also tried to defend the position that Janvier's statement had had an influence on the actions of the UN headquarters. Such speculations on a connection between Janvier's appearance before the Security Council and the later fall of Srebrenica seemed attractive, but Janvier's idea to withdraw UNPROFOR from the enclaves was not followed up: UNPROFOR did not withdraw from the enclaves. After Janvier hadn't received any support in the Security Council for his ideas of withdrawal from the eastern enclaves, he didn't discuss that any more, not even after it had gone wrong.¹⁴⁰ But above all the Bosnian-Serb strategy on how to handle Srebrenica, as will be discussed later in this part, had already been shaped before Janvier addressed the Security Council. Janvier's ideas were not considered worth further study. As in a reflex the politicians rejected it, because it would underline the failure of the Safe Area concept; people didn't want to admit a failure. The American UN ambassador Albright was at the forefront, but the Dutch government members were clearly heard as well. That way there came no new implementation of the Safe Area concept.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05277. Code Biegman 467, 25/05/95.

¹³⁷ TK, 1995-1996, Proceedings, 19/12/95, TK 40-3185 en TK 40-3162.

¹³⁸ TK, 1995-1996, Proceedings, 19/12/95, TK 40-3185 en TK 40-3162.

¹³⁹ APPVN doss. 272 ag nr. 22491. Code Biegman 548, 19/06/95.

¹⁴⁰ Interview A.M.W.W. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

¹⁴¹ For instance similar to the Safe Havens in Northern and Southern Iraq that were protected from the air. A concept that still works today, without allied troops being on Iraqi soil. As general Shalikhvili, former commander of Operation Provide Comfort in Iraq, said: that was a concept that, unlike that of the Safe Areas, had been thought about and where the motto had been 'shoot first, ask questions later'. Shalikhvili did have to admit that the terrain in Iraq was better suited to such an approach than the terrain in Bosnia. Interview John Shalikhvili, 07/06/00.

10. The air strikes on Pale

The month of May saw a considerable escalation of the fighting between VRS and ABiH.¹⁴² UNPROFOR got involved in the fighting, which resulted on 25 and 26 May in the much-discussed air strikes on ammunition depots in Pale, the 'capital' of the Republika Srpska. However, it would be incorrect to consider these bombings by NATO as the single cause of the escalation; before 25 May the conflict had already been escalating.

For instance on 7 May ten French UN soldiers and civilians were killed and 30 got wounded in a mortar attack near Sarajevo, on which operation also the carefulness of the UN headquarters in Zagreb was underlined once more: Akashi's refusal to use Close Air Support was criticized by a number of UN member states.

A next step on the escalation ladder was the removal of heavy weapons by Bosnian Serbs from a Weapon Collection Point, on 24 May even followed by firing heavy weapons by Bosnian Serbs from Weapon Collection Points, and taking away still more weapons. That included tanks and rocket launchers in what was called the Heavy Weapons Exclusion Zone around Sarajevo.

This removal of heavy weapons by Bosnian Serbs did not remain without consequences. On 24 May the Bosnian Serbs received an ultimatum through a press conference by general Smith in Sarajevo: if the next day heavy weapons would not have been removed or delivered at a Weapon Collection Point, the VRS would be attacked from the air. If the heavy weapons would not remain silent within 24 hours after that, another air strike would follow. That same ultimatum also applied to the ABiH.

The VRS did not respect this deadline. That made 25 May 1995 a day to remember in the Bosnian conflict. In the Chapter 'Air power: Close Air Support and air strikes' below, these air strikes will be discussed in more detail. Threatening with force, as Smith did on this occasion, sometimes had a positive result. The fact that NATO was prepared to shoot down airplanes that violated the no-fly zone, had prevented the use of the airspace for offensive purposes. Threatening with force had already worked before to set up the Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zone around Sarajevo. But the Bosnian Serbs had quickly understood that they could have the UN pay an unacceptable price for the use of air power. And that was exactly what happened after the second air strike.

After the Bosnian Serbs had failed to respect the deadline, NATO indeed carried out an air strike on 25 May. To prevent unintended damage (in military terms: collateral damage) and casualties, they selected as target two bunkers on an ammunition site near Pale, the capital of the Republika Srpska, proclaimed by the Bosnian Serbs.

The VRS did not take long to respond to this air strike. That same day the VRS besieged Weapon Collection Points and fired at all Safe Areas, with the exception of Zepa. Especially Tuzla was hit very hard: as retaliation for the air strikes on 25 May (Tito's day of birth, and the day of unity and fraternity¹⁴³) they fired at Tuzla from a distance of 20 kilometres, and one single shell (a 130 mm artillery shell) caused 195 casualties, of which 72 were killed.¹⁴⁴ Because the Bosnian Serbs did not observe the ultimatum, on 26 May NATO carried out a second air strike on the other bunkers at the same ammunition site near Pale.

Three examples show how UN personnel got involved in the VRS actions against their will. The first and most important one showed UNPROFOR's vulnerability: on 26 May the VRS took 145 UN observers and UN soldiers hostage. During the following days the number of hostages increased.

¹⁴² For the description of the events in May in this section in a general sense use has been made of the list of events as stated in the report by Boutros-Ghali. The conclusions in his report will be discussed in section 11.

¹⁴³ CRST. Remark by General Sead Delic, see Minutes of Meeting with Brig Delic/Comd 2 Corps on 07/0695. Compiled by MA/Comd Sec NE Maj Valved.

¹⁴⁴ NIOD, Coll Brantz. Commander Sector North East (Brigadier General Hagrup Haukland) to Major General Rupert Smith, 28/05/95. UNMOs later expressed their suspicion that the shellings then and in later weeks on the western part of city were not random, but that these were aimed at the TTU factory of which it was suspected that it was an ammunition factory. Remarkably, the shell was Soviet-made and it was equipped with an American percussion fuse. (CRST.UNMO HQ Sector NE to UNMO BHC, 111000B Jun 95).

Now famous TV images showed UN personnel chained to strategic objects, in many cases tied to bridges and lampposts. The VRS said to have locked up 168 peacekeepers at possible targets for an air strike to make sure the next air strike would not be aimed at those. General Mladic informed general Smith that their lives would be at risk if the air strikes were to continue. A second example of the direct involvement of UNPROFOR personnel happened at Sarajevo: there the French retook the Vrbanja bridge (see below) on French initiative, that had earlier been taken by the VRS. A third example is that on 28 May the VRS in Gorazde fired at the British compound and took 33 men prisoner of the personnel of the observation posts (OPs). The following section describes the direct consequences of these actions for UNPROFOR.

The VRS didn't stop at that: also on 28 May the Bosnian Serbs cut off the gas, water and electricity supply to Sarajevo. From the Weapon Collection Points they had surrounded the VRS took back two hundred mortars and artillery pieces.

After the VRS had taken UN personnel hostage, it was relatively quiet in Sarajevo, but that had been achieved at a high price and it had left UNPROFOR in complete isolation. The situation increased the problems with sending supplies to the eastern enclaves, because now the Bosnian Serbs didn't feel at all like letting convoys pass that were heading for the UN personnel in those eastern enclaves. The capacity of the UN to act effectively in Bosnia had badly been affected. The same applied for the intended impartiality of the UN and the necessary consent from the warring factions for the UN presence: the warring factions considered UNPROFOR party to the conflict.

11. Direct consequences of the air strikes for UNPROFOR

The air strikes on 25 and 26 May in Pale were not isolated events. Earlier in spring it had already become clear what the pattern was at the use of air power (air strikes or Close Air Support): Force Commander Janvier wanted to observe extreme restraint because of the safety of the troops on the ground. That attitude in itself was not strange, because each time air power was used against the Bosnian Serbs, the VRS quickly responded with major consequences for UNPROFOR: hostages were taken, the supply route to the Safe Areas was closed, airplanes supplying relief-aid to Sarajevo were fired at, UNMOs and VN personnel at isolated observation posts were taken hostage and UNPROFOR was ignored. The general UNPROFOR policy as regards the use of air power, and the decision-making process that led to the air strikes at Pale, will be discussed in the next Chapter, 'Air Power: Close Air Support and air strikes'. Here the account continues with consequences the air strikes on 25 and 26 May had for UNPROFOR of which the most important one was, as stated earlier, that the Bosnian Serbs were taking hostages because UNPROFOR would have chosen sides.¹⁴⁵ In addition, isolated UN units were surrounded by the VRS, and UNPROFOR had been robbed of their freedom of movement in Bosnian-Serb territory.¹⁴⁶

On 29 May general Smith also concluded that the objective of the air strikes had not been achieved. This objective had been to revitalize the regime of the Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones and Weapon Collection Points that had gradually been broken down. On the contrary, the VRS had taken possession of large numbers of arms and equipment from the Weapon Collection Points. The Bosnian government did cooperate as long as it was to their advantage, but could also be forced to give up the regime of the Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones or Weapon Collection Points.

The VRS had a hold on UNPROFOR, Smith concluded: still (on 29 May) 347 UN soldiers were being held hostage, isolated UN units were surrounded by the VRS, and the VRS had robbed UNPROFOR of their freedom of movement. The UN personnel in the enclaves was vulnerable and, as Smith put it, 'more part of the problem than the solution'. UNPROFOR had lost the consent of the

¹⁴⁵ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 62/77, File 2.8 Nato 25/05/93 – 05/07/95. The statements came from Parliament chairman Momcilo Krajisnik on Radio Knin, 26/05/95, 16.00 hrs. Krajisnik also came with the reproach that the Bosnian troops were using the Safe Areas, including Srebrenica, as base of operations. UNPROFOR 26/05/95, 23.30 hrs.

¹⁴⁶ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Commander HQ UNPROFOR Directive 2/95, 29/05/95, No. 8800, UN Conf.

Bosnian Serbs for their presence and were no longer seen as peacekeeper, certainly not since UNPROFOR was holding four VRS soldiers prisoners of war. UNPROFOR could hardly be called impartial anymore and they were not far from the point that in fact they were allies of the Bosnian Muslims.¹⁴⁷

After the air strikes on Pale on 25 and 26 May 1995 a completely new situation developed. As general Smith put it in a discussion with the Bosnian vice-president E. Ganic on the evening of 24 May: the air strikes would change the situation to such an extent that 'much of the debate currently going on in New York would become academic'.¹⁴⁸ New York did not know that the air strikes were coming: On 24 May Janvier held his speeches before the Security Council and the troop contributing nations, and he said he was aware of the importance of air strikes, but he gave no indication whatsoever that he was actually going to use them.¹⁴⁹ Directly after the first air strike the UN were in an uproar.

Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo had estimated that the air strike would cause escalation. The intelligence staff (in military terms: the G-2) in Sarajevo expected that an air strike would mainly evoke a strong response because the Bosnian Serbs had been hit so close to home. Karadzic might see it as proof that he was right to continue to fight; he would resist Milosevic's pressure to start negotiations. UN personnel could be taken hostage, as Karadzic had threatened to do. The VRS might even take up arms against UNPROFOR. In particular it was predictable that as countermeasure for the enclaves the VRS would attack there, hold UN personnel and stop further convoys. The ABiH would wait and see which way the wind was blowing and wait for the response from the Bosnian Serbs, while at the same time they would try to increase the tension and destabilize the situation by provoking the Bosnian Serbs. Sarajevo and also Gorazde were obvious targets for such actions. They were playing high-stakes poker and it wasn't clear what card the Bosnian Serbs would be playing. 'They are very good poker players and never show their cards until they have to'.¹⁵⁰

The first reactions by the Bosnian Serbs to the air strikes came in words and didn't promise much good. Mladic accused Smith of 'crazy and unreasonable' use of the instrument of air strikes. He wondered whether Smith was trying to frighten him. Mladic expected Smith to act as a reasonably thinking human being; he, Mladic, had never provoked or attacked the UN, but now it had been Smith who had attacked him. Smith should have thought of his soldiers and the consequences of 'such unreasonable and unthinking decisions'. Mladic expected apologies rather than threats.¹⁵¹ Other reactions from the Bosnian Serbs were just as furious. The advisor and spokesman of Karadzic, Jovan Zametica, reeled off a litany of protests against the UN. He said that from now on the UN could only be considered an enemy, because the UN had chosen the side of his enemies. The international community tried to use force to induce the Serbs to make concessions, but that wouldn't work. Already that community didn't understand much of the Serb cause and the Serb rights. The Bosnian Serbs were prepared to negotiate about peace tomorrow, but only when the Bosnian-Serb interests were taken into account and the Bosnian Serbs were not seen as just an autonomous minority in Bosnia.¹⁵² Karadzic himself declared that because of the air strikes, the Republika Srpska considered the UN an enemy and he revoked all arrangements made earlier with the UN. UN resolutions would no longer be respected. Momcilo Krajisnik, Parliament Chairman of the Republika Srpska, also said that the UN had given up their neutral position and should from now be considered the enemy. After what the UN had failed to do, they did not have the right to attack the Bosnian Serbs. That is because Krajisnik stated that the

¹⁴⁷ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Commander HQ UNPROFOR Directive 2/95, 29/05/95, UN Conf.

¹⁴⁸ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Meeting Gen Smith/Dr Ganic: 24/05/95, attached to Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 25/05/95, No. Z-861.

¹⁴⁹ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05277. Code Biegman 467, 25/05/95.

¹⁵⁰ NIOD, Coll. Smith. BH Command G2 Assessment 25/05/95, UN Conf.

¹⁵¹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Telephone Conversation Gen Smith / Gen Mladic: 26/05/95, attached to Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 26/05/95, No. Z-870.

¹⁵² UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Statement of Dr Jovan Zametica, Advisor and Spokesman to Dr Karadzic, Bosnian Serb Radio, 26/05/95, 24.00 hrs, attached to Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 27/05/95, No. Z-875.

Safe Areas were not at all safe, but that they were used as base of operations for attacks by the Bosnian Muslims. There were armed troops instead of civilians under protection. The ABiH had carried out attacks from Srebrenica, Zepa as well as Gorazde.¹⁵³

After these threatening words against the UN, the Bosnian Serbs suited their actions to the word: large numbers of UN personnel were taken hostage. That plunged the UN into a crisis. The special representative of the UN secretary-general, Akashi, appealed to Karadzic to release the hostages. The way in which they were exhibited in images that went all over the world, with UN personnel chained to objects, had not done much good to Karadzic's reputation. Harming the hostages would only cause pressure from the international community for further military action, air strikes included, 'that will be impossible to resist'.¹⁵⁴

However, Akashi was bluffing for in reality the actions against the Bosnian Serbs didn't become stricter after 25 and 26 May. It looked more like the reverse; the careful powers were gaining influence again. Akashi was only too aware of the limitations the hostages would cause for the political and military activities of UNPROFOR.¹⁵⁵ 'The need not to worsen the security situation in UNPROFOR is paramount.' Akashi reported to New York that he had instructed general Smith that implementation of the mandate was second to the safety of the UN personnel. Smith had to take measures to prevent the VRS from taking even more personnel hostage. That could mean a reduction of UNPROFOR's presence and activities.¹⁵⁶ That had proved Smith right that the discussion so far in New York suddenly seemed very academic, now that Akashi had also worded his vision of the mandate.

More in general most people within UNPROFOR thought that the air strikes had fallen short of expectations. That was for instance concluded by Akashi's substitute in Sarajevo, Deyan Mihov. The objective had been to make the VRS comply with the agreement of February 1994 on heavy weapons, and to achieve stabilization of the situation around Sarajevo and elsewhere in Bosnia. Because that objective had not been achieved, and to get the hostages released, Mihov wanted to stop the air strikes. In his opinion it looked like the Bosnian Serbs were following a preconceived plan. Their objective seemed to cause disputes between UN and NATO, as well as within the Security Council, in the Contact Group and among the troop contributing nations.¹⁵⁷ Whether or not that was the objective of the Bosnian Serbs, they succeeded rather nicely: the consequence of the air strikes of 25 and 26 May was that for the time being UNPROFOR gave up further air strikes.

New visions of the national governments

The development of the hostage situation had really shaken the troop contributing nations, in particular the United Kingdom and France. For instance, on 2 June the French observers were transported to safer areas as a matter of precaution. The situation in Bosnia was getting highly gruesome for the intervening soldiers too.

The Americans had also had a fright, although they had no ground troops in Bosnia. They got more involved after an American F-16 was shot down near Banja Luka on 2 June.¹⁵⁸ There were American individuals in Bosnia, but only in the civil and military staffs. That also appeared on 29 May

¹⁵³ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Statement of Mr Momcilo Krajisnik, 'speaker of the Republika Srpska National Assembly', Bosnian Serb Radio, 26/05/95, 14.00 hrs, attached to Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 27/05/95, No. Z-875.

¹⁵⁴ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Letter Yashushi Akashi to Radovan Karadzic, 26/05/95, attached to Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 27/05/95, No. Z-875.

¹⁵⁵ Confidential information (60).

¹⁵⁶ Confidential information (61).

¹⁵⁷ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Fax Deyan Mihov, Acting D-SRSG/CAC BH Command Sarajevo to Yasushi Akashi and Michel Moussali, HCA Civil Affairs, HQ Zagreb, Situation Assessment 29/0595 sent with Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 29/05/95, No. Z-889.

¹⁵⁸ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, Weekly Situation Report, 31/05/95, No. Z-900, Restricted; MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, no. 25/95, completed 30/12/00B May 1995; confidential information (121); Royal Netherlands Crisis Staff Weeksitrep of 25/05/95 - 02/06/95.

when messages came about hostage-takings of American observers of the ICFY mission who were monitoring the border between Yugoslavia and Bosnia. These observers were then hastily withdrawn.

At a high level in the United States now discussions started on how to continue. On 27 May safety advisor Lake and chairman of the Joint Chiefs-of-staff, general Shalikashvili, had a discussion about the subject. Lake thought that UNPROFOR 'should stay on course and decide what to do next'. Shalikashvili was instructed by him: 'Be prepared to discuss redeployment and emergency extractions.' General Smith had already warned for the possibility that the troops would have to be withdrawn.

Military precautions were taken for an operation to withdraw UNPROFOR. The American so-called Rapid Response Option (the Marine Expeditionary Unit or MEU) in the Mediterranean was activated, as well as a third part of an American airborne division in Italy, the availability of which had been kept silent. That activation merely involved an increase of their readiness and did not yet mean deployment.

Washington also took political precautions: Lake talked to American Congress members about moving the Marine Expeditionary Unit from the Mediterranean to the Adriatic Sea. However, as yet their actual deployment was not discussed. The American Minister of Defence, Perry, had a meeting with the British and German Ministers of Defence, Rifkind and Rühle. Perry's message was: 'no air strikes, only Close Air Support'. This response mainly seemed inspired by the spur of the moment; there are no further indications that the policy of the United States did not remain that the Bosnian Serbs had to be closed down on through air strikes. The American army also got permission to make plans to rescue the hostages. The American government did not rule out commando actions to free hostages.

The hostage crisis made achieving international agreement even more difficult than it already was. For instance the Security Council could not reach agreement on a Presidential Statement to denunciate the violence, and the North Atlantic Council, called in emergency session, did not get beyond demanding that the shooting at the Safe Areas had to be stopped and that the hostages should unconditionally be released. Even the Russians spoke of barbarism.

Soon it also appeared that the hostage crisis got a place of its own in the discussions between the Americans and the troop contributing nations. For instance, Perry had spoken to the new French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hervé de Charette, and it had appeared to him that the hostage situation had been reason for the separate countries to have a much greater interest in Bosnia because of their hostages than before.

The same applied for the British: the British Chief of Defence Staff, Sir Peter Inge, had already said that so far the British had not had a 'vital interest' in Bosnia, but that now they did. British troops with heavy weapons (artillery) landed in Split.¹⁵⁹

The French and American response to the hostage crisis

The hostage crisis had roused the emotions, not in the least in France: the strategic Vrbanja bridge near Sarajevo had been stormed and taken on 27 May by Bosnian Serbs, dressed as French UN soldiers. Two French soldiers were killed. That same morning this bridge was retaken; this recapture took place, without Smith knowing anything about it, on personal instructions of the French President, Chirac. He gave orders to the French Chief of Defence Staff, Lanxade, and he transferred them to the also French general Gobilliard in Sarajevo, who set up the recapture operation. The argument for this French get-together was that the French government reserved the right to take Command and Control in case of an emergency and to issue direct instructions to French units under international command.¹⁶⁰

Despite earlier tirades by telephone, the generals Smith and Mladic remained in touch with each other on subjects like this. On 28 May they discussed the situation that had developed. The recapture

¹⁵⁹ Interview John Shalikashvili, 07/06/00. Information on the basis of the diary notes.

¹⁶⁰ Confidential interview (1).

had killed three VRS soldiers and four were taken prisoner of war. It caused the bizarre situation that a peacekeeping force took prisoners of war, although they were not allowed to be called like that. Then VRS soldiers threatened to kill the French UN soldiers that had been taken hostage if these four Serbs were not released. Smith did not directly reply to that to Mladic; Mladic told Smith that he had information that these four Serbs had been handed over to the ABiH (which was not true). Mladic called the treatment of the French UN soldiers taken hostage humane and correct - apart from an isolated case -. He did admit that some French UN soldiers were at key locations that could be target of NATO actions, including Mladic' own headquarters. In addition Mladic told Smith that he hoped that Smith would act in accordance with the UN mandate and would not respond to the wishes of the Bosnian government. Smith should make it clear once more to the Bosnian Vice-President Ganic, according to Mladic.¹⁶¹ The VRS soldiers were not released until after mid-June also the UNPROFOR hostages had been released.

The French directly took the position that the French and not the UN should liberate the French hostages. In addition to the solo action at the Vrbanja bridge, the French were considering to set up another national operation for that purpose; the French aircraft carrier Foch sailed with special units on board. The French Chief of Defence Staff, Lanxade, told his American counterpart Shalikhvili that neither the UN nor UNPROFOR were the right intermediaries to do business with the Serbs now that there were hostages. The UN in Zagreb could not handle the crisis. Countries would want to solve the hostage problem each in their own way. The chairman of the Military Committee of NATO, Sir Richard Vincent, even received telephone calls from the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hervé de Charette, who was unhappy because there was no multinational involvement.¹⁶²

The new French president, Chirac, also responded to the hostage crisis. After the indignation on the hostage-takings, it was mainly France that tried to realize new initiatives. Chirac took the lead in new diplomatic offensives and the French chairmanship of the EU that ended by the end of June caused a diplomatic final sprint. An important French initiative was the proposal to set up a Rapid Reaction Force (for its formation see section 13). On top of that the French intended to follow up this military initiative with political action. France called for an international conference and asked the two joint chairmen of the International Conference on the former Yugoslavia, Stoltenberg and Bildt, to leave for The Balkans as soon as possible for preparatory talks, so there could be results in time to discuss those at the European summit in Cannes on 26 and 27 June.¹⁶³

The Americans on the other hand wanted to prevent each country from steering its own course, for that would result in chaos. That's why Perry thought it necessary to have NATO solve the hostage crisis, by a group of international planners. Otherwise the Americans seemed to have written off the UN: In Perry's opinion the entire peace operation had to be transferred to NATO. Finally he emphasized the vital interests of a new negotiator for the Contact Group; if no political agreement could be reached, everyone would be up a blind alley.¹⁶⁴

The Dutch response to the hostage crisis

On 28 May, Minister Voorhoeve told the American Minister of Defence, Perry, about his fears that also after a solution of the hostage crisis the problems with UNPROFOR would continue, by which he meant: as long as the UN troops were in vulnerable positions spread out over Bosnia, and the Bosnian Serbs could take both UNPROFOR and the Muslim population hostage.

¹⁶¹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Telephone Conversation Gen Smith / Gen Mladic: 28/05/95 UN Confi, attached to Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 26/05/95, No. Z-883.

¹⁶² ABZ, DEU/ARA/05243. Code Wijnaendts 165, 28/05/95.

¹⁶³ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 119, File BHC Weekly Sitreps, 17/06/95 – 21/09/95. UNPROFOR HQ, Weekly Situation Report, No. 122, 5-11 June 1995.

¹⁶⁴ Interview John Shalikhvili, 07/06/00.

The first priority for Voorhoeve was to make UNPROFOR less vulnerable, before more forceful action could be taken against the Bosnian Serbs. That meant withdrawal of the UNMOs and a solution for the UNPROFOR troops in the enclaves. Voorhoeve saw two ways to achieve that: either a corridor to the enclaves over land was created after negotiations, – but that would be difficult to realize – or the enclaves were evacuated, taking along the population that should then be relocated in Central Bosnia or around Sarajevo. This was just an exchange of thoughts with Perry, Voorhoeve himself has never tried to find support for this idea. This option would of course be unfeasible because this scenario meant that over a hundred thousand people had to be moved, while it was highly questionable whether the Bosnian government would want to cooperate.

At least Voorhoeve saw the problem clearly: as long as the enclaves remained the responsibility of the UN, UNPROFOR would remain highly vulnerable because the Bosnian Serbs had the population there in a firm hold. A day after his conversation with Perry, on 29 May, Voorhoeve warned the Council of Ministers that in view of discussions in New York, it could become inevitable for UNPROFOR to have to leave the enclaves.

The Dutch government was also worried about the situation that had developed. During that same Dutch Council of Ministers on 29 May, Voorhoeve warned for the risk that Dutchbat soldiers could be taken hostage. The UN were highly vulnerable and no longer had things under control in Bosnia.¹⁶⁵ It was concluded in the Council of Ministers that with this kind of actions the Bosnian Serbs seemed to be aiming at banishing UNPROFOR from Bosnia. A forced departure would have major consequences for the credibility of the Security Council and NATO. The UN were vulnerable, the enclaves were indefensible and the UN could not act as warring faction. None of the member-states knew what the best way was to deal with the Bosnian Serbs. Lack of control on the part of the UN, doubts and insecurity had caused a situation in which the Bosnian Serbs were challenging the UN. All eyes were now focused on the meeting of the Contact Group in The Hague and of the NATO ministers of Foreign Affairs who were going to meet in Noordwijk together with their colleagues from Central and Eastern Europe. No decisions were expected in Noordwijk, but it was important that the large countries presented a common front to which the Netherlands could conform.

Now the Netherlands hoped that the following would happen with UNPROFOR: a redeployment of the troops, which would make UNPROFOR less vulnerable; no longer sending unarmed observers; and a new policy regarding the enclaves. But if the UN troops left the enclaves, they would have to take along the local population. As said before, Voorhoeve had already expressed this idea in a conversation with Perry. Implementation of this idea would of course mean a lot of human suffering; however, it was better than ethnic cleansing by the Bosnian Serbs. Though it meant cooperating with ethnic cleansing, it could be defended if the interests of the population were considered. However, the Netherlands had too little influence in achieving a political consensus on the road to a peace plan. The Netherlands did have to strive after making the situation for the Dutch UN soldiers as safe as possible. The Council of Ministers really did not pretend to be able to set out the political course for the international consultation. It would be possible to develop options in which the Netherlands had a choice: either withdrawal, or taking part in redeployment, reduction of the vulnerability and solving the enclaves problem. The latter was the preferred choice.¹⁶⁶

At this meeting of the Council of Ministers it was also noted that contradictory messages came from France, which, in the opinion of the cabinet, increased the unrest. At this meeting of the Council of Ministers, it was heard that the French wanted a different mandate for UNPROFOR. The position of Russia wasn't clear either. Russia seemed to have a positive attitude towards the Bosnian Serbs, but got increasingly irritated by their unruliness. In addition, the Russian attitude was slowing down the international consultation. In the Dutch vision one country should take the lead to get all the hostages released; preferably the United States, but there the political reservations within the country were too

¹⁶⁵ Diary Voorhoeve, p. 80-81, 83

¹⁶⁶ Objectivized summary for the NIOD investigation of the meeting of the Ministerial Council of 29/05/95.

great. Another country that had the military capacity was France. Though evacuation plans for UNPROFOR were ready, there was no good plan to transfer the solution to the hostages crises to NATO.¹⁶⁷

How to achieve a more efficient peace force and a more practicable mandate was another problem that kept the Dutch government busy. It was not only politically relevant to get London and Paris speaking with one voice, but if the Netherlands wanted to send additional troops for reinforcement of UNPROFOR, a conceptual approach was important. The moment it became possible to seriously discuss a peace arrangement with the Bosnian Serbs was coming closer, in the opinion of the Council of Ministers, and then a UN force remained necessary for monitoring. The objective should be a different and clearer operational leadership. The Netherlands would be capable of making a modest but valuable contribution. That also was important in case of the event Dutchbat would get into trouble in Srebrenica and the help of allies would be necessary.¹⁶⁸

12. The report from the UN Secretary-General

With so many hostages as a consequence of the air strikes, Boutros-Ghali could only conclude that the use of air power in a peacekeeping operation caused problems. It was the fifth time the UN head resorted to the air strike weapon and the third time the Bosnian Serbs had hit back by taking hostages. Using force against one party put an end to UNPROFOR's neutrality with all the risks for the personnel. For that reason a decision to use air power should be well-considered after carefully balancing all factors that influenced the mission. It could not be the result of fixed criteria, according to Boutros-Ghali.¹⁶⁹

What they were now waiting for was the report for the Security Council on redeployment of the UNPROFOR troops in Bosnia that Boutros-Ghali had promised. The report was published on 30 May. After Janvier's presentation, Janvier and Baxter (Smith's Military Assistant who had been assigned to Janvier's delegation) spent two more fruitless days in New York rewriting Boutros-Ghali's report in an attempt to make it more palatable. Eventually it wasn't the Department of Peacekeeping Operations but Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Goulding who took over drafting the report.¹⁷⁰ In this comprehensive report Boutros-Ghali took stock of the situation in the former Yugoslavia.¹⁷¹ It not only discussed what he called the 'dramatic developments' in Bosnia. Boutros-Ghali expressly placed matters in a wider perspective, by clearly bringing out into the open what exactly UNPROFOR was and was not.

Boutros-Ghali noted that there was little progress on the diplomatic field and that it was not to be expected shortly either. The warring factions apparently had decided to go back to the battlefield and Boutros-Ghali assumed that the lack of cooperation was going to continue.

The fighting had already started again in March, even before the end of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement on 1 May. First in Bihac, after which the fighting spread to Central Bosnia and Tuzla. After mid-May the fighting around Sarajevo got fiercer. Both parties were fighting for the high terrain sections around the city and along the Pale road and were using heavy weapons, which increased the number of casualties both among the population and among UNPROFOR.

The situation in which UNPROFOR had ended up as a consequence of the escalation of the fighting, brought Boutros-Ghali to the mandate of UNPROFOR. Before any options for modifications

¹⁶⁷ Objectivized summary for the NIOD investigation of the meeting of the Ministerial Council of 29/05/95.

¹⁶⁸ Objectivized summary for the NIOD investigation of the meeting of the Ministerial Council of 02/06/95.

¹⁶⁹ Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council Resolutions 982 (1995) and 987 (1995), 30/05/95, No. S/1995/444, §§ 40 en 58.

¹⁷⁰ Interview Jim Baxter, 16/10/00.

¹⁷¹ Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council Resolutions 982 (1995) and 987 (1995), 30/05/95, No/1995/444. The following sessions, including the references, is fully based on this report.

could be considered, it was important to analyze the tasks with which the Security Council had charged UNPROFOR with regard to the Safe Areas, which were:

- to monitor the cease-fire in the Safe Areas;
- to promote the withdrawal of military or paramilitary units other than those of the Bosnian Government from the Safe Areas;
- to deter attacks against the Safe Areas;
- to occupy key points on the ground;
- to participate in the delivery of humanitarian relief to the population in the Safe Areas.

Boutros-Ghali touched on a tender spot when he came up with the fundamental reason why the position of UNPROFOR in the Safe Areas was made problematic: the inconsistencies within the mission.

There had been a very fundamental problem right from the start: according to Boutros-Ghali some 34,000 troops would have been required to achieve the intended ‘deterrence through strength’. However, the Security Council had chosen the light option of 7600 men, under the assumption that parties were going to agree to UN resolution 836 and would cooperate – which was not the case. Over the course of time troubles had only increased and relations between parties had deteriorated. The Safe Areas had been dragged along in the intensification of the conflict.

How to deal with the VRS was not the only problem; the ABiH had weapons they used for extensive attacks from the Safe Areas. Boutros-Ghali pointed out that on the one hand the UN Resolution 836 did not demand from the Bosnian government to withdraw their military units from the Safe Areas, but that on the other hand to the Security Council had made it clear in the form of Presidential Statements that ‘provocative actions by whomsoever committed’, so also by the ABiH, were unacceptable.¹⁷² Boutros-Ghali himself had emphasized that the defenders of a Safe Area had to observe certain obligations if UNPROFOR wanted to realize the objective of protecting the population. ‘Unprovoked attacks launched from Safe Areas are inconsistent with the whole concept.’¹⁷³ Indeed that was exactly what the ABiH were doing in spring 1995: the military activities in and around the Safe Areas were intensified considerably and were made an integral part of a larger military campaign. Military units, corps headquarters, and logistic installations were situated in Safe Areas, such as Bihac, Tuzla, and mainly Sarajevo. In addition the ABiH maintained considerable numbers of troops in Gorazde (where also an ammunition factory was located) and in Zepa and Srebrenica. The latter was a violation of the demilitarization agreement of 18 April 1993. That agreement prescribed that no armed people or units other than UNPROFOR were allowed to be in the city of Srebrenica.¹⁷⁴

To put it more in general, Boutros-Ghali reproached the Security Council for sending out UNPROFOR with a peacekeeping mandate, while elements of peace-enforcement had crept in, among other things because in its resolutions the Security Council had referred to Chapter VII of the UN Charter, that allows the use of force. However, UNPROFOR had not been adapted to that; it remains based purely on peacekeeping tasks.

In this connection Albright said to have felt very unhappy after the large-scale hostage-taking of UNPROFOR soldiers. In retrospect it appeared that UNPROFOR had never been given the right mandate and that, in addition, the concept of the use of air power in a UN operation had not been defined properly, she felt. Boutros-Ghali had been proved right by saying that the operations under Chapter VI and VII of the UN Charter, namely peacekeeping on the ground and peace-enforcement from the air, did not go together. In hindsight Albright admitted from New York that she could have been a little too easy to judge the acts of UN commanders in Zagreb and Sarajevo.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² United Nations, S/PRST/1994/14 and 57.

¹⁷³ United Nations, S/1995/444, p. 11.

¹⁷⁴ NIOD, Coll. Wahlgren. Agreement for the Demilitarisation of Srebrenica, signed Gen Sefer Halilovic, Lt Gen Ratko Mladic, Lt Gen Lars-Eric Wahlgren, 18/04/93.

¹⁷⁵ Interview M. Albright, 28/09/01.

In his report Boutros-Ghali noted that in many circles it was thought that the disastrous situation in Bosnia was the consequence of the incapacity of UNPROFOR to impose the will of the international community. In his opinion that was not correct. He thought that the situation was a consequence of the fact that parties were not prepared to observe their obligations. Along a similar line of reasoning critics sometimes made it look as if UNPROFOR was intended to end the war or to fight on the side of one of the parties. That was not true either, Boutros-Ghali thought. That was a matter for the Contact Group and the International Conference on the former Yugoslavia (ICFY). Consequently, Boutros-Ghali resisted the criticism poured out over UNPROFOR because they were not successful in fighting the war, for that was not their assignment. The objective of UNPROFOR's presence was to mitigate the consequences of the war, to stem the conflict and to create conditions for negotiations. The problem was that none of the parties had come to the conclusion that their own objectives could easier be achieved at the negotiating table than on the battlefield.

On that battlefield of course the offensive ABiH actions referred to earlier were not the only problem for UNPROFOR. The response by the VRS was usually aimed at military targets in the Safe Areas, though the response was often disproportional. But also without provocations by the ABiH the VRS would violate the Safe Area regime and other local agreements, for instance by firing at the Safe Areas. The UNPROFOR mandate demanded a response to Bosnian-Serb actions, even though in turn these were a response to provocations by the Bosnian Muslims. In that case it was a problem to maintain UNPROFOR's neutrality and to prevent them from being seen as party to conflict.¹⁷⁶

In addition, it was a peculiarity that in Boutros-Ghali's analysis the mandate required cooperation with the warring factions, but at the same time it offered the possibility to call in Close Air Support in the event UN personnel was attacked. The victim of that Close Air Support would then be the contending party that they at the same time had to cooperate with. And the Security Council had only imposed sanctions against one party, the Bosnian Serbs. However, at the same time it was expected from these Bosnian Serbs that they would cooperate with UNPROFOR.

Possibilities to implement the mandate were also seriously hampered by lack of Freedom of Movement. After it had been decided that UNPROFOR had to protect humanitarian convoys, that was done on the rules applying for peacekeeping: use of force exclusively permitted in self-defence. Boutros-Ghali had added that 'self-defence was deemed to include situations in which armed persons attempted by force to prevent United Nations troops from carrying out their mandate'.¹⁷⁷ That had indeed been the case because the Bosnian Serbs got the opportunity to stop humanitarian convoys without UNPROFOR being able to do anything against it, because no UN personnel was under direct threat. That had made it as good as impossible to send supplies to Gorazde, Srebrenica and Zepa. Fuel supplies to keep operations there going were at a dangerously low level.

The consequence of all these internal inconsistencies was that by now the Bosnian Serbs no longer cooperated with UNPROFOR and, in response, had imposed their own sanctions against the UN. In his conclusion Boutros-Ghali was as clear as he had been at the Security Council briefing: this couldn't go on. 'As a result of these contradictions, UNPROFOR now finds itself obstructed, targeted by both sides, denied supply, restricted in its movements, subjected to constant criticism - in short, in a predicament that my Special Representative, the Theatre Force Commander, many of the troop-contributing nations and I myself no longer consider tolerable.'¹⁷⁸

In view of all this Boutros-Ghali was very definite: the mandate was still aimed at peacekeeping. Even though already for more than 16 months there had been no negotiations with all parties at the table. The warring factions increasingly saw UNPROFOR as a hindrance on the road to their objective. All that time UNPROFOR remain deployed in a situation in which 'after more than three years, there is still no peace to keep'. However, the present situation for UNPROFOR would have been unavoidable,

¹⁷⁶ Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council Resolutions 982 (1195) and 987 (1995), 30/05/95, No. 23.S/23900, § 68.

¹⁷⁷ See United Nations, S/24440, 10/09/92.

¹⁷⁸ United Nations, S/23900, § 69.

Boutros-Ghali stated, as in his opinion the Security Council had wanted a peacekeeping operation and had stuck to that. This could also be concluded from the low strength the Security Council had permitted for UNPROFOR, while Boutros-Ghali had thought that considerably more troops would be needed for implementation of the mandate. Also from careful assessment of the many resolutions adopted on the former Yugoslavia, Boutros-Ghali concluded that the mandate was almost fully aimed at peacekeeping; only the safety of UNPROFOR personnel was enforceable. And of course a force equipped for peacekeeping could not be expected to fight. Composition and equipment of the troops didn't even allow that.

Peacekeeping was intended to support a political process, according to Boutros-Ghali. Even though the political process had now come to a halt, fact remained that neglecting that there was a difference between peacekeeping and peace-enforcement undermined the operation and put UN personnel at risk. Boutros-Ghali finally reminded them that already in 1992 he had come to the conclusion that the conflict in the former Yugoslavia was not suitable for peacekeeping because parties were too far apart.¹⁷⁹ This way Boutros-Ghali also indirectly blamed the Security Council for the malaise in which the UNPROFOR mission found itself.

How to go on with the UNPROFOR mission?

Having said that, the question remained: now that UNPROFOR was there, how to go on? Boutros-Ghali analyzed that UNPROFOR could only execute the mandate when consent and cooperation of the warring factions were obtained. 'Given their lamentable record in this respect, it is important to avoid creating unrealistic expectations of what the force can achieve'.¹⁸⁰ So that was exactly the problem: if parties were determined to continue the war, and that was what it looked like, the results of UNPROFOR would remain limited. It no longer seemed cost-effective to keep up a large military organization that could be crippled whenever the warring factions would feel like it, with all the harmful consequences for the credibility of the UN. The warring factions just showed too little respect for the UN to turn their peacekeeping operation into a success.

Use of force on the ground certainly wasn't a solution. Approval of the use of force in no event went beyond the right to self-defence, like with every UN peace operation. That showed from the equipment of the troops, according to Boutros-Ghali.

Use of Close Air Support might be a solution, but that was only permitted to protect UNPROFOR personnel, while it was the intention that the threat it wielded would deter attacks on the Safe Areas. During the period up to late May 1995, air power (air strike or Close Air Support) had been called in in nine cases. However, experience had taught that the use of Close Air Support also had had major drawbacks and that additionally it certainly was not an easy solution. That was because use of force against one party changed the perception of that party as regards UNPROFOR's neutrality. That entailed the risk that elsewhere UN personnel would be seen as party to the conflict. Because these were so spread out over the country, they were an easy target for obstruction and hostage-takings, like it had happened after the bombing of Pale.

Because the consequences of Close Air Support on the ground could be far-reaching, prior to the use of Close Air Support careful assessment of all consequences was required, Boutros-Ghali thought. For that reason the double key remained very important: UN and NATO both had their own decision-making processes and consent of both organizations was required (see Part I and the Chapter 'Air power: Close Air Support and air strikes'). According to Boutros-Ghali, Force Commander Janvier shared his vision regarding the use of Close Air Support. That the consequences could be major, was also discovered by some troop contributing nations, that initially had been prepared to use Close Air Support, but later had second thoughts in view of the risks it caused for the troops on the ground:

¹⁷⁹ See United Nations, S/23900,12/05/92.

¹⁸⁰ United Nations, S/23900, § 65.

hostage-takings of UN personnel for instance. Some members of the Security Council had also turned against the use of Close Air Support.

In fact Boutros-Ghali had four options on the question how to go on with UNPROFOR. The first was to accept that there was no other option than to amend the UNPROFOR mandate; after all, the events of 25 and 26 May had shown that the position of UNPROFOR had become impossible. It became clearer and clearer that the UNPROFOR mandate was an inadequate instrument to achieve acceptable living conditions in the Safe Areas. As a result, the pressure to use Close Air Support increased, not to protect UN personnel but, on the contrary, to protect or even just to supply the population in the Safe Areas. On the other hand, Close Air Support as deterrent had its limitations. Close Air Support had to contend with the problem of the air defence system of the Bosnian Serbs. That made it necessary to suppress the air defence: the possibilities of the VRS to attack NATO planes had to be incapacitated, otherwise the risks for the planes were too high - an argument from NATO. The VRS would consider the elimination of their air-defence system a hostile act, make UNPROFOR party to the conflict, and thus the boundaries of peacekeeping would be crossed. That was exactly what was threatening to happen after 25 and 26 May. Because of this risk of escalation on the ground Boutros-Ghali was against amending the current mandate and letting UNPROFOR use more force.

According to Boutros-Ghali a second option could be to make the Safe Areas really safe. The only way to achieve that - as long as there was no comprehensive political arrangement - was to come to a regime that was acceptable to both parties. For that purpose UNPROFOR would have to remain deploying troops along the confrontation line, to avoid affecting UNPROFOR's capacity to prevent or stem fights at local level, and to deter an attack on the Safe Areas. Then UNPROFOR would have to concentrate on tasks such as: 'good offices', a liaison task, negotiations with warring factions, monitoring cease-fires, as long as parties were prepared to implement such measures. In other words: pure peacekeeping tasks. Boutros-Ghali was not an advocate of this option either; it came down to muddling through.

In itself, Boutros-Ghali had the best arguments for the next option, total withdrawal of UNPROFOR. However, it had become clear to him that he would not get sufficient support for this option from the separate governments, so he did not opt for it.

Taking stock of the conditions, only one course of action remained, according to Boutros-Ghali: choosing the fourth and last option, meaning an amendment of the UNPROFOR mandate in such a manner that it only included tasks that could reasonably be expected of a peace force. For Boutros-Ghali that meant that, to limit the vulnerability of UNPROFOR, he stood by his earlier plan to withdraw UNPROFOR from the eastern enclaves. As a personal note Boutros-Ghali added that for him the safety of the UN personnel had a high priority. The television reports of UN personnel taken hostage and humiliated had already been painful enough for the UN top.¹⁸¹

Reaction to the report of Boutros-Ghali

The Security Council was divided on the question how to react to Boutros-Ghali's report and his four options, including his preference, withdrawal from the eastern enclaves.

It was obvious that the hostage crises caused the Security Council to proceed very carefully. That caused the proposals by Boutros-Ghali and Janvier to restructure UNPROFOR and to concentrate in Central Bosnia to make the unit less vulnerable to hostage-takings, to be cut down by the Security Council without properly assessing the military merits. Because of a lack of political will to discuss other options for the protection of the population in the eastern enclaves and to revitalize the idea of deterrence through air strikes, UNPROFOR could do little else than continue on the road of the 'muddling through scenario'. It should be noted that it was exactly the Bosnian government that said to be prepared to agree to a withdrawal of UNPROFOR from the eastern enclaves, provided that

¹⁸¹ Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council Resolutions 982 (1995) and 987 (1995), 30/05/95, No. 23.

it would be compensated by a commitment of deterrence and protection of the population using air power.¹⁸²

The result of this lack of political will to consider the options of Boutros-Ghali was, curiously enough, that the Security Council did not send any response.¹⁸³ The Council just didn't want to choose from the options presented by Boutros-Ghali.¹⁸⁴ Still this report was discussed, at a joint meeting of the troop contributing nations and the members of the Security Council. The prevailing spirit there was described as follows by Kofi Annan: 'While there was no formal deadline for the Council to take action on the report, all members of the Council were aware of the urgency of the matter under consideration.' That was diplomatic language for a dead-end.

The majority of the troop contributing nations didn't want to hear about any amendment to the mandate whatsoever; that meant they didn't choose either. In particular the mandate for the Safe Areas should not be amended. So in fact there were no new developments since Boutros-Ghali and Janvier had briefed the Security Council on their ideas about the future of UNPROFOR: presence in the Safe Areas had to be maintained. The troop contributing nations still rejected withdrawal, but they did demand that the Security Council should clearly indicate a direction, as well as objectives and means that matched the tasks allocated to UNPROFOR.¹⁸⁵

The Dutch government didn't respond either to Boutros-Ghali's report and did not go into the content of the options it described for the future of UNPROFOR. Already before the report was published the Contact Group had come to the conclusion that in all events UNPROFOR had to stay. The Dutch government supported this conclusion and welcomed reinforcement of UNPROFOR, as Ministers Van Mierlo and Voorhoeve informed Parliament. The Netherlands would consider how a contribution could be made.¹⁸⁶ That would lead to a Dutch contribution to setting up the Rapid Reaction Force (see section 13).

The ambiguities mentioned by Boutros-Ghali in the various Security Council resolutions, just like the shortcomings in the Safe Area concept, received little attention from the Security Council this way. In Resolution 998 of 16 June 1995 the Security Council did not get beyond demanding unobstructed access for humanitarian aid to the enclaves and respect for the Safe Areas. The Security Council supported the necessity of a mutually agreed demilitarization of the Safe Areas and their direct vicinity. That would be to the advantage of all parties because it could mean an end of the attacks on and from the Safe Areas. The Security Council encouraged the UN Secretary-General to intensify his efforts to reach an agreement with parties on demilitarization and called upon parties to cooperate.¹⁸⁷ That was all. However, Boutros-Ghali did not make an effort in this respect, the more so because only 'in the long run' Boutros-Ghali wanted to obtain the consent of the warring factions for demilitarization of the Safe Areas.¹⁸⁸ It was also highly questionable whether that was feasible shortly.

It may be surprising that the recommendations by the military commanders and the secretary-general responsible for the operations, received so little attention. That was certainly the case for the Major General Royal Netherlands Marine Corps F.H. van Kappen, who took office as military adviser to the UN Secretary-General shortly after the report by Boutros-Ghali was published. As a soldier he was amazed that in New York military advice carried so little weight. Extensive military recommendations were watered-down in the bureaucratic process through political officials, political directors and Undersecretaries-General. Military information often disturbed political pictures and did not fit in well with the political story, Van Kappen thought. Military recommendations could not be made available unfiltered to the members of the Security Council, because that would affect the power

¹⁸² ABZ, PVVN. Code Biegman 486, 01/06/95.

¹⁸³ Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35 (1998), 15/11/99, § 209.

¹⁸⁴ Interview Yasushi Akashi, 25/11/99.

¹⁸⁵ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 05/06/95, No. MSC-1874.

¹⁸⁶ TK, 1994-1995, 22 181, nr. 97. (30/05/95).

¹⁸⁷ United Nations, S/RES/998(1995), 16/06/95.

¹⁸⁸ ABZ, DPV/ARA/01802. Letter Boutros Boutros-Ghali to Willy Claes, 23/06/95.

of the political administrative levels. The members of the Security Council did tend to approve it, but the UN Secretariat checked that. ‘The mandarins who have been sitting there forever and a day consider that surrendering part of their power to a bunch of foreign workers’, Van Kappen said, referring to temporarily deployed soldiers. Having soldiers brief the Security Council also was an anathema. It had already been very exceptional that Janvier had given such a briefing. Soldiers were to rough with words for the UN, Van Kappen thought.¹⁸⁹ These heart-felt cries do deserve some comment. From a military perspective the observation that the UN had too little attention for military advice was understandable. On the other hand it is true that the UN is involved in military matters, but it still remains a political organization. And a political organization also bases its decisions on other than military considerations; an additional factor for the UN was that they always had to keep finding a consensus in the decision-making process, which already made it difficult enough even without military information.

Van Kappen also noted that the problem that in his opinion military information did not carry enough weight in the UN decision-making process, was wider. Also from the military staffs in the capitals the Permanent Representatives hardly received military advice. With the exception of the British it seemed that little comprehensive advice from the capitals reached ‘their’ permanent representatives. In particular for the Americans the military advice seemed dispersed and to have followed a roundabout way in which various institutes like the State Department, the Pentagon and the National Security Council were at loggerheads with each other.¹⁹⁰

13. Response to the air strikes on Pale: formation of the Rapid Reaction Force

One of the consequences of the air strikes was that the political deadlock in which UNPROFOR found itself became painfully visible. The idea that progress could be made if only the Bosnian Serbs would be dealt with forcefully, turned against UNPROFOR as a boomerang. Hundreds of UN soldiers had been taken hostage, making new air strikes fundamentally unthinkable. So for UNPROFOR it meant muddling through.

In this political vacuum both the British and the French governments were trying to find ways to give UNPROFOR more teeth. That had to be achieved by deploying a ‘forceful’ military unit (with artillery and attack helicopters) in Bosnia, that would have to be composed on combined British-French initiative. That way a corridor could be created from central-Bosnia to Sarajevo and it would become possible to send supplies to the eastern enclaves. Opinions still differed on how exactly to implement all this: Janvier estimated that using the so-called Rapid Reaction Force to open such corridors would not be feasible, because it would make UNPROFOR party to the conflict.¹⁹¹ However, opening up corridors to the Safe Areas was exactly what Paris and London wanted, and it was the silent wish in The Hague; Prime Minister Kok worded the objective of the Rapid Reaction Force as follows: ‘the question was how to continue in a responsible manner. The answer was: ‘take into account the interests of the people for whom you are there’. And of course in line with that: ‘whenever possible also take into account to safety and position of your own people’.¹⁹²

Characteristic of the relations was that both the French and the British units intended for the Rapid Reaction Force, were announced by the two governments without Janvier and Smith having been informed. Directly after the air strikes on Pale, the British Prime Minister Major decided to send reinforcements; a few hours later President Chirac announced that he was going to send even more troops than the British. There had been no previous consultation with the UN whatsoever.¹⁹³ This state of affairs was typical of what was going to happen to the Rapid Reaction Force.

¹⁸⁹ Interview F.H. van Kappen, 21/06/00.

¹⁹⁰ Interview F.H. van Kappen, 21/06/00.

¹⁹¹ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. SRSG’s meeting in Split, 09/06/95. Conf.

¹⁹² Interview W. Kok, 25/05/00.

¹⁹³ Ripley, *Deliberate Force*, p.130-4.

History of the formation of the Rapid Reaction Force

The idea for a 'forceful' unit like the Rapid Reaction Force did not entirely come out of thin air. The French had already been in favour of a more powerful role for UNPROFOR, as had for instance already appeared before the bombings at Pale from the plea by the French Chief of Defence Staff Lanxade at the conference of the Chiefs of Defence Staff in Soesterberg on 19 May.

The hostage crisis, that developed after the bombings, did give an impulse to set up the Rapid Reaction Force. It is not quite clear who took the initiative. France and the United Kingdom both claimed the idea, while in particular London had its reservations about the French intentions. The French focused on Sarajevo, because that's what they were responsible for. For the same reasons the British concentrated on Gorazde, where they had troops.

At least on 28 May it were the French who gave the further impetus to set up the Rapid Reaction Force, by submitting a Priorities Memorandum for further discussion in the Contact Group. What the French had in mind with the formation of the Rapid Reaction Force was that after the hostage crisis they wanted to realize reinforcement of UNPROFOR and reduction of their vulnerability. Some of the tasks the French aimed at for the new unit was opening up a corridor to Sarajevo, and sending supplies to the eastern enclaves. The latter also offered an attractive perspective for the Netherlands: it could reduce the problems of Dutchbat in Srebrenica. The French Memorandum did leave many questions open; for instance who was going to command the Rapid Reaction Force. It had already become clear that the United States and the Russian Federation wouldn't want to contribute. The Russians were suspicious of reinforcement of UNPROFOR, and they feared a pre-arranged deal by the Western countries.¹⁹⁴

On 29 May the Rapid Reaction Force was discussed at the highest political level between the United Kingdom and France. On this occasion, the British Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hurd, had his first meeting with his new French colleague, Hervé de Charette, successor of Juppé. De Charette presented proposals for opening up a corridor at Sarajevo, and for the composition of the Rapid Reaction Force that would have to arrange it. Hurd saw little difference between the French and British visions, and in a political sense he agreed with the French Memorandum. From a military point of view Hurd, just like the French, aimed at reducing the vulnerability and increasing the effectiveness of UNPROFOR. As yet no decision had been taken on the question whether the Rapid Reaction Force would be 'blue' or 'green'.

During that meeting Hurd also addressed the - in his opinion-insufficient political-military control of the military activities in the former Yugoslavia. He thought a tougher attitude was necessary to prevent a repetition of the hostage crisis. He criticized NATO Secretary-General Claes who should not act quickly enough, but mainly the fact that within the UN the Security Council and the Secretary-General kept passing each other the responsibility. However, Hurd didn't come up with any solutions; he only wanted to point out that better control was required. He recognized that such would not be possible through the Contact Group, of which the British government was part, because after all they could not take any military decisions. Hurd's criticism on the UN decision-making process had already been expressed earlier by the French; consequence was that the British and French preferably operated without UN interference.¹⁹⁵

Responses from other governments to the formation of the Rapid Reaction Force

Hurd also got backing for the British-French initiative from EU mediator Lord Owen. They also spoke each other on 29 May. Owen stated that the Rapid Reaction Force would give general Smith extra possibilities without having to resort to the use of air power. Owen criticized the use of air power as long as UNPROFOR was still in a vulnerable position: the hostages were in danger, and the toughness

¹⁹⁴ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Code Wijnaendts 172, 01/06/95, 01/06/95; Code Celer 222, 01/06/95.

¹⁹⁵ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01

and determination of the political and military leaders in Pale should not be underestimated. The VRS had had two years to think about possible actions against air strikes and taking hostages as part of their strategy. Owen declared himself in favour of redeployment and reinforcement of UNPROFOR. Apparently, he too had little confidence in the decision-making process of the UN. He applauded the option of more troops under independent command.

Hurd met with less enthusiasm among the smaller troop contributing nations, including the Netherlands. These countries had their own worries about the role of London and Paris (the Dutch worries about a French-British axis have already been discussed in section 8). The French-British initiative was broached during the meeting of the North Atlantic Council of NATO in Noordwijk on 30 May, but the worries couldn't be removed. For that reason there still was clumsy pressure (Owen) from Minister Van Mierlo to have the Netherlands join the Contact Group, an old Dutch wish. More in general Van Mierlo wanted the troop contributing nations to have a seat in the Contact Group, but his idea failed to gain approval.¹⁹⁶

Political discussion on the set-up of the Rapid Reaction Force

France and the United Kingdom followed their line of march towards formation of the Rapid Reaction Force. The next step was to get from idea to realization. For that purpose the French assembled the ministers of defence of the NATO and WEU countries that also contributed troops to UNPROFOR. That consultation was planned for 3 June in Paris.

During the preparations for this meeting it was clear that the British and French each had their own approach of the set-up of the Rapid Reaction Force. Delegations of public officials and experts had sounded out the ideas in the three participating countries. That revealed the differences in views between France and the United Kingdom. Although the participants agreed that the new unit should only have to be intended for emergency situations, it was not crystal-clear what that should mean.

According to the British the Rapid Reaction Force could not be used to fight a way to the enclave for the convoys. The French wanted to bring the unit under the French-dominated UN headquarters in Zagreb, but that met with political objections on the part of the British. In their opinion extra British troops should also be used to reinforce British units in Bosnia and for that reason they should come under the British-dominated headquarters in Sarajevo. The delegations did agree that the troops would have to operate within the existing mandate and force instructions, though these would have to be modified a little. The Dutch delegation thought that important too. The British want to limit the tasks to humanitarian and peacekeeping tasks and considered the Rapid Reaction Force as a backup unit that would act reactively to fill the gap between 'the gun on the ground' and 'the fighter plane in the air.' The French on the other hand, wanted to take a firmer stand. They wanted a multinational unit, equipped with armoured vehicles and guns, that could be deployed under a stretched mandate. It seemed that the French were thinking more in the line of a 'green' implementation of the Rapid Reaction Force and the British more of a 'blue' implementation. The British wanted to wear the blue helmet or beret, the French wanted to go no further than a UN badge.¹⁹⁷

In preparation of the summit in Paris of 3 June, the Netherlands also had to determine its policy. The matter caused discord during consultation in the Prime Minister's office 'het Torentje' on 2 June. Minister Van Mierlo of Foreign Affairs was absent from this consultation because he was abroad; he had civil servants represent him. Present at the Torentje were: Prime Minister Kok, Vice-Premier Dijkstal, Minister Voorhoeve, Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen, Council Adviser Merckelbach of General Affairs, and Substitute Director-General Political Affairs of Foreign Affairs Van Eenennaam.

¹⁹⁶ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

¹⁹⁷ NIOD, Coll. Kreemers. Fax 'To the Minister and delegation members for the ministerial meeting on the situation in the former Yugoslavia on 3 June 1995 in Paris', from Lt Gen Schouten, kol. R. van Dam, F.J.J. Princen. Added to the fax were reports on 'Bijeenkomst van de delegaties van FR, VK, VS en NL', 01/06/95 and 'Bijeenkomst experts', 02/06/95.

Voorhoeve declared himself in favour of the more careful British line, also because that fitted in better with the UN framework, something the Netherlands thought rather important. The French line of more forceful action mainly appealed to Foreign Affairs, even though that was purely for political reasons.¹⁹⁸ This difference of opinion between Defence and Foreign Affairs caused discussion.

On behalf of Foreign Affairs, Van Eenennaam opposed Voorhoeve, who in view of the differences of opinion between the United Kingdom and France, had advocated support for the British position. For London it was important that the Rapid Reaction Force would not cross the line between peacekeeping and peace-enforcement and that there should not be two lines of command with different mandates. Van Eenennaam argued that recent statements by Clinton, Chirac and the Germans showed that they were inclining towards more forceful action. Directly opting for peace-enforcement seemed a bridge too far: for that reason, Foreign Affairs was trying to find a solution that would fit within the borders of the peacekeeping mandate, while maintaining the double key for applications for Close Air Support. There was wide support for sending additional troops to Bosnia, provided that it would be with a clear mandate, Van Eenennaam estimated. According to Van Eenennaam Prime Minister Kok also expected support in Parliament, if only the mandate would be clear.

Foreign Affairs thought it would be better if the Dutch government would back an approach that could be supported by both the British and the French. Van Eenennaam was afraid that the line advocated by Voorhoeve would lead to a too one-sided Dutch orientation on the British; this would lead to a politically undesirable *alleingang* of the French. Because the summit in Paris had been one of ministers of Defence rather than of ministers of Foreign Affairs, that could pose a problem, Van Eenennaam thought. The result could be that the Netherlands (Voorhoeve) would in fact agree with London, but still would have to take an interim position between London and Paris (what Foreign Affairs thought necessary). Van Eenennaam added that in practice maybe it would not be so bad, because the French-British problems about the organization of the Rapid Reaction Force would already largely have been solved.

So there really was a difference of visions between Foreign Affairs and Defence: Defence wanted to join the British, Foreign Affairs preferred a central position. Probably the reason was that in the absence of his minister, Van Eenennaam felt obliged to make a strong argument for the position of Foreign Affairs. The net result of all this seemed to be that in any case for the British there would be no reason to expect Voorhoeve to cause problems in Paris.

A clear choice for the French or British position was not made. Instead the ‘Torentje’ consultation led to a number of starting points that could be contributed on further consultation in Paris. The Netherlands was prepared to join the initiatives of other countries and was prepared to send additional units. A compromise was worded to the extent that the objective in Paris should be the closest possible integration of the British and French ideas, also to prevent the development of separate command structures, and to prevent the French from steering their own course. A decisive command structure under UN command was required, but the mandate should not cross the border with peace-enforcement. That linked up with the British line. The units of the Rapid Reaction Force would have to be deployed in such a manner that they could increase the safety of the scattered and lighter armed units, and could contribute to restoration of the Freedom of Movement for UNPROFOR, so it would again become possible to send supplies to the enclaves.¹⁹⁹ In the further consultation in preparation of the Paris summit, the Netherlands did not attempt to make a link between the Rapid Reaction Force and supplying the eastern enclaves.

¹⁹⁸ ABZ, DAV 999.241. Confidential Memorandum Plv DGPZ to M through DGPZ and S, 02/06/95; Bstas. Memo Ambtelijk BZ and Defence to MP Kok via Merckelbach, Vice MP Dijkstal, Minister Voorhoeve, CDS Gen vdBreemen [02/06/95]; DCBC, 529. Note for Chief of Defence Staff, 02/06/95, without number.

¹⁹⁹ ABZ, DAV 999.241. Confidential Memorandum Plv DGPZ to M through DGPZ and S, 02/06/95; Bstas. Memo Ambtelijk BZ and Defence to MP Kok via Merckelbach, Vice MP Dijkstal, Minister Voorhoeve, CDS Gen vdBreemen [02/06/95]; DCBC, 529. Note for Chief of Defence Staff, 02/06/95, without number; Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

Consultation in Paris on 3 June 1995

The Paris consultation on 3 June confirmed that the Rapid Reaction Force was intended to increase the effectiveness of UNPROFOR and to reduce the vulnerability of the UN troops. The most vulnerable units would have to be redeployed, but the presence of the UN troops in the eastern enclaves was not under discussion.

An important direct objective for the Netherlands was restoration of the Freedom of Movement to the eastern enclaves, and sending supplies to those. That was even stronger because the French Defence Minister, Millon, expected that the Rapid Reaction Force would be able to force a route to the eastern enclaves. That linked up with the unexpressed wishes of the Netherlands to start sending supplies to Srebrenica again. In Paris Voorhoeve emphasized the importance of the Rapid Reaction Force by offering two units of soldiers (a company of mortars 120 mm of the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps, and a unit with mortar detection radars of the Royal Netherlands Army).²⁰⁰

The nations contributing troops to UNPROFOR welcomed the results of the Paris consultation. Only the Islamic countries thought the results of the consultation did not go far enough because the Rapid Reaction Force was not going to get a mandate for peace-enforcement.²⁰¹

Further consultation followed after the Paris summit. On the one hand this took place between soldiers, in which, according to Voorhoeve, the Dutch were highly instrumental in bringing the French and British ideas under one heading;²⁰² on the other hand there was also political consultation in New York, between the UN secretariat and the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands. The company remained limited to these countries because their contributions linked up closely and the Dutch and British had already been exercising jointly for years.

In New York the arrangement was confirmed that the Rapid Reaction Force would be acting within the existing UNPROFOR mandate (so peacekeeping) and within the existing command chain (so in UN framework). Operational decisions were reserved for Force Commander Janvier. The units were going to operate in national uniform so, unlike the rest of UNPROFOR, without UN hats and without white-painted vehicles. The UN Rules of Engagement would remain in force, but these would be adapted to the heavier weapons that were to be deployed. Thirty days after the political agreement the units would have to be in the operating area. The Rapid Reaction Force numbered a total of some 13,500 men. The organization would consist of a multinational brigade: a task force A with British and Dutch units with a strength of 2500 men, and a task force B consisting of the 2000 men French units. In addition, the British supplied an airmobile brigade with a strength of 5000 men, and the French a standby brigade of some 4000 men.²⁰³ General Smith would have liked to include the Danish tanks that were still in Tuzla in the Rapid Reaction Force but Copenhagen did not want to hear about it. The Danes regarded the Rapid Reaction Force as an intervention by politicians of which the military had no idea what to do with it.²⁰⁴

The organization of the Rapid Reaction Force in relation to that of UNPROFOR

So it was decided to have the Rapid Reaction Force operate along the same decision-making lines as UNPROFOR had already done all that time. One of the questions raised concerned the actual position of personal representative of the UN Secretary-General, Akashi, in the command chain. This point remained unsolved; France and the United Kingdom took the position that his role would have to be

²⁰⁰ DCBC, 2409. Fax DCBC to Sitcen KL, 031703Z Jun95; *NRC Handelsblad*, 04/07/95, 'Reactiemacht Bosnia forceert toegang enclaves'.

²⁰¹ ABZ, DPV/ARA/02110. Code Biegman 499, 05/06/95.

²⁰² TK, 1999-200, 26 454, nr. 10, p. 203. Stenografisch verslag van de openbare hoorzitting van de Tijdelijke commissie uitzendingen, 31/05/00.

²⁰³ DCBC, 1879. Summary of Discussions, 07/06/95. Also refer to the joint letter of the ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence to Chairman of Parliament, 07/06/95, nr. D101/95/11086.

²⁰⁴ Interview C.H. Helso, 28/10/99.

reduced. The authority to use Close Air Support would have to be delegated to the UN commanders. The British and the French agreed not to politically broach this subject, but to leave it to Janvier and Smith.²⁰⁵ The French government also concluded that it was necessary to have the operational control over the Rapid Reaction Force without intervention of Akashi. Speculations were already heard on an imminent resignation of Akashi, in view of the wide dissatisfaction about his performance in New York. However, as regards Akashi's role, New York for the moment stuck to the line of 'constructive ambiguity'.

In The Hague there was also fear that the 'gains of Paris' would evaporate in the New York decision-making process. Indeed that mainly involved the position of Akashi. In The Hague it was said that the military decisions by Janvier and Smith regarding the Rapid Reaction Force would from then on reach Akashi in the form of recommendations that he would not be able to refuse.²⁰⁶

Problems on a possible deployment of the Rapid Reaction Force

From the beginning onwards, Force Commander Janvier put the possibilities of the Rapid Reaction Force into perspective. For starters, he feared that such reinforcements would be serving national interests. But above all, he viewed this construction as problematic with respect to the arrival of this Rapid Reaction Force. The two warring factions would be suspicious because it would mean a change in status quo that was not in their interest. Its deployment could easily make UNPROFOR party to the conflict, and Janvier did not like that idea.²⁰⁷ That way the Rapid Reaction Force could end up in the same morass as UNPROFOR.

Janvier's estimate seemed correct; the warring factions looked upon the Rapid Reaction Force from self-interest. The Bosnian UN ambassador Sacirbey for instance feared that the objective of the Rapid Reaction Force would gradually become more modest, especially after the British Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hurd, had explained to him that the unit could not be used to enforce corridors to the eastern enclaves and to protect the Safe Areas. For that matter, that was also something Voorhoeve had already told Sacirbey after the end of the conference in Paris on 3 June. That was because Sacirbey had already asked then whether the Rapid Reaction Force was also intended for Srebrenica, as he would have liked, but the answer was that such was not the case.²⁰⁸ After Hurd's statement, the British Minister of Defence, Rifkind, also said that the Rapid Reaction Force was not intended to fight itself a way past the checkpoints. The Rapid Reaction Force could be used to shoot back if convoys were fired at and to prevent vehicles and equipment from being stolen. For the sake of clarity London informed UNPROFOR Commander Smith that the Rapid Reaction Force would have to play it by the rules for peacekeeping, had to observe the Rules of Engagement of UNPROFOR, and had to act with the consent of the parties.²⁰⁹ That made it clear to the Bosnian Muslims that the Rapid Reaction Force would not be able to force a corridor to Sarajevo and that they would be acting within the existing mandate; they expressed their disappointment on this.²¹⁰ Also, in later days the Bosnian attitude remained ambiguous because, as the Bosnian UN ambassador Sacirbey put it, the mandate was ambiguous. The positive thing about its formation was that a more active mode of operation of UNPROFOR was made possible, but that contributed little to a solution as long as UNPROFOR remained part of the problem instead of the solution, Sacirbey said.²¹¹

²⁰⁵ ABZ, DPV/ARA/02090. Code Biegman 509, 07/06/95.

²⁰⁶ DCBC. Code Schaper 521, 13/06/95.

²⁰⁷ Confidential information (158).

²⁰⁸ Interview K.J.R. Klompenhouwer, 20/01/00.

²⁰⁹ DAB. Memo DAB to the Minister, Report of the conversation between Minister of Defence, dr. ir J.J.C. Voorhoeve, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mr M. Sacirbey, 13 June 1995, 14/06/95, nr. D95/306; Confidential information; NIOD, Coll. Nicolai. Diary Nicolai, 16/06/95.

²¹⁰ DCBC, 2821. Code Van Mierlo 73, 06/06/95.

²¹¹ ABZ, DPV/ARA/02090. Code Biegman 520, 09/06/95.

The assessment at UNPROFOR was that on the other hand the VRS would see the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force as new evidence of support to the Bosnian Muslims, with the consequence that it would only hamper a solution of the hostage crisis and restoration of the Freedom of Movement and make the Bosnian Serbs even more stubborn. Possible intervention by the Rapid Reaction Force to protect the population in the enclaves could only increase the frustration of the Bosnian Serbs on the status of the Safe Areas and their failed demilitarization, and make them aware of the fact that the Security Council resolutions were mainly directed against them. Conversely, the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force could tempt the Bosnian Muslims to extend their military activities. For deployment of the Rapid Reaction Force the UN, just like in the case of UNPROFOR, strongly depended on the Bosnian government, which could mean a certain influence on the development.²¹²

In practice the reaction of the Bosnian Serbs to the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force was not too bad. They were not too worried about its arrival and seemed to want to wait and see what the effects would be once it had landed. The greatest worry was that the Rapid Reaction Force would be used to deliver aid. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Republika Srpska, Buha, also said that the unit would sooner contribute to ‘Vietnamization’ of Bosnia than to peace, but that the Bosnian Serbs were not going to attack it.²¹³

General Smith in Sarajevo, just like Janvier in Zagreb, had his reservations about the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force. He also expressed those: ‘tell me what I have to do and give me the means to do it. Also tell me what the purpose is of all those reinforcements I get without asking for them. Do you want to become party to the conflict or don’t you? Do you want the Bosnian Serbs to regard you as ally of the Bosnian government or don’t you?’ According to chief of staff Nicolai in Sarajevo, Smith tried to get answers to these questions in order to force political decisions.²¹⁴ Smith also did not want the Rapid Reaction Force to become an instrument that would unwillingly involve UNPROFOR in peace-enforcement. Smith once more emphasized in a directive that UNPROFOR remained a peaceforce that would only use force in self-defence.²¹⁵

Just like Smith, Janvier wanted that a clear and feasible mission would be worded for the Rapid Reaction Force and that the composition would be geared to that.²¹⁶ Similar notes could be heard in the staff of the Rapid Reaction Force in formation itself. First the tasks should be determined, then it should be determined what units were required. Now it seemed as if the sequence had been reversed.²¹⁷

Janvier assumed that the impartiality of the UN could and should be maintained. Moreover, he wanted the Rapid Reaction Force to be completely self-supporting and not to rely on logistic support from the UN. In addition, Janvier wanted to use the Rapid Reaction Force mainly to protect the Freedom of Movement for UNPROFOR to make a new start with delivering humanitarian aid and supplies to the enclaves. Once a route by a road had been opened, the Rapid Reaction Force could be used to forcefully maintain the new Freedom of Movement, Janvier thought. However, Janvier thought it impossible to open up and keep open routes to the enclaves.²¹⁸ That was in line with the political arrangements that had been made on the use of the Rapid Reaction Force, but by now the question became realistic what in practice would be the added value of the Rapid Reaction Force.

²¹² NIOD, Coll. Theunens. Interoffice Memorandum G2 to COS, 02/06/95, ‘some Thoughts on the Warring Factions’ Response to UNPROFOR ‘Reinforced’ Peacekeeping.

²¹³ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 119, File BHC Weekly Sitreps, 17/06/95 – 21/09/95. UNPROFOR HQ, Weekly Situation Report, No. 122, 5-11 June 1995; UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 88041, File 4-10, Background notes to SRSG, John Almstrom to SRSG, 18/06/95.

²¹⁴ DCBC, 2405. Fax DCBC to BuZa/DAV and PVVN, 121724ZJun95 with added note Bgen Nicolai to CDS and BLS, ‘Toelichting op Strategisch Concept Comd UNPROFOR’ of 06/06/95.

²¹⁵ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87304, File 3300-6, Vol 5, 01/06/95 – 15/09/95. Commander HQ UNPROFOR Directive 3/95, 29/06/95.

²¹⁶ Bstas. Note CDS to the Minister and the Staatssecretaris, 06/06/95, No. S/95/061/2330. Janvier also considered his headquarters insufficiently equipped to take operational command of the Rapid Reaction Force.

²¹⁷ Ripley, *Deliberate Force*, p.131.

²¹⁸ DCBC, 1878. Force Commanders Intent on the Employment of the QRF, [07/06/95].

Janvier was afraid that expectations about the Rapid Reaction Force would be too high. The unit was not capable of opening up corridors and could only win time to break through the deadlock in the peace process. In addition, Janvier wanted the Security Council to make his mandate simpler and clearer. If that was not going to happen, he only saw expensive UN resources being used up which would cause further confusion among the warring factions without bringing a peaceful solution any nearer. Janvier also wondered whether he could deploy the Rapid Reaction Force in Croatia, while the establishing countries mainly aimed at deployment in Bosnia. Finally Janvier preferred the unit to operate under his command rather than that of UNPROFOR Commander Smith;²¹⁹ Janvier apparently thought the risk not unrealistic that Smith would use the Rapid Reaction Force for adventures that Janvier considered undesirable.

In any case it was clear that the Rapid Reaction Force could not mean an alternative for a political solution to the problems. It seemed further away than ever. Talks between the American negotiator Frasure and Milosevic on the recognition of Bosnia failed, because Milosevic wanted to keep his options open for constitutional arrangements between Belgrade and Pale, and because in exchange for recognition of Bosnia, Milosevic insisted on alleviation of the sanctions (discussed further in section 15).

Milosevic seemed to accept the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force because he thought its tasks could not be more than protecting UN convoys and soldiers. Moreover, it could help freezing the front lines, which could contribute to realizing the strategic objectives of Belgrade.²²⁰

Formation of the Rapid Reaction Force: consequences in Washington, Brussels, New York

The American Congress steered its own course regarding Bosnia. That had appeared for instance from the pressure exerted by Congress to get the arms embargo for Bosnia lifted. The Rapid Reaction Force also got its own place in the discussions on Capitol Hill. 'UN-bashing' once more appeared a popular activity there: during a hearing of the American Congress it appeared that many members considered the UN mission in Bosnia a failure. The mood in Congress, particularly among the Republicans, really was a spoke in the wheel of the formation process of the Rapid Reaction Force. Though the Americans would still not supply ground forces, their involvement in the Security Council was vital. Then there still was Clinton's promise that American ground forces would be deployed if UNPROFOR was to be withdrawn. In a reaction to the frustrations in Congress, Secretary for Defence Perry asked attention for the fact that the number of civil casualties had decreased considerably since the deployment of UNPROFOR (according to Perry from over 100,000 in 1992, through about 12,000 in 1993 and 3000 in 1994, to less than a thousand so far in 1995) but to no avail. In the eyes of Congress solidarity with the European allies should not go beyond helping them on an evacuation of UNPROFOR. If the deployment of the Rapid Reaction Force would not lead to successes, Perry saw that moment come near.²²¹ That also seemed the reason why Perry wanted to see the Rapid Reaction Force deployed as soon as possible: he had to make it credible before Congress that the Rapid Reaction Force was useful.²²²

NATO was not displeased with the formation of the Rapid Reaction Force, because that way the UN would have their own capacity to evacuate isolated UN units. That allowed NATO to concentrate on a complete withdrawal plan for UNPROFOR.²²³ The suggestion that with the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force the withdrawal plan (OPLAN 40104) was no longer necessary, was mainly thought up by the Americans and, Van Mierlo stated, had to be refuted. American assistance on

²¹⁹CRST. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 12/06/95, No. UNPF-HQ Z-967.

²²⁰ ABZ, DDI-DAV/00246. Code Engels 68, 07/06/95.

²²¹ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05243. Code Jacobovits 378, 08/06/95; DCBC, 2811. Code Veenendaal NAVO 870, 08/06/95, Conf.

²²² UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 88041, File 4-10, Background notes to SRSG, John Almstrom to SRSG, 18/06/95.

²²³ DCBC, 1877. Code Veenendaal NAVO 854, 06/06/95.

evacuation of UNPROFOR or parts of it remained important.²²⁴ The British vision also was that setting up the Rapid Reaction Force did not mean preparation for withdrawal, even though the British did not exclude withdrawal from the Safe Areas if it was no longer possible to carry out meaningful tasks there.²²⁵

In New York the attention focused on a new Security Council resolution. Not because the UNPROFOR mandate had to be changed, but because the ceiling permitted for the strength of UNPROFOR would be exceeded by well over ten thousand men. The question who was going to pay the Rapid Reaction Force also remained unanswered. New York hoped that the governments involved would pay the costs, but these took the position that this was in addition to UNPROFOR, so the funding had to be arranged through UN channels.²²⁶ As a result of that, and because the required definition of the task of the Rapid Reaction Force, the realization of the resolution was an arduous process.

Prior to the meeting of the Security Council where the new resolution was going to be discussed, Boutros-Ghali pointed out to the Security Council that reinforcement of UNPROFOR should not lead to the idea that UNPROFOR would be able to put a stop to the war in Bosnia. UNPROFOR could only create the conditions for a political settlement. For that reason Boutros-Ghali considered it vital to ensure that the formation of the Rapid Reaction Force would be accompanied by new initiatives and a decisive attempt to revitalize the peace process. The governments of the countries contributing troops to the Rapid Reaction Force agreed to that.²²⁷

The Security Council resolution regarding the formation of the Rapid Reaction Force was registered under number 998. The Netherlands was co-introducer. The resolution stated that a military solution to the conflict was impossible, called for a new cease-fire and negotiations, and asked the Bosnian Serbs to accept the Contact Group plan as starting point for those.

The resolution did not find receptive ground among the warring factions. The Bosnian Muslims did not want to hear about an appeal for a cease-fire: though, the purpose of the solution was to approve the formation of the Rapid Reaction Force, at the same time all existing tasks within the original peacekeeping mandate were maintained. Akashi sent Karadzic a letter to inform him that the Rapid Reaction Force was going to operate under the existing Rules of Engagement and furthermore that the Rapid Reaction Force 'will not in any way change the essential peace-keeping nature of the UNPROFOR mission'.²²⁸ Akashi's letter leaked out which promptly caused an American accusation of appeasement. UN representative Albright called the contents and timing of the letter 'highly inappropriate', because it gave the idea that the Rapid Reaction Force would be more of the same.²²⁹ The French also disassociated themselves from Akashi's letter. On the contrary, it had been the French intention that the Rapid Reaction Force would be acting more forcefully,²³⁰ but the French had lost control over it.

Because of this vague mission of the Rapid Reaction Force American Congress also started to interfere again. The Congressmen wondered whether funding the mission was worthwhile.²³¹ After all, the Americans were paying 31% of the costs of the peacekeeping operations. Another factor was that

²²⁴ DCBC, 1398. Code Van Mierlo 237, 13/06/95.

²²⁵ ABZ, DPV/ARA/02090. Code Biegman 551, 20/06/95.

²²⁶ ABZ, DPV/ARA/02090. Biegman 509, 07/06/95.

²²⁷ ABZ, DPV/ARA/02090. Fax PNVN to DPV/PZ, 8 [9] June 1995, No. nyv-3683 with letter Boutros-Boutros-Ghali to Detlev Graf zu Rantzau, President of the Security Council, 09/06/95. Also refer to Security Council, S/1995/470, 09/06/95.

²²⁸ Collection NIOD (7), 09/07/99 Annex 1, Letter SRSG to Radovan Karadzic, 19/06/95. Also refer to NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 19/06/95, No. Z-1022

²²⁹ UNGE, UNPROFOR. UNPROFOR HQ, Office of Civil Affairs, Weekly Situation Report, No. 120, 19-25 June 1995.

²³⁰ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Code Wijnaendts 208, 23/06/95, 23/06/95.

²³¹ ABZ, DPV/ARA/02090. Code Jacobovits 385, 13/06/95.

in Bosnia there were no Americans on the ground, but some 20,000 Americans did play a role in the various other operations in the former Yugoslavia. However, those costs were not paid by the UN.²³²

American uncertainty about the question who was going to pay the costs of the Rapid Reaction Force even prevented the resolution from being put to the vote in the UN Security Council.²³³ Congress maintained objections, because the Rapid Reaction Force would be more of same. The resolution also had to make clear in stronger words that the protection of the Safe Areas would be continued; the Americans still considered that highly necessary. Akashi's statement that UNPROFOR, also with the Rapid Reaction Force, would exclusively be engaged in peacekeeping had not really been appreciated in Washington.²³⁴ The intended nationally paid forceful military force seemed to be degenerating into a UN force with a less clear assignment. The Rapid Reaction Force should have a renewed deterrence concept, the Americans thought. It was exactly the assignment that was important to the American Congress to be able to judge the Rapid Reaction Force and its funding. Within Congress there was considerable mistrust as regards the UN, more in particular against Boutros-Ghali and Akashi. UN ambassador Albright summarized the American position with a clear statement that was characteristic of her: 'the more Akashi, the less money'.²³⁵

The American resistance mainly came from the Republican leaders in the Senate, Dole and Gingrich. But President Clinton also considered the mission of the Rapid Reaction Force 'watered down'. It seemed it was going to become part of the inefficient UN system; a watered-down version of the original objective of Rapid Reaction Force that also was a thorn in the flesh of others.

The Islamic countries objected to a passage in the draft resolution on the necessity of demilitarization of the Safe Areas; in previous resolutions regarding the UNPROFOR mission this demilitarization had already been included in 1993, but it had never happened. In an attempt to help the Bosnian Muslims the Islamic countries now emphasized that the tasks of the Rapid Reaction Force should also include protection of the Muslim population in the Safe Areas.²³⁶ The Germans held the British responsible for this watering down because, unlike the French (and the Germans), they had not wanted to go beyond maintaining the status quo.²³⁷

Clinton's objections appeared to be removed because the French President Chirac, visiting Washington, seemed to convince Clinton that the Rapid Reaction Force really could make a difference.²³⁸ The question was however, whether Chirac had really convinced Clinton of the usefulness of the Rapid Reaction Force; the ideas of the American government would have differed little from those of Gingrich and Dole, so Washington could conveniently hide behind Congress.²³⁹

In Washington, Chirac also entered into discussion with the Republican leaders in the Senate, Dole and Gingrich. They would have preferred that the Rapid Reaction Force would operate under NATO umbrella, that the UN peacekeeping mission was reconsidered, and that the United States had made it clear to the European Union that the Americans were not on the side of the Bosnian Serbs. Chirac argued that it was also about protecting soldiers, and that Congress should not withhold its political support. Gingrich did appear sensitive to that, and he was prepared to accept an American vote in favour of the resolution, but he would not accept funding it.²⁴⁰ Subsequently, Chirac thought he could conclude that the Americans would accept the resolution. However, that was not the case; Albright did not receive instructions from Washington to that effect.²⁴¹

²³² ABZ, Embassy Washington. Code Jacobovits 408, 20/06/95.

²³³ ABZ, DDI-DAV/00246. Memorandum Plv DEU to e.g. S, DGPZ, 14/06/95, no. DEU-481/95.

²³⁴ ABZ, DPV/ARA/02090. Code Jacobovitz 393, 15/06/95.

²³⁵ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05243. Codes Van Walsum 242 and Biegan 548, 20 and 19/06/95.

²³⁶ DCBC, 556. Code Schaper 521, 13/06/95.

²³⁷ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Code Jacobovits 403, 17/06/95.

²³⁸ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Code Jacobovitz 396, 16/06/95.

²³⁹ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Code Schaper 539, 17/06/95.

²⁴⁰ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Code Jacobovitz 396, 16/06/95.

²⁴¹ ABZ, DEU/ARA 05278. Code Schaper 539, 17/06/95.

Not only had Chirac failed to convince Dole and Gingrich, they also tried to take the edge of the resolution by wanting to include that 'UNPROFOR officials that have to date crippled the UNPROFOR operation' would not have the right to veto the deployment of the Rapid Reaction Force. These Republican senators didn't want the Americans to accept any further financial and military obligations in connection with the Rapid Reaction Force and they didn't want the costs to be divided among the member states.²⁴² The resolution did not give in to the requirements of Dole and Gingrich that a civil UN official, namely Akashi, should not have the right to veto the deployment of air power.²⁴³ The financial problem still hadn't been solved either. In order to have more time to canvass Congress, the Americans were aiming at a postponement of the vote.²⁴⁴ In the background the Bosnian Muslims played in part in the problem of funding the Rapid Reaction Force: they tried to convince the Americans not pay for it, unless the unit was authorized to open up corridors.²⁴⁵ As a rule Washington made itself international spokesman of the Bosnian position,²⁴⁶ but this time the problems that Americans had with the UN in general and with funding the Rapid Reaction Force in particular, were greater than the sympathy for the Bosnian Muslims.

Eventually a solution could be found to still put the resolution to the vote. That happened by adding the phrase: 'the modalities of the financing to be determined later' to one of the operative paragraphs of the text of the resolution. Except the Americans, nobody was happy about this postponement. The British for instance saw it as the final blow to the peacekeeping operations if these operations would not be paid from membership fees but from voluntary contributions.²⁴⁷

On 16 June the Security Council finally accepted resolution 998. UNPROFOR was authorized to increase the strength by a maximum of 12,500 men. The Russian Federation and China abstained from voting.²⁴⁸

Also after adoption of the resolution the Americans still had questions about the Rapid Reaction Force. Could it also be deployed in Croatia? Would the French decide or did the UN decide when the French standby brigade that would remain in France could be deployed? Neither was there certainty about the American assistance with heavily armed armoured planes (in military terms: C-130 Gunships) and attack helicopters, as well as support in the field of intelligence.²⁴⁹ The Gunships could operate from basis outside Bosnia, but attack helicopters would have to be made available without American crews because the American Congress did not permit Americans to be stationed in Bosnia. For the same reason participation by an American intelligence unit in the staff of the Rapid Reaction Force was only possible if the Rapid Reaction Force would be stationed in Croatia.²⁵⁰ In any case this intelligence support would remain limited to photo material.²⁵¹

Further problems with the development of the Rapid Reaction Force

The United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands kept exerting pressure on the UN secretariat to present a budget in the usual manner to see to what extent the costs of the Rapid Reaction Force could be brought within the existing budget for UNPROFOR, or could be covered by voluntary

²⁴² ABZ, PVNY. Fax PVVN to DPV/PZ, DEU/OE and Amb Washington, 15/06/95, No. nyv-3624 with letter Newt Gingrich and Bob Dole to The President, 15/06/95.

²⁴³ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Code Jacobovits 403, 17/06/95.

²⁴⁴ DCBC, 2402. Code Jacobovits 393, 15/06/95.

²⁴⁵ CRST. Fax Philip Corwin to Akashi, 28/06/95, 'Meeting with Minister Muratovic'.

²⁴⁶ Interview Charles Redman, 27/06/01.

²⁴⁷ Confidential information (21).

²⁴⁸ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Letter of the Minister of Foreign Affairs to Chairman of Parliament, 21/06/95, no. DPV/PZ-1348/95.

²⁴⁹ DCBC no. 2195. Secure Fax Amb Washington to Ministry of Defence attn DAB and CDS and Ministry of Foreign Affairs attn DAV, 21/06/95, without number.

²⁵⁰ ABZ, Embassy Washington. Code Jacobovits 408, 20/06/95.

²⁵¹ Confidential information (20).

contributions that would have to be deposited in a trust fund. For the latter promises had been made by Japan, Germany, Canada and Italy during the meeting of the G-7 that was held from 15 to 17 June in Halifax, Canada.²⁵² However, that would mean partial absorption of the costs of the Rapid Reaction Force in the existing UN budget, and the Americans opposed that as well.²⁵³ The American attitudes met with strong criticism during the G-7 summit: the United States refused to send ground forces to Bosnia and now they also refused to pay for others who did want to do that. The British Minister of Defence, Rifkind, expressed the criticism as follows: ‘all that Senators and Congressmen have to decide is whether US dollars should be made available. Britain, France and the Netherlands, who provide UNPROFOR peacekeepers, have to decide whether it is worthwhile sending young men to Bosnia who may be killed and injured.’²⁵⁴

Also in the Netherlands the Rapid Reaction Force was reason for debate. On 8 June an overwhelming majority of the Permanent Commissions for Foreign Affairs and Defence of the Lower House had agreed with the intention to add 170 Dutch soldiers to the Rapid Reaction Force.²⁵⁵ However, general Couzy, Commander in Chief of the Royal Netherlands Army, expressed a different opinion. He criticized the way the UN were muddling through in the former Yugoslavia, and he did not agree with the British and French initiatives to reinforce UNPROFOR with this Rapid Reaction Force. He called it madness to send troops to protect other troops. Couzy also thought that hurt national feelings were not a proper basis for a well-considered policy.

Couzy’s statements – not only on this subject - caused quite some political commotion (see Chapter 4). After the parliamentary approval, the Netherlands started preparations to make the mortar company of the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps, a mortar-tracing radar group of the Royal Netherlands Army, and some staff officers ready for deployment in Bosnia. On 15 July the Rapid Reaction Force in Bosnia had to be ready for action. Because of the funding problems it was not possible for the Americans to send this equipment free of charge to the operating area on American ships in planes; therefore the Netherlands rented tonnage. The Americans did fly in the personnel.²⁵⁶

Indeed the American troubles about the funding of the Rapid Reaction Force did continue. The Republican leaders in Congress also opposed funding the costs of the Rapid Reaction Force if it came directly from the American defence budget.²⁵⁷ With that trick Clinton had hoped to remain friends with the troop contributing nations and at the same time to steer clear of the opposition by Congress. However, Gingrich and Dole opposed the use of contributions from current budgets, because that way Congress would be bypassed. They told President Clinton so in a new letter. As long as the Rapid Reaction Force could not make a meaningful contribution to the protection of the Safe Areas, strong resistance would remain among the Republicans. They also opposed giving Close Air Support to the Rapid Reaction Force, as long as it was not possible to deal with the Bosnian-Serb air defence. It was unacceptable that American personnel would be running risks because of political sensitivities of UN bureaucrats, which meant that Dole and Gingrich overlooked the fact that this was rather a matter of an inadequate mandate for UNPROFOR. In the meantime the attitude towards UNPROFOR among the Republicans had not really improved: the moment had even come to completely stop paying for ‘a hopelessly incompetent’ UNPROFOR operation, they felt.²⁵⁸

The American discussion on the funding of the Rapid Reaction Force was complicated further by the negative reports in the American media on the force’s credibility. The tenor of the reports was:

²⁵² ABZ, DPV/ARA/02090. Code Biegman 558, 21/06/95.

²⁵³ ABZ, DPV/ARA/02090. Code Biegman 570, 28/06/95.

²⁵⁴ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 119, File BHC Weekly Sitreps, 17/06/95 – 21/09/95. UNPROFOR HQ, Weekly Situation Report, No. 122, 5-11 June 1995.

²⁵⁵ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Code Van Mierlo 158, 09/06/95.

²⁵⁶ BSG, CDS 95III. Note CDS to the Minister, 29/06/95, No. S/95/061/2697.

²⁵⁷ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Code Jacobovits 422, 30/06/95.

²⁵⁸ APVNY. Fax PZ/Washington to DEU, PV New York, 30/06/95, without number. Letter Dole/Gingrich re Rapid Reaction Force.

‘more expensive UNPROFOR inaction’, and that while the Rapid Reaction Force would not be able to open up corridors to starving Sarajevo and the enclaves without Mladic’s permission. In addition, the American media mentioned the demoralization in the US headquarters in Zagreb, because people there had to operate in an intellectual and diplomatic vacuum. The main criticism was directed at the Security Council. Also for that reason Bosnian government officials and Western diplomats saw the Rapid Reaction Force as a precursor of the withdrawal of UNPROFOR.²⁵⁹

For now that had undermined the threat of a more forceful course of action by UNPROFOR, which indeed greatly affected morale in Zagreb. The wish expressed by Boutros-Ghali to clarify and simplify the mandate was not reflected in Resolution 998 either and only confirmed the muddling-through idea. The Security Council emphasized the necessity of a ‘vigorous pursuit of a political settlement’ because there was no military solution, but at the same time the newly appointed negotiator Carl Bildt said: ‘there will not be a political solution, there is no political process’. These contradictory signals did affect the Zagreb headquarters. According to colonel De Jonge in Janvier’s staff, the mood there was gloomy, especially because of the continuing problems for UNPROFOR even apart from the Rapid Reaction Force.²⁶⁰

Janvier remained tormented by doubts about the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force. In a letter to general Smith, Janvier informed him that the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force would not improve the situation as long as there was no will to achieve changes on the political stage. If not within three to four weeks after the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force the political process had been revitalized, Janvier was pessimistic about the future. The arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force would at best create expectations and make the cries for forceful action get louder. No matter how frustrating the situation was, the soldiers would have to withstand those cries. Janvier always kept the safety of the troops in mind: what he wanted to prevent under any circumstances was that the Rapid Reaction Force would become an instrument to drag UNPROFOR from peacekeeping to peace-enforcement.²⁶¹

Rapid Reaction Force: too little, too late

Consequently, the formation of the Rapid Reaction Force took quite some doing, also after the political decision to set it up. An operational concept had to be created on the basis of a rather obscure definition of tasks. Moreover, the composition of a staff for the Rapid Reaction Force required extensive horse trading between the French and the British on the division of positions. Finally, the actual deployment of the Rapid Reaction Force was seriously hampered by sabotage from the Croatian and Bosnian authorities on landing in Split and moving to Bosnia.

For the political and military climate in June and early July the activities and discussion around the formation of the Rapid Reaction Force were relevant in a more general sense, but that had no noticeable influence on the situation in Srebrenica. A role in enforcing the highly necessary resupply of the eastern enclaves was not reserved for the Rapid Reaction Force. Because of all restrictions on the military possibilities to open up a corridor, there seemed to be little hope for the Netherlands on formation of the Rapid Reaction Force that taking part in it would also be to the advantage of Dutchbat in their scary stronghold.

Nevertheless the Rapid Reaction Force would be highly important late August 1995: the operation Deliberate Force would at last bring about a turn in the situation. Artillery and mortar units of the Rapid Reaction Force then played a valuable role in reply to the mortar grenade hit on the Markale market in Sarajevo. Artillery and mortars – unlike air power, directly available under all weather conditions and with less risk for unintended damage (in military terms: collateral damage) – fired 1500

²⁵⁹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 03/07/95, No. 2181; *Christian Science Monitor*, 03/07/95, David Rohde, ‘UNPROFOR’s New Bosnia Force May Depend On Serb OK’ and ‘Despondent UNPROFOR Staff Question Their Role’; *The Washington Post*, 01/07/95, John Pomfret, ‘West "Reaction Force" Rapidly Fading Away’.

²⁶⁰ CRST. Fax G3 Land Ops HQ UNPF to CDS and BLS in hands, 17/06/95.

²⁶¹ SMG/1004/6. Lieutenant-General Bernard Janvier to Lieutenant-General Sir Rupert Smith, 27/06/95.

grenades at the time. However, the Rapid Reaction Force came too late for the dramatic events of which Dutchbat would be witness: the Dutch contingent of the Rapid Reaction Force was going to leave for Bosnia exactly on 11 July of all days: the day of the fall of Srebrenica.²⁶²

14. The situation on the ground for UNPROFOR in June 1995

In the meantime the situation for UNPROFOR remained highly arduous. The Security Council had not responded to Boutros-Ghali's report in which he expressed his preference for withdrawal from the eastern enclaves. That as it were automatically left UNPROFOR to keep 'muddling through'.

The Bosnian Muslims kept relatively quiet during a few days after the air strikes, as UNPROFOR suspected in the hope that further ground or air actions would follow and UNPROFOR would do the job for the ABiH by curbing the fighting power of the VRS. However, the UN realized that this patience would soon be exhausted if there were a long-term stalemate and again it would appear that UNPROFOR did not have the power to act against the warring factions. That could lead to more pressure on UNPROFOR from the part of the Bosnian government, or because the ABiH could try to take advantage of this momentum by starting their own military action. In the meantime the VRS could focus on the enclaves: that could divert the attention that now went to Sarajevo. That had the additional advantage for the VRS to fight in a smaller, encircled area which was easier. Gorazde could be a first target for the VRS.²⁶³

Now that UNPROFOR had proceeded to use force with the air strikes, according to Smith the problem had developed that because of the use of air power it now seemed to be a matter of peace-enforcement, while the mandate on the ground remained unchanged peacekeeping. That could cause confusion, but a return to the situation before the air strikes was as good as impossible according to Smith. He wondered whether the UN was prepared to fight against the VRS and, if so, with what objective for UNPROFOR, within what political strategy, under whose command and with what troops and means? And if the UN were not prepared to fight, then what was the objective of UNPROFOR going to be? According to him, answers to these questions were decisive to what was going to happen. In anticipation of these replies, Smith assumed that the troop-contributing nations would be prepared to fight.²⁶⁴ What Smith actually wanted was, by way of experiment, to just enter into battle with the Bosnian Serbs. For instance, he would have liked to send out a convoy without asking permission from the Bosnian Serbs, as was the custom so far. As soon as the VRS was going to fire at it, he would want to strike back with prepared Close Air Support. However, nobody dared let him take the test. They had to stick to the (by now theoretical) concept that UNPROFOR was impartial.

Early June Smith arrived at a new estimate of the objectives of the warring factions. Objective of the VRS with regard to UNPROFOR was to neutralize it by regulating or denying resupply, in particular for fuel. That would affect UNPROFOR's power to such an extent that the safe Area concept would be emasculated, after which the VRS could freely attack the opponents.

From a military viewpoint the objective of the VRS was to keep exerting pressure on the enclaves to be able to reduce their size. The underlying objective was to release manpower for operations around Sarajevo, because to the VRS Sarajevo remained the centre of the activities. Yet Smith did not think the risk of offensive operations to take all of the eastern enclaves particularly great at that moment. Its political implications, the negative publicity and a lack of infantry made it unlikely, according to Smith. Rather, the VRS tactics seemed to aim at besieging the ABiH troops in the enclaves to exhaust them and force them to surrender.

²⁶² See also Ripley, *Operation Deliberate Force* and A.J.E. Wagemaker, 'Powerplay in Bosnia?', *Marineblad*, 106(1996)114-121.

²⁶³ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Fax Deyan Mihov, Acting D-SRSG/CAC BH Command Sarajevo to Yasushi Akashi and Michel Moussali, HCA Civil Affairs, HQ Zagreb, Situation Assessment 29/05 sent with Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 29/05/95, No. Z-889.

²⁶⁴ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Commander HQ UNPROFOR Directive 2/95, 29/05/95, UN Confi.

Smith was convinced that the VRS were counting on it that actions against the enclaves would not invoke a response from NATO. Therefore the VRS would continue shelling military targets within the enclaves. The ABiH in the enclaves were going to lose ground; the defenders would gradually run out of ammunition and would have to find refuge in more densely populated areas.

Conversely, Smith thought the Bosnian Muslims would do anything to get UNPROFOR, NATO and the international community on their side. Smith expected that the ABiH would be going to use UNPROFOR as a protective shield. The result would be that VRS could be shooting at UNPROFOR as a deterrence. That way the ABiH would try to drag UNPROFOR into the conflict. In this scenario the safety of the UN soldiers was not directly at risk, but casualties through crossfire were possible.²⁶⁵

The situation had not improved much when on 22 June 1995 Smith explained his military vision on the situation in Bosnia to the negotiators Stoltenberg and Bildt. Bildt was exploring the ground as newly appointed EU negotiator. Soon a division of tasks would develop between Bildt and Stoltenberg in which Bildt was handling Bosnia and Stoltenberg took care of Croatia. Bildt wanted to try and draw the Bosnian Serbs from their psychological shell without alienating the Bosnian government. Bildt told Smith that he realized that the clock was ticking and that the political and military situation was unfavourable.²⁶⁶

During his briefing to Bildt and Stoltenberg, Smith gave his vision of the near future of the conflict: Smith pointed out to Bildt that the time factor was against the Bosnian Serbs. According to Smith that was the reason why Mladic wanted peace soon; Mladic would benefit by a permanent ceasefire. A temporary ceasefire could only be to the advantage of the Bosnian Muslims, for they could arrange reinforcement. The ABiH's tactics were, according to Smith, to slowly nibble away small pieces of the territory held by the VRS. The ABiH aimed at small targets such as a single road and, locally, the occupation of elevated areas; being at a higher level than the enemy would give a military-tactical advantage. The ABiH attacked in various areas simultaneously to prevent the VRS from concentrating. It forced Mladic to move his troops with dilapidating buses and dwindling fuel supplies under cover of darkness. The VRS did maintain a considerable superiority in heavy weapons, but the ABiH began to operate reasonably effectively with small infantry units. In the long term the ABiH could be winning and even book successes at Sarajevo.

As far as Smith was concerned, UNPROFOR was in a crisis, he told the negotiators. For him now the point had gradually been reached of: 'either send your white vehicles home and let's have a real fight, or let's leave'. He confronted Bildt and Stoltenberg with the question whether they were prepared to use force in self-defence (for instance in the form of Close Air Support), and to accept the escalation of the conflict that it could entail. If escalation was not accepted, UNPROFOR had to leave, Smith said. According to Smith only in Zagreb the will still seemed to exist for 'muddling through'.²⁶⁷ In saying so, he underestimated that in an international framework, and so also at the UN in New York, muddling through still was the only feasible option with all its drawbacks.

The further policy of UNPROFOR according to Janvier

To his question whether the UN was prepared to fight, Smith did not get an answer from Janvier. In fact that answer was not relevant anymore, because Smith received the directive from Janvier that implementation of the mandate was subordinate to the safety of the UN personnel. Janvier informed Smith accordingly in his Personal directive, dated 29 May. Loss of lives only to defend positions had to be prevented, Janvier thought.

That way the Force Commander acknowledged in so many words that after the air strikes of 25 and 26 May the Bosnian Serbs had been able to change the situation in a political and military sense to

²⁶⁵ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Lt Gen R.A. Smith, Eastern Enclave Operations Assessment, 06/06/95, No. 8940.

²⁶⁶ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 24/1995/95, No. Z-1051.

²⁶⁷ Corwin, *Dubious Mandate*, p. 113-144.

their advantage. They would be determined, and they would continue to strike UNPROFOR at its weak points. The Bosnian Serbs were preparing for 'extremely intense and long-lasting crises'. They were taking measures to protect themselves against future air strikes and against military actions on the ground. In Janvier's analysis the centre for the VRS was at Sarajevo. This city was at stake, both from a military and a media viewpoint. The VRS were going to use the position in which the isolated UNPROFOR units found themselves, such as in the enclaves, and take those decisions they thought important. In that sense the Bosnian Serbs had a dual objective, according to Janvier.

According to Janvier, the main objective of the VRS was to neutralize UNPROFOR. The VRS wanted to prevent UNPROFOR from carrying out their tasks, in particular at the locations where UNPROFOR was between the parties, such as in the enclaves. The VRS was going to use 'every trick in the book' to tip the local balance of power in the advantage of the VRS.

The second objective then was to take those military targets that so far UNPROFOR had kept them away from. The VRS would want to keep the momentum and fully isolate Sarajevo and the enclaves. The risk of Bosnian provocations could only worsen the situation. The ABiH could attack the VRS to provoke Bosnian-Serb retaliation, in particular around Sarajevo. UNPROFOR could become involved, but then under dramatically adverse circumstances with so many hostages in Bosnian-Serb hands. That would cause a cycle that would eventually result in a call for a massive air strikes. As usual, the media would soon bring that to the attention of the general public.

Janvier's policy was aimed at saving lives of hostages, obtaining safety for the UNPROFOR troops, and putting a stop to the trend of taking hostages. He thought it of vital importance to reduce the vulnerability for hostage-takings. Under the current circumstances UNPROFOR was in fact no longer able to do what it originally was intended for: the escalation of the situation around Sarajevo was just too much for the military capabilities of UNPROFOR. Neither could UNPROFOR handle the imminent problems with sending food to the enclaves. Withdrawal by the warring factions from the Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones, and the violation of the Safe Area regime was an issue to be dealt with at a political level, not for UNPROFOR: they now had to make the safety of the UN troops their priority.²⁶⁸

Nevertheless, Janvier wanted to try and have UNPROFOR keep the initiative, without endangering the lives of his soldiers. He wanted to do that by simultaneously demonstrating that key positions would be held onto and, if necessary, defended. Smith was ordered to do everything to locally stabilize the situation without surrendering positions that could have a military importance for the warring factions. Janvier gave instructions to make preparations to leave the vulnerable OPs that were not essential for the task. Backup units had to be formed to be able to act in emergency situations. If they were fired at, they had to respond, while observing the principle of proportionality. At local level Smith had to initiate negotiations to realize termination of the actions against UNPROFOR and the release of the hostages.²⁶⁹

Smith's response to Janvier's directive was that to him it was a matter of principle not to negotiate with the Bosnian Serbs as long as not all hostages had been released and their equipment had been returned. Smith also wanted to deal only very cautiously with the Bosnian government to prevent UNPROFOR from being considered biased in favour of the Bosnian Muslims. Instructions from high up had to be given, otherwise Smith feared that UN personnel in the enclaves would be inclined to cooperate with the Bosnian Muslims.

In addition, Smith once more touched on the tender spot by concluding that there was no coherent strategy to establish links between matters such as: political measures to end the conflict; taking military measures to support that strategy; bringing about the release of the hostages; and thinking about the purpose of reinforcements for UNPROFOR. Such a strategy was not only required to solve the hostage crisis, but also to alleviate the humanitarian situation in Sarajevo and to get

²⁶⁸ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Force Commander to LtGen R. Smith Only, 29/05/95, File Ref: FC/95/0801, UN Confi.

²⁶⁹ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Force Commander to LtGen R. Smith Only, 29/05/95, File Ref: FC/95/0801, UN Confi.

supplies to the eastern enclaves. Smith wanted all these problems to be tackled within a political-military strategy to be determined.²⁷⁰ The problem was that indeed a political strategy was highly necessary to get UNPROFOR out of the morass, but that there was no such strategy.

And a morass it was, everybody in Zagreb realized. Consequently, the situation in Bosnia had its effect on the atmosphere at the UN headquarters in Zagreb. Colonel J.H. de Jonge, member of Janvier's staff, openly stated that the UN was at risk of being dragged along into a 'vicious Vietnam circle'. Whatever scenario was observed in the war of nerves with the Bosnian Serbs, the UN would lose in all events. Powerless and frustrated Zagreb waited for political instructions. De Jonge once more analysed the situation in which UNPROFOR found itself: UNPROFOR had lost its credibility and was in a political vacuum. The UN mission was built on quicksand and logical errors, he stated in an interview. Peacekeeping assumed that there was peace. The surrounded enclaves, including Srebrenica, were indefensible and not safe because UNPROFOR was not equipped to deter an attack or to strike back. The UN was a toothless army, pitted against the heavily armed VRS, and the UN was not capable of repaying in kind. The only option left was to use air power, but that had appeared a giant step on the escalation ladder.

De Jonge thought that there should be more understanding for the ideas and sensitivities of the Bosnian Serbs. In his capacity of Chief of Land Operations De Jonge tried to anticipate the moves of the warring factions, but he confessed to have been mistaken all the time: 'my way of thinking is not theirs. I don't understand them.' De Jonge saw the Bosnian Serbs as constrained and no longer prepared to compromise. Their behaviour was irrational and they were more bitter than ever before: the world had always been anti-Serb and they could never do any good. That had given the Bosnian Serbs the idea that they had nothing left to lose. On top of that, according to De Jonge, the Bosnian Muslims could get away with 'quite a lot' and the Bosnian Serbs were permitted 'hardly anything' on the battlefield. There was an unbalance that in some cases was unjust, encouraged by the continuous American support.²⁷¹

Minister Voorhoeve did not thank De Jonge for these revelations. It had irritated both him and Van Mierlo. Voorhoeve wanted criticism from the field to be expressed by superiors. Otherwise, critical reports in the media would cause too much confusion and unrest among friends and family of the deployed Dutch soldiers.²⁷²

Deadlock between New York and Zagreb

In the meantime, a different note was heard from New York. So far Boutros-Ghali had advanced very cautiously and he and Janvier had agreed that the first priority had to be the safety of the UN personnel. Mid-June, when the hostage crisis was coming to an end, Undersecretary Kofi Annan took the initiative from New York to put the pressure on again. It was remarkable that Annan asked Akashi to send on the contents of this message to Smith, something that happened much more often later. That was the start of a centre shift from Zagreb to Sarajevo.

The bad mood in Zagreb had not been left unnoticed in New York. Kofi Annan wrote to Akashi: 'Here in New York, we are well aware of the extreme difficulties and the resulting stress that all UNPROFOR personnel in the theatre are operating under at the moment.' Annan admitted that 'the way ahead is somewhat unclear at this point', words that Zagreb equated with muddling through.

Annan believed that the time had come that UNPROFOR had to try to make more out of their mandate. A 'reconfiguration' was required: a new balance had to be found between Force Protection and the realization of the mandate. Annan said to be 'disturbed' by a statement from Akashi's spokesman that Akashi was waiting for directives from New York. Annan ensured Akashi that his

²⁷⁰ SMG 1004/3. Office of the Commander HQ UNPROFOR to HQ UNPF Zagreb attn SRSR, COS, FC, 'strategic Planning Issues', 02/06/95.

²⁷¹ Interview Frank Westerman; *NRC Handelsblad*, 30/05/95.

²⁷² *NRC Handelsblad*, 13/06/95.

judgement and decisions could count on the full support from New York, that he did not want to be in the way of the commanders in the field, and that in addition New York was 'always happy to respond to specific requests for guidance' Exactly that was the problem for Zagreb: New York did not always respond to such questions. In any case, waiting for Security Council resolutions in preparation made no sense, according to Annan, for those did not deal with operational details. That way it looked as if Akashi and Janvier were expecting New York to come up with clear guidelines, while New York was waiting for acts from Zagreb: that meant deadlock.

In between there were the media, who had recorded statements from UN officials that in practice UNPROFOR was not allowed to do anything without Bosnian-Serb approval. Annan said he found it awkward if UNPROFOR were to surrender to a mentality of isolation and to worrying mainly about the safety of the personnel, no matter how important. That also entailed risks; Somalia had taught that doing nothing with a view to the own safety was exactly what had provoked enemy action. Therefore, Kofi Annan considered it important to show willpower and to boost credibility to make room in the future for peacekeeping again. Giving in to a 'mentality of isolation' dictated by care for the personnel should not be allowed. Annan wondered what options Akashi saw to ensure humanitarian relief and resupply of UNPROFOR. On 9 June Pale said to have accepted it, and what did UNPROFOR do to subsequently enforce cooperation of local VRS commanders?²⁷³

Akashi came with an answer to Annan that was relatively defensive and mainly listed the problems for UNPROFOR. According to Akashi, UNPROFOR was still recovering from the consequences of the air strikes of 25 and 26 May, 'which dramatically highlighted the long standing contradictions and impracticabilities of the Safe Area mandate, and the consequences of an inability to escalate force in an essentially peace-keeping mission'. The media had portrayed UNPROFOR as passive and withdrawn ('unassertive'). That was caused by ambiguities in the UNPROFOR mandate and false hope. Akashi once more brought to mind that Boutros-Ghali had already mentioned that in his report to the Security Council. Akashi disputed this had caused a 'negative mentality' with UNPROFOR in the realization of the mandate. Yet the lack of Freedom of Movement, caused by the VRS as well as increasingly by the ABiH, had caused 'some frustration' among the troops.

What was needed according to Akashi was decisiveness, and avoiding the feeling of paralysis. However, the rest of the message showed little decisiveness, but rather the by now well-known cliches on the future of UNPROFOR and the risks of the mission. Restoration of the Freedom of Movement did not suffice according to Akashi; a clear definition of the presence of UNPROFOR in the Safe Areas, just like demilitarization of those was required. The warring factions had started a war and UNPROFOR found itself in the middle of a Bosnian offensive around Sarajevo, resulting in manipulation, hostilities and mistrust from the side of both parties. Under these circumstances UNPROFOR had to be prepared for escalation. It was important to understand thoroughly what this could mean, because it required that the escalation could be continued, resulting in further hostilities. That required support of the Security Council and the troop contributing nations. The arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force and a reduction of the vulnerability of UNPROFOR offered new, though limited possibilities.²⁷⁴ It has already been discussed that Janvier warned for too high expectations of this Rapid Reaction Force, because it entailed the risk that UNPROFOR would become party to the conflict.

UNPROFOR in June 1995: muddling through

Akashi's gloom expressed towards Annan was shared by Janvier. Late June 1995 the latter informed Annan that in fact the situation for UNPROFOR in the Bosnian theatre had only worsened even further. UNPROFOR kept being troubled by restrictions on their Freedom of Movement. In Janvier's opinion their purpose remained unchanged: the Bosnian Serbs wanted to punish UNPROFOR, to

²⁷³ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 15/06/95, No. 1981.

²⁷⁴ Confidential information (62).

prove that the Republika Srpska was a nation, to impose sanctions upon UNPROFOR in order to alleviate the sanctions imposed on themselves, to control and punish the population in the enclaves, and to try and lay their hands on a larger part of the humanitarian relief. The position of the Bosnian Muslims did not make it any easier either, Janvier analysed: the Bosnian government imposed restrictions to check the UNPROFOR actions, and to be able to carry out military operations without UNPROFOR having any idea. All these restrictions limited the relief flows. The population of Bihac, Sarajevo and the three eastern enclaves received insufficient relief to be able to survive in the long run. This undermined the credibility of UNPROFOR and UNHCR.

Janvier saw that the realization of the UNPROFOR mandate in the eastern enclaves, including Srebrenica, was increasingly put at risk. Without Freedom of Movement, UNPROFOR was held hostage in the enclaves: 'by the Bosnian Serbs (outside) and by the Bosnian Muslims (inside)'. Insufficient resupply made it impossible to man all observation posts of UNPROFOR. Patrols by vehicle had already become impossible due to lack of fuel. Patrols on foot could not see everything and these were vulnerable to enemy action. In Srebrenica and Zepa the UN units had to be considered 'semi-operational' due to lack of fuel and other means: already for two months nobody had been able to enter or leave the enclaves. It was unavoidable that this situation had an influence on the morale of the troops, because the soldiers were increasingly wondering what they were actually doing there when they were not able to do their job.²⁷⁵

By now there were lasting differences of opinion between Janvier and Smith regarding military matters. Since the meeting in Split where Akashi, Janvier and Smith discussed the situation in Bosnia (see section 5), the difference in thinking between Janvier and Smith was perfectly clear. The question whether it was possible to achieve a new status quo for the peacekeepers, and whether the Bosnian government and the VRS wanted a cease-fire, was answered by Janvier with 'yes' and Smith with 'no'. Smith expected high tension, increase of incidents and deterioration of the situation around the enclaves, without having the possibility to use air power.²⁷⁶

Smith wanted tougher action, while it seemed that Janvier did not take decisions so easily. As already stated above, the pattern seemed to be that Zagreb presented problems to New York, from where in many cases the answer came that solutions had to be found in Zagreb, thus closing the circle.

All this offered the individual countries space to take their own decisions. Examples of that were the French recapture of the Vrbanja bridge at Sarajevo, or the helicopter lift of French mortars to Sarajevo ordered by the French of which Smith only learned the next day. As consequence of the formation of the Rapid Reaction Force all kinds of planning teams arrived in the area, without much advance coordination. Smith in turn also surprised Janvier sometimes, for instance when he arranged with Janvier's British chief of staff and in consultation with London, landing a British artillery regiment in Split without Janvier knowing anything about it.²⁷⁷

Not many new impulses could be expected from Akashi. He took the position that until the situation had changed sufficiently, UNPROFOR had to be careful about defining new objectives or accepting risks. For now his objective was to arrange a more regular supply of humanitarian relief. Convoys started to reach the enclaves and Sarajevo again, even though not sufficient to cover the need. The idea of 'forcing convoys through', as Smith actually wanted, was an abomination to Akashi. The military power was lacking for it and, more importantly, it no longer concerned local VRS opposition but policy ordered from high up by the de Bosnian-Serb leaders. That made a fundamental difference to Akashi. Removing blockades with military means then unavoidably led to escalation and further hostilities. That required additional means, calculation, preparation and full support from the Security Council and the troop contributing nations.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ Confidential information (62).

²⁷⁶ NIOD, Coll. Nicolai. Diary Nicolai, 10/06/95.

²⁷⁷ CRST. Fax G3 Land Ops HQ UNPF to CDS and BLS in hands, 17/06/95.

²⁷⁸ Confidential Information (62)

Akashi looked to New York, but New York did not bother about the convoy problems. The Security Council had spoken on 16 June, and with Resolution 998 had ordered the warring factions to: 'fully respect the safety of UNPROFOR personnel, and others engaged in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and ensure their complete freedom of movement.' On 23 June the Security Council, on the initiative of the Russian Federation and after lengthy consultation within the Contact Group, once more condemned parties for the restrictions in the Freedom of Movement they imposed upon UNPROFOR and for hindering humanitarian relief. This time the Council also condemned the 'Bosnian Government Forces' for obstructing UNPROFOR in Visoko, Gorazde, Gorni Vakuf and Kladanj, and for laying mines in front of the compound of the Canadian UN unit in Visoko.²⁷⁹ The Bosnian authorities had carried out a revenge action against the Canadians there; they claimed that reports from the battalion 'provided sensitive operational data to the Bosnian Serbs'. The ABiH threatened to shell the Canadians if they dared to venture outside their base. Consequently, observation posts (OPs) had to be withdrawn.²⁸⁰ Under these circumstances, Akashi's task was not really enviable. Neither the Bosnian Muslims nor the Bosnian Serbs cared much about the political resolutions of the Security Council and that placed all problems with steering UNPROFOR back on Akashi's plate.

Of course Smith's worries were undiminished as well, he said on 29 June: though the political process had been reactivated by Bildt's actions, Smith also noted that the ABiH were going to continue their offensive, and: 'we can expect the VRS to counter-attack at some stage'. Finally Smith wrote: 'I am particularly sensitive to the situation of the units in Sarajevo and the Eastern Enclaves who for no fault of their own are without clear direction'.²⁸¹

Janvier did share Smith's opinion that negotiations with a clear objective were required, and preferably at the highest level. That process of negotiations, that Janvier expected to start soon, had priority and should not be disturbed; another reason to refrain from new air power actions, Janvier thought. Akashi was busy designing a strategy for the negotiations; they had to lead to a wide political agreement. Janvier thought that he himself and Smith would soon become part of that process. Janvier was optimistic that the international community would reach a more coherent approach, with more consensus.

Janvier also reported to Smith that he was fully informed on the situation in the enclaves. His main priority was to get food to the troops. Smith was ordered to ensure resupply with the Bosnian Serbs, starting with Zepa. However, Janvier did not want compromises, but he wanted to make it clear to the Bosnian Serbs what their responsibilities were and what the consequences would be if they failed to cooperate. He did not indicate what those consequences would be. It did have to become clear to the Bosnian Serbs that UNPROFOR was determined to get supplies to the troops. Smith had to continue with plans to airlift supplies to the enclaves, for the event the Bosnian Serbs kept frustrating resupply by road.²⁸² The problems of airlifting supplies to the enclaves is discussed in detail in the Appendix 'Airlifting supplies'.

Just like the UN, NATO was worried about the safety of the UN troops and their vulnerability. NATO was prepared to increase the safety and to reduce the vulnerability. That was the result of the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in ministerial session (that is with the Ministers of Defence and of Foreign Affairs of the NATO countries) in Noordwijk on 30 May. Secretary-General Claes informed his UN counterpart Boutros-Ghali that the NATO countries would strongly support a lasting presence of the UN in the former Yugoslavia.²⁸³ Despite this statement, well before the air strikes of 25 and 26

²⁷⁹ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Fax PV New York to Ministry of BZ, 23/06/95, reference nyv-3449.

²⁸⁰ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 119, File BHC Weekly Sitreps 17/06/95 – 21/09/95. UNPROFOR HQ, Office of Civil Affairs, Weekly Situation Report, No. 120, 19-25 June 1995.

²⁸¹ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Smith to FC, Commander HQ Unprofor Directive 3/95, 29/06/95.

²⁸² NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Letter Lieutenant-General Bernard Janvier [to General Smith], 02/06/95.

²⁸³ UNNY,DPKO, UNPF. Letter Willy Claes to Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 31/05/95, No. attached to Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 26/2/31, No. 1831.

May talks had started between NATO and UN to plan a possible withdrawal of UNPROFOR from Bosnia.²⁸⁴ So that scenario was also considered a possibility.

15. At the political front in Bosnia after the air strikes: the situation in June 1995

Differences in political ideas between Mladic and Karadzic

The analysis in Zagreb was that discord existed in the bosom of the Bosnian-Serb leadership; in a general sense there would be little symbiosis between Karadzic and Mladic. From his political angle Karadzic seemed to want to hold onto his original maximalist course, while Mladic from his military perspective was steering a much more pragmatic course and seemed to be more prepared to compromise on territorial matters.²⁸⁵ However, for Western governments it was extremely difficult to map out the exact relations between Karadzic and Mladic, and between those two and Milosevic.²⁸⁶ As negotiator Lord Owen put it, there was in fact an 'anarchic situation' in Pale, on which foreigners and also Milosevic could hardly get a hold. Karadzic and his entourage should mistakenly have been seen as a genuine government.²⁸⁷

Relations between Karadzic and Mladic had already soured in April 1995. Mladic had complained to Karadzic about businessmen affiliated to Karadzic's political party, the SDS. According to Mladic they would benefit by the war, without providing the VRS with the (fuel) supplies to win the war. Conversely, Karadzic blamed Mladic for losing terrain, which caused a counterreproach to Karadzic that he had defined insufficiently feasible objectives for the war.

Karadzic and delegates in the Parliament of the Republika Srpska then accused Mladic of a coup against the political leaders of the Bosnian Serbs. Attempts were made to reorganize the General Staff of the VRS, making it subordinate to Karadzic's political party. From the start of the war the political leaders of the Republika Srpska should have tried in vain to convince the military leaders that they should coordinate their military actions with the politicians.²⁸⁸ However, these attempts failed.²⁸⁹

Mladic accused the political leaders of the Republika Srpska to be after financial gains, but as a professional soldier he said he had no ambitions to take over the political leadership. The Bosnian Muslims hoped this would lead to Karadzic's fall, but that was not near.²⁹⁰

The rows between Mladic and Karadzic were not very helpful in coordinating a military strategy between the High Command (Karadzic) and the General Staff of the Commander (Mladic). Moreover, they brought Mladic and Milosevic closer to each other, to find ways to realize the cease-fire and to arrange coordination of military plans in an attempt 'to clean up the map' while the Contact Group plan would have to be used as basis for further negotiations.²⁹¹

Already in July 1994 the Contact Group had drawn up a map of Bosnia and informed parties that they first had to accept this map before changes could be made in mutual consultation. However, the Bosnian Serbs had rejected the plan, which resulted in political and diplomatic isolation of Pale.

²⁸⁴ Confidential Information (63).

²⁸⁵ Confidential Collection (5). Fax Ravi Solanski UNHCR Zagreb to A. O'Connell UNHCR Geneva, 07/07/95. It is not stated who compiled the study and at what date it was completed.

²⁸⁶ Confidential Interview (52).

²⁸⁷ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

²⁸⁸ Interview Miroslav Toholj, 14/12/99.

²⁸⁹ Belgrade *Vecernje Novosti*, 18/04/95, p. 4; Belgrade *Nin*, 01/11/96, p. 19-22, LtCol Milovan Milutinovic, 'Loss of Supreme Command'; Podgorica *Monitor*, 21/04/95, p. 15, Vladimir Jovanovic, 'Coup Against Mladic', aangehaald in [US State Department, Draft] *Balkan Military History Project, Balkan Battle Fields: A Military History of the Yugoslav Conflict 1990-1995*, Book 3, p. 9-11.

²⁹⁰ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05243. Conversation M[Minister]/Bildt 26/6 [26/06/95] with additional remarks Bildt during dinner 26/6.

²⁹¹ [US State Department, Draft] *Balkan Military History Project, Balkan Battle Fields: A Military History of the Yugoslav Conflict 1990-1995*, Book 3, p. 9-11.

This isolation of Pale had not appeared very fruitful. The Bosnian Serbs kept refusing the map as a basis for negotiations, and Milosevic apparently had not been able or willing to exert sufficient pressure on the Bosnian Serbs to make them change their position. Pressure on the Bosnian Serbs, by imposing sanctions, only had an economic but no political effect and it was hardly possible to make the sanctions more severe.²⁹²

The pattern that one-twos were played between Mladic and Milosevic, without involving Karadzic, was unmistakable: these also contributed to the isolation of Pale. Milosevic for instance encouraged Mladic to state in public that he rather than Karadzic would carry on the negotiations that were going to lead to peace. If that was a bridge too far for Mladic, maybe as interim solution the Mixed Military Working Group could be brought back to life and Mladic could directly negotiate a settlement with his counterpart Delic under Smith's supervision, with the maps on the table. Akashi should not have to be involved, for then the political leaders in Pale would also have to join, Milosevic suggested. According to Milosevic, in elections Mladic would even stand an excellent chance to succeed Karadzic as political leader of the Bosnian Serbs. However, Mladic did not like such ideas very much; he took the position of an a-politic soldier. The position of Mladic in the VRS was very strong, and he knew that the political leaders in Pale could not ignore him, if they wanted to reach a political agreement. Rumours of a coup in Pale were unfounded, but these could be an indication of a decreased willingness to fight within the VRS, which could go even further if they were to sustain more losses.²⁹³ Rumours of a dash for political power by Mladic continued, also because Mladic visited Milosevic, without involving the political leaders in Pale.²⁹⁴ In turn Karadzic had asked Milosevic for help to remove Mladic from his position, but he had refused.

In the monthly for the VRS, Mladic called for unity among the Bosnian Serbs, and asked them to prepare for a long war. He criticized the political establishment (Karadzic c.s.); they would want to impose solutions that were not in line with the interests of the Serb people. Mladic also wrote that there had been political machinations around his person, but he said that there had never been a military coup against the political leaders. Finally he said not to harbour any political ambitions.

Karadzic on the other hand complained that for a year nobody had spoken to the Bosnian Serbs. If the negotiations were not resumed, that would lead to a totally unnecessary war caused by frustration and impatience. Therefore, in June Karadzic wanted the new EU negotiator, Bildt, to come to Pale as soon as possible. His arrival would be the first step on the road to normalization of the relations with UNPROFOR. As soon as Bildt arrived, humanitarian relief to the Muslim population could be resumed, the shootings by the VRS would come to an end, and an international peace conference could start. Karadzic also included a proposal to that effect in a letter to president Clinton. He called for a 'Camp David style conference' and promised that in a short time all current problems could be solved and peace could be signed. Clinton was the only person who could save the world from a bloody war on the verge of breaking out, according to Karadzic. With the usual historic analogies, Karadzic stated that the Serbs had lived in Bosnia for ages, but that they couldn't do that under a Muslim regime and Islamic law. Izetbegovic would lead the way to Islamic fundamentalism, Karadzic thought. If that was what the Bosnian Muslims wanted, then that was fine with Karadzic, but the Bosnian Serbs did not want that.²⁹⁵ Such a cry for help made it clear how much Karadzic was up to his neck in trouble; it was a sign that the political isolation of Pale was successful. Consequently, Bildt did not respond to the invitation.

The major tensions between Karadzic and Mladic were covered up for the outside world as far as possible,²⁹⁶ but on 4 August they no longer managed to do that. Then the discord came out into the

²⁹² ABZ, DEU/ARA/05243. Memorandum Plv DEU to M through DGPZ and S, 21/06/95, no. DEU-494/95.

²⁹³ Confidential information.

²⁹⁴ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

²⁹⁵ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Fax Philip Corwin to Akashi, 02/07/95.

²⁹⁶ ABZ, DDI-DAV/00246. Incoming message PA/Belgrade to DEU, 12/06/95, No. Belgrade-264.

open: Karadzic dismissed Mladic, at a moment that things were looking bad for the Republika Srpska due to the Croatian advance. However, after a week Karadzic had to back down and reinstate Mladic.²⁹⁷

Differences in political ideas between Karadžić and Milošević

There was no political dialogue with the Bosnian Serbs, they were in an isolated situation. The question was how despite all that a dialogue with Pale could be started again. Milošević had stated to want to play a part in it; negotiator Lord Owen urged to make use of that. However, late May 1995 Minister Van Mierlo wondered why they should negotiate with Milošević; his influence was on the wane, Van Mierlo estimated. The British did not agree with that: nobody knew whether Milošević was a good or a bad card, but he was a card with which they could and should play. 'After all, over the past month, a split had developed between Belgrade and Pale, and that should be considered a success'. However, Van Mierlo stuck to his original position: one should not place too much trust in Milošević.²⁹⁸ London was proved right in so far that indeed the relations between Milošević and Karadzic could get even worse; they worsened mid-June 1995 and would be 'close to zero'.²⁹⁹

EU negotiator Bildt noted friction between Karadzic and Milošević, but according to him there wasn't a deep gap between Pale and Belgrade; Milošević was only cleverly playing off Karadzic so he could butter his bread on both sides.³⁰⁰ According to him Milošević did take some delight from making negative remarks about the leaders in Pale. They would not want to negotiate seriously, Karadzic was said to lie, to refuse to respect agreements, and to break every promise he made. These qualifications were not without some self-interest on the part of Milošević; Milošević wanted to make it clear that *he* was the one to be trusted and that *he* was the one who could force Pale to accept matters, according to Bildt.³⁰¹ A different observer, the American negotiator Redman, thought that the influence of Milošević on Karadzic should not be overestimated either, according to the reasoning that the one who adopts a reasonable attitude has little influence on the one who is determined not to act reasonable: Milošević indeed presented himself as someone who had an influence on the negotiating process, and with whom a deal could be made. He would be prepared to draw lines on the map and to observe the resulting arrangements, which eventually he would indeed do in Dayton. The Bosnian Serbs under the leadership of Karadzic did not want all those arrangements, but were only hoping to increase their territory.³⁰²

Otherwise the differences in vision between Karadzic and Milošević were not only caused by principles about the question whether a political arrangement should be striven after; for instance, Milošević blamed Karadzic for his interest in Sarajevo, which according to Milošević would be personal and selfish. Milošević had tried offering Karadzic the suburbs Vogosca and Ilijas in exchange for offering the Posavina corridor to the Bosnian Muslims. The Assembly of the Republika Srpska would accept such a proposal, Milošević thought. Karadzic should have known this was the case, and exactly for that reason he had always kept territorial discussions general.³⁰³ Milošević also revealed that he was listening in to Karadzic's telephone conversations; on that basis he concluded that Karadzic only used the Krajina as small change to Mladic for exchanging areas in Bosnia: Karadzic knew that in a military-strategic sense Mladic set greater store by Western Bosnia and Krajina, Karadzic himself considered Easter Bosnia more important because otherwise association with Serbia would never be possible.

Milošević also discussed this separation in the leadership in Pale with Akashi and he said to be highly critical of Karadzic and Parliament chairman Krajisnik. As long as those two were there, no

²⁹⁷ Bildt, *Peace Journey*, p. 82.

²⁹⁸ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

²⁹⁹ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05243. Code Biegman 518, 09/06/95.

³⁰⁰ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05243. Coreu Vie 248, 19/06/95.

³⁰¹ Bildt, *Peace Journey*, p. 45.

³⁰² Interview Charles Redman, 25/06/01.

³⁰³ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

solution was possible. According to Akashi's assessment Mladic was the only ally of Milosevic in Pale.³⁰⁴

In an attempt to get the Bosnian Serbs out of their isolation and to involve them again in the negotiating process, at a certain point the Russians also visited Pale. They tried to convince Karadzic to accept the Contact Group plan.³⁰⁵ However, the Russian proposals met with resistance from both Karadzic and Milosevic. Karadzic refused to accept a plan that would divide Bosnia into two almost equal parts and although just like Karadzic Milosevic wanted the sanctions imposed against Yugoslavia to be lifted,³⁰⁶ unlike Karadzic he was prepared to make that subordinate to acceptance of the Contact Group plans. However, the expectations – for instance among the Americans - were that Milosevic would not directly succeed in getting Karadzic back at the negotiating table; Milosevic would also consider Karadzic a rival rather than a partner.³⁰⁷

The Bosnian Serbs indeed felt more and more isolated, because after their rejection of the Contract Group plan, the attention of the international community shifted towards Milosevic. That already was the case before the bombings of Pale took place. The hostage crisis further increased Milosevic's role because he was seen as the man who could achieve a satisfactory solution. At the same time the international community wanted Milosevic to recognize Bosnia as a state. That would mean a major blow to the Bosnian Serbs, because it would destroy the dream of a Great Serbia that many in the Bosnian-Serb regime in Pale still had.³⁰⁸ In turn that would increase the isolation of Karadzic and his people; Milosevic seemed to realize that such a Great Serbia was not feasible, at least not in the near future.

The Bosnian Muslims had high hopes of the split they saw between Milosevic and Karadzic. Milosevic had already ordered withdrawal of Serb officers and soldiers from Bosnia, as the Bosnian Muslims had noticed, as a result of which twenty VRS tanks and several rocket launchers were left idle along the side of the road. The ABiH was certain that Karadzic would consider this treason to the Serb cause, getting Pale into panic and doing irrational things, like large-scale attacks and attacks on civilian targets. Recognition of Bosnia by Milosevic could follow within a few days, they thought. However, in fact that would still take quite some time.³⁰⁹

Recognition of Bosnia by Milosevic?

Karadzic' plans were upset by the creation of the American-sponsored Muslim-Croat Federation early 1994. That would seriously hinder the future ties between the various groups of Serbs. Inclusion of the Serb-proclaimed republic in the Krajina, the Republika Srpska Krajina, in the Croatian economy would be improved by it, while that of the Serb-proclaimed republic in Bosnia, the Republika Srpska, would become dependent on the Bosnian economy.³¹⁰

Karadzic' ideal was to have all Serbs live together in one republic. That was received well in the self-proclaimed Serb republics in Croatia and Bosnia. The Republika Srpska and the Republika Srpska Krajina were trying to find support with each other in an attempt to realize a 'United Serb Republic'. However, in practice there was little cooperation between the two entities. And, more importantly: from Belgrade no support for this idea was received. Milosevic wanted the two Republikas not to go

³⁰⁴ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi aan Annan, 10/05/95, No. Z-759.

³⁰⁵ ABZ, DDI-DAV/00246. Code Engels 76, 23/06/95.

³⁰⁶ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 119, File BHC Weekly Sitreps 95. UNPROFOR HQ, Weekly Situation Report, No. 122, 5-11 June 1995.

³⁰⁷ DS. Zendbrief PV NAVO/PA aan Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken /DAV en Ministerie van Defensie/DAB, DS, 20/06/95, No. 118667.

³⁰⁸ DS. Zendbrief PV NAVO/PA aan Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken/DAV en Ministerie van Defensie/DAB, DS, 20/06/95, No. 118667.

³⁰⁹ ICTY (IT-98-33) D 51/a. ABiH 28e Division Command to Commander 280 IBLB personally, 22 May 1995, No. 01-47/95, Military Secret.

³¹⁰ ICTY (IT 98-33) OTP 425/a. Karadzic, Directive No. 7, 08/03/95, No. 2/2-11.

beyond a basic decision and to postpone practical realization to a later date. Most Bosnian-Serb members of Parliament would not be prepared to provoke Milosevic regarding this subject. The Serb Republic did seem to make haste when they decided that the unification of the Serbs should be proclaimed on 28 June 1995, the day of the commemoration of the battle of Kosovo in 1389 that the Serbs lost and the start of the century-long Turkish rule.³¹¹ However, that did not happen; instead Karadzic' fear for inclusion of the Republika Srpska in Bosnia and inclusion of the Republika Srpska Krajina in Croatia was more or less proved justified.

Milosevic would also have wanted to agree to recognition of Bosnia, in exchange for lifting the sanctions. This step, Milosevic would have estimated, was necessary to end Karadzic' Great-Serb aspirations and 'to keep him under control as 'loose cannon'. Still a consequence could be that Karadzic and the VRS would try to provoke NATO air strikes in order to force Milosevic to render military support to the Republika Srpska. The subsequent intention would be to put Milosevic in the awkward position that he would have to leave fellow-Serbs in the lurch.³¹² Consequently, Karadzic was disappointed that the response to the air strikes was not that military support was asked from Serbia, but only that hostages were taken. Karadzic accused his rivals Milosevic and Mladic that they had caused the hostage crisis between them. Karadzic would even have gone as far as giving orders to release the hostages in order to still get military support from Serbia, but Belgrade would have prevented that. Milosevic would benefit by a release of the hostages in stages, because that way he could build up a strong negotiating position. Karadzic, who got increasingly isolated, then even tentatively suggested that he would still be prepared to accept the Contact Group plan, provided that a formula could be found that would save him loss of face. That would be possible by introducing minor modifications to the map and in giving the Republika Srpska more the character of an independent state.³¹³

However, in the meantime Milosevic followed his own agenda. He wanted to stick to the 49% against 51% area division as provided in the Contact Group plan. He did support the idea of exchanging territory, but in order not to get his fingers burned, he took the position that it had to be arranged in direct negotiations between Karadzic and Izetbegovic. Milosevic had agreed that Bosnia was going to exist of two entities: the Muslim-Croat Federation and the Republika Srpska, provided that both entities were economically viable. On that basis Milosevic stated to be prepared to recognize Bosnia. For Milosevic this promise also provided leverage to try and alleviate the sanctions under which the Yugoslavs were suffering. As argument for alleviation of the sanctions Milosevic also used the argument that the sanctions were counter-productive, because they weakened Belgrade's influence on the Bosnian Serbs and gave the Bosnian Muslims a motive to continue fighting in the expectation that Serbia would collapse.³¹⁴

At the same time there was a military stalemate in Bosnia as a result of which the confrontation line hardly changed any more. About mid-June the ABiH started an offensive around Sarajevo. That did not yield much for the Bosnian Muslims, while mainly the population in Sarajevo and in the enclaves suffered heavily because the resupply was cut off. It invoked the question in the European capitals how useful a continued political isolation of Pale was.³¹⁵

³¹¹ MID/KL, MID/KL, Intsum 114/95, 161200Z Jun 95; MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation 29/95, completed 211400B Jun 1995, Confi; UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, Weekly Situation Report, 20/1995/95, No. Z-1031.

³¹² Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/95.

³¹³ ABZ, DDI-DAV/00246. Code Engels 76, 23/06/95.

³¹⁴ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05288. Rome Coreu 298, 14/06/95.

³¹⁵ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05243. Memorandum Plv DEU to M through DGPZ and S, 21/06/95, no. DEU-494/95.

New initiatives for a political arrangement

In June Carl Bildt became European joint chairman (with Stoltenberg) of the International Conference on the former Yugoslavia. He took over the tasks from Lord Owen. When he took office, the question became topical again in the European capitals whether direct contacts with Karadzic had to be developed again. Acceptance of the Contact Group plan was no longer considered a fruitful condition before this was possible again. The French president Chirac had said, after consultation with the European government leaders, that Bildt's task was to make contact with all political and military powers in Bosnia,³¹⁶ so including Karadzic. However, the Americans objected to the idea that Bildt would have direct talks with Karadzic; on the contrary, they wanted to maintain his isolation.³¹⁷ That way the deadlock remained for the time being.

The government leaders of the European Union who were gathered in Cannes on 26 and 27 June, in a declaration issued by the EU demanded free access to the enclaves and Sarajevo and warned the parties not to hinder the freedom of movement of UNPROFOR and humanitarian organizations. Karadzic ignored the EU call for a cease-fire with the argument that the ABiH had only used such agreements to reinforce themselves.³¹⁸ In Cannes the European Council also defined the negotiating mandate for Carl Bildt as EU negotiator. Bildt was given five tasks, the first of which was to end the siege of Sarajevo and to gain access to the eastern enclaves. This task was given a higher priority than resuming negotiations on the peace plan at hand. Reaching a moratorium on military operations had the lowest priority.³¹⁹ However, according to Wijnaendts, the Dutch ambassador in Paris, Bildt would have little illusions about the success of his mission and did not believe that he would succeed in realizing a political solution.³²⁰

The only real development in the political field in June in Bosnia was that mid-June the Bosnian Serbs released the last hostages, though without the stolen equipment, including twelve French armoured vehicles.³²¹ That had ended the hostage crisis as such, but the political deadlock continued. Boutros-Ghali proposed to organize a conference with all parties involved, remarkably enough including the Bosnian Serbs. Bosnian vice-president Ejup Ganic rejected the idea; he wanted to stick to the peace plan of the Contact Group. Conversely, Alexa Buha, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republika Srpska, considered negotiations on that plan unacceptable.³²²

There was little progress either in lifting the arms embargo against the Bosnian Muslims: on 9 June the American government informed the Bosnian Prime Minister Siladjic that they would not lift it unilaterally. Siladjic then accused the Americans of setting their sail to the failing policy of the European countries.³²³

16. The strategy of the Bosnian Muslims in the fighting

So far in this Chapter a lot of attention has been paid to the role the Bosnian Serbs played in frustrating the UNPROFOR mandate. Clearly the army of the Bosnian Serbs, the VRS, constituted a major problem for UNPROFOR, because this VRS gradually started to see and treat UNPROFOR as their opponent. The position of the army of the Bosnian Muslims, the ABiH, was materially different. The

³¹⁶ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05243. Code Wijnaendts 186, 12/06/96.

³¹⁷ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Codes Jacobovits 393 and 403, 15 and 16/06/95.

³¹⁸ MID/KL. MID/KL, Intsum 122/95, 281200Z Jun 95.

³¹⁹ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05242. Statement by European Union and Statement by the President of the Republic on behalf of the European Council, 27/06/95, no. SN211/95, part B and SN 204/2/95.

³²⁰ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05243. Code Wijnaendts 210, 28/06/95.

³²¹ Minister Hasan Muratovic said that the French had let fifty tanks and APCs get into the hands of the Bosnian Serbs as 'delivery deal'. (CRST. Fax Philip Corwin to Y. Akashi, 1/07/95).

³²² MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation 28/95, completed 141400B Jun 1995, Confi.

³²³ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 119, File BHC Weekly Sitreps 95. UNPROFOR HQ, Weekly Situation Report, No. 122, 5-11 June 1995.

ABiH did not really see UNPROFOR as their enemy, but increasingly expected UNPROFOR to stand up for the Bosnian Muslims as the ‘underdog’ in the conflict. With that attitude the Bosnian Muslims – not only the ABiH soldiers but also the Bosnian government – considerably complicated the position of UNPROFOR. In the meantime the warring factions also had their own strategy in the struggle between them, in many cases over the heads of UNPROFOR. This section will discuss the strategy observed by the Bosnian Muslims.

In his memoirs, EU negotiator Lord Owen analyses the relation between the UN troops and the Bosnian Muslims. In his opinion that relation was characterized by the fact that the UN soldiers had trouble understanding that disorder and desalinization were an essential element of the strategy of the Bosnian Muslims. That was at odds with the military mind of the UN soldiers, used to working in a relatively well-ordered military organization, who had to find order in the midst of the Bosnian chaos. That impression must have been even stronger because in the conflict the Bosnian Serbs were the ones who had an interest in maintaining the status quo, while the Bosnian Muslims were the ones who refused to except the truce lines and tried to change them by violating agreements and provoking incidents. Consequently, the Bosnian Muslims were responsible for most of the truce violations and, in the opinion of Owen, they were the main threat to the Safe Areas: from there they could execute their operations, and even under protection of the UN. The Bosnian Muslims did take care not to provoke so far that they endangered the efforts of UNHCR.³²⁴

The UN headquarters in Zagreb had also concluded that the Bosnian Muslims continually misused the Safe Areas to maintain their Armed forces, while in some cases it looked as if they intended to provoke shelling by the Bosnian Serbs. Zagreb referred to the example of Tuzla, where the ABiH regularly fired artillery deployed in the city, which in turn provoked retaliation by the VRS, in many cases targeted at the headquarters of the 2nd ABiH Corps, located in the centre of the city. As far as the eastern enclaves were concerned, expectations of the UN headquarters were that the ABiH would continue their outbreak from the Safe Areas but that it was unlikely that this would happen at a large scale.³²⁵

The Bosnian government did not make it easier for UNPROFOR to get a good idea about the intentions of the Bosnian Muslims. Their political and military strategy were not always easy to follow, and sometimes of a varying nature. The Bosnian president, Izetbegovic, kept aloof in the negotiations; the discussions were between the other members of the Bosnian government. In addition to the impenetrability of the position of the Bosnian government, there also was the problem that people not always spoke with one mouth. For instance the Bosnian vice-president, Ganic, had wanted to use the month of April 1995 to come to a political arrangement of the conflict rather than just trying to achieve a continuation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. He thought that the international community had wasted the period of the Cessation of Hostilities, and had only resumed matters when it ended.³²⁶ However, other members of the Bosnian government pointed out that a quick solution of the conflict was exactly what the Bosnian Serbs wanted. Indeed the Bosnian Serbs had repeatedly expressed the wish to put a direct and final end to the war, followed by negotiations. The *communis opinio* in the Bosnian government was that it was a ‘public relations trap’, worded as follows by the Bosnian Prime Minister Siladjzic: ‘soon we will be called aggressors in our own country.’³²⁷

This Siladjzic, the Bosnian Prime Minister, wanted to find a way out of the deadlock in quite a different way than Vice-President Ganic. He interpreted the position of the Bosnian Muslims towards the Bosnian Serbs as follows: ‘we are not strong enough to win and they are not strong enough to defeat us’. His strategy was aimed at forcing the Bosnian Serbs to accept the Contact Group plan. Siladjzic had asked the Contact Group to propose to Milosevic to acknowledge Bosnia with a view of

³²⁴ Owen, *Odysssey*, p. 199-200.

³²⁵ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 81304, File 3300-6, Vol. 4, 1 Apr-12 Jul 95. Operations BH. Interoffice Memorandum Military Information Branch, G2 to COS, 18/03/95.

³²⁶ UNNY, DPKO,UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 20/03/95, No. UNPROFOR Z-441.

³²⁷ UNNY, DPKO,UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 21/04/95, No. UNPROFOR Z-637.

Milosevic acknowledging the Republika Srpska as a part of Bosnia; while on the contrary the ideal of the Bosnian Serbs was to affiliate with Serbia. In this way Siladjic tried to force a wedge between Milosevic and Karadzic. The next step would be that the Contact Group plan would have to be formally accepted by the Security Council. Accordingly, at the same time Siladjic wanted that the international community would give the Bosnian Muslims guarantees towards the Bosnian Serbs.³²⁸ If the Bosnian Serbs refused to accept the Contact Group plan, as they had done earlier, the Bosnian Muslims could blame the Bosnian Serbs for obstructing the peace process.

The position of the Bosnian government was even more complicated because they were not only speaking with several voices, but on top of that those voices expressed changing ideas. A clear example of that occurred late April as regards Siladjic, the Bosnian Prime Minister. He repeated what he said earlier, that the ABiH would not take the initiative for offensive military operations. However, at odds with that was that he added that a continuation of the cease-fire was not in the interest of the Bosnian government and, consequently, not in the interest of the Bosnian Muslims. Siladjic accused the Bosnian Serbs of wanting to maintain the status quo through a 'creeping legalization of what they took by genocide'. If the Bosnian Serbs wanted peace, they had to pay attention to the worries of the Bosnian government about the shellings by the VRS of the Safe Areas, Siladjic said. According to him the Bosnian Serbs were planning an intensification of the shellings of the Safe Areas. Another sign that the Bosnian Muslims wanted to take up arms again, was that Siladjic was breathing new life into the call to lift the arms embargo, suspended by the Bosnian President Izetbegovic in November 1994.

A major theme in the strategy of the Bosnian government, no matter with which voice they were speaking, was that pressure was exerted on UNPROFOR to resume the humanitarian relief to the enclaves. Prime Minister Siladjic and the minister without portfolio charged with UN matters, Muratovic, were trying to get an unambiguous statement by Akashi and Smith that UNPROFOR was prepared to adopt a forceful interpretation of the mandate, in particular with regard to humanitarian relief. For quite some time Akashi had already been under pressure from the these two Bosnians to adopt a more forceful attitude, or to clearly say that UNPROFOR was not prepared to do so. Akashi did not do either, because he wanted to keep operating carefully as well as to avoid underlining the failure of UNPROFOR. According to the Bosnian Muslims the mandate offered scope for more forceful action against the Bosnian Serbs for frustrating the convoys, and UNPROFOR could do more. Siladjic also tried to put pressure on general Smith to make him use force to ensure the delivery of humanitarian relief. However, Smith replied that he could not go beyond self-defence and did not willfully want to endanger convoys.³²⁹ As stated earlier, Smith really was prepared to try the experiment to send out a convoy without permission from the Bosnian Serbs, but telling that to Siladjic might give the latter false hope.

Akashi tried to derive a view on the Bosnian strategy from conversations with the Bosnian Muslims. That was successful to the extent that it became clear that the Bosnian Muslims wanted to benefit by the factor time and also by exerting international pressure to exploit their 'underdog' position. If UNPROFOR were to remain neutral, according to the mandate, in Akashi's analysis that would probably lead to a Bosnian campaign aimed at the UN, the United States, some European countries, and some Islamic countries to exert pressure to pursue a policy of punishing the Bosnian Serbs. Akashi thought it likely that the Bosnian government would want to use the factor time by considerably stepping up hostilities during the months after the end of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement: the ABiH would violate truce lines and provoke incidents to keep the VRS busy. In those circumstances the UN would come under great pressure to ensure the humanitarian relief to the enclaves and to deter a VRS attack. In the meantime the Bosnian government would be worrying about the expected continued refusal by the Bosnian Serbs to accept the Contact Group plan; after all, Karadzic had stated that he considered the West the enemy of the Bosnian Serbs and that he did not

³²⁸ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 25/03/95, No. UNPROFOR Z-473.

³²⁹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 21/04/95, No. UNPROFOR Z-637.

want to have anything to do with the Contact Group. That would also lead to international pressure to relieve the Bosnian position. More in general the Bosnian government would remain trying to brand the Bosnian Serbs as the aggressors responsible for continuation of the war. The Bosnian government would also want to revitalize the battle against the arms embargo with help from the allies and the Republicans in the American Congress, still according to Akashi.³³⁰

The presence of UNPROFOR in the eastern enclaves also became subject of discussion within the Bosnian government. The Bosnian Permanent Representative at the UN, Sacirbey, said that his government set great store by continued presence of UN troops in the Safe Areas. The Bosnian government should want to agree to a demilitarization of Sarajevo – a crucial city to the VRS and to the ABiH -, provided that it would not only apply for the areas under Bosnian control, but also for the areas under Serb control, and that UNPROFOR would be defending the area. The Bosnian government did not want demilitarization for Safe Areas such as Tuzla and Gorazde, because important military installations were located there.³³¹ Shortly after that Sacirbey, by then Bosnian Minister of Foreign Affairs, said that the Bosnian government could agree to withdrawal of UNPROFOR from the eastern enclaves, provided that it would be compensated by a UN commitment to the effect that they would use air power to deter the Bosnian Serbs, would protect the population and, if necessary, arrange food airdrops. This was possible, according to Sacirbey, because gradually the ABiH were capable of defending the enclaves on the ground. UNPROFOR could then concentrate on traditional peacekeeping in Central Bosnia, and keeping open a secure corridor to Sarajevo - an old wish of the Bosnian Muslims.³³² However, there were also reports that Sacirbey as minister had violently criticized Boutros-Ghali who had proposed withdrawal by UNPROFOR from the eastern enclaves. Sacirbey said he feared that the population would no longer be protected in that case. Vice-President Ganic also said that he would not allow UNPROFOR to leave the Safe Areas.³³³ Minister Muratovic in his turn said that the Bosnian government supported changes in the mandate. He preferred a smaller UNPROFOR with a limited mandate, that would offer options for NATO actions. With that Muratovic also seemed to suggest that UNPROFOR could leave the eastern enclaves. Lifting the arms embargo, or a larger UNPROFOR that did have the capacity to enforce peace, were other options for Muratovic.³³⁴

Lifting the arms embargo against the Bosnian Muslims, as discussed before, came on the agenda in June. That happened in connection with the loss of trust in UNPROFOR on the part of the Bosnian government. Then Minister Sacirbey of Foreign Affairs said that his government had to choose between fighting to lift the arms embargo or sticking to UNPROFOR, and Sacirbey now decided to choose the first option. He noted a continuous erosion in the implementation of the Security Council resolutions and he was harassing its chairman with letters expressing his worries. He wanted consultation to achieve implementation of relevant resolutions. In fact the only still had confidence in UNPROFOR if their mission was reinforced with heavy artillery through the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force to implement the Security Council resolutions, but Sacirbey was cynical about its arrival: 'the first time it uses force will be the last'. Only if the Rapid Reaction Force would succeed in gaining access to the enclaves and Sarajevo, its arrival was justified, said Sacirbey. Because the Bosnian government did not believe in it, according to Sacirbey they were close to the point when they would ask UNPROFOR to leave the country because it no longer could play a useful role.³³⁵ Minister

³³⁰ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 21/04/95, No. UNPROFOR Z-637.

³³¹ DCBC, 1413. Code Biegman 452, 19/05/95.

³³² ABZ, PVNY. Code Biegman 486, 01/06/95.

³³³ MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, no. 27/95, completed 081400B June 1995.

³³⁴ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 25/77, File 1.1.57, SNE 04/04/95 – 23/08/95. Weekly Report, 22/05/95, Code Cable Moussali (HCA Zagreb) to Info Officer NORLOGBAT, 25/05/95, No. SSN-1251. Also sent as Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 24/05/95, No. UNPF-HQ Z-855.

³³⁵ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, attn SRSG, FC, Smith, 11/06/95, No. 1949; NIOD Coll. Ashton. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 28/06/95, No. MSC-2119, with attached letter Muhamed Sacirbey to Detlev Graf zu Rantzau, President of the Security Council, 26 and 28/06/95.

Muratovic spread the same message, but with a tougher and more disdainful tone. He said that the Bosnian government disapproved of all relations with the Bosnian Serbs, including people in contact with them, as was the case with UNPROFOR at all levels at that moment.³³⁶ Muratovic also said that he no longer placed trust in Akashi en Janvier. Their decisions weakened the operations in Bosnia and raised the question what was the use of 20,000 troops in Bosnia. Only Smith still had his trust.³³⁷

Recommencement of the hostilities around Sarajevo

What UNPROFOR had been expecting for a long time, happened on 16 June: the battle of Sarajevo broke out again. That day the ABiH had started a major offensive from Sarajevo. The intention was to connect the city with the area of the Muslim-Croat Federation north and west of the city. From Central Bosnia the ABiH simultaneously attacked the VRS in the back. This outbreak attempt was in violation of the Security Council resolution 913 of 1994, that prohibited 'provocative action (...) in and around Safe Areas', but there was little UNPROFOR could do about it. Initially the offensive seemed to yield successes.³³⁸ The ABiH managed to block two supply routes of the VRS, which caused counter-attacks from the VRS.³³⁹

Akashi's staff in Zagreb analysed what the various objectives of the ABiH with this attack were. According to Akashi this time the objective of the offensive was not specifically military, but mainly political and diplomatic: it put pressure on the VRS, that already was experiencing political and military problems: in a political sense because they got isolated from the international community, in a military sense because they had to save their strength as long as the problems with their own supplying continued. The offensive would also put pressure on the regime in Belgrade, to make it clear that this regime was making common cause with the Bosnian Serbs. In addition, the offensive would boost the morale of the Muslim population, and generate support for the SDA, the leading nationalist party of President Izetbegovic. That way the ABiH wanted to show that they were doing what the international community failed to do. Moreover, the objective of the offensive was to gain international sympathy for the cause of the Bosnian Muslims: with the Bosnian Muslims as underdog much attention of the international press, more than to the ABiH attack itself, would go to the responses by the Bosnian Serbs, such as the shelling of Sarajevo. That in turn could contribute to pressure on the international community and to lifting the arms embargo. President Izetbegovic had already said: 'In our situation we have no obligation to look at what the world is thinking, the world that has done nothing for Sarajevo.' Reacting against the indifference of the international community was possible without the Bosnian Muslims paying a political price. Finally the offensive could demonstrate that the military alliance between Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats was fruitful. Indeed there seemed to be some coordination with the army of the Bosnian Croats in the form of artillery support around Kiseljak and in the Lasva valley. That forced the Bosnian Serbs to fight on several fronts at the same time, by which both the Bosnian Muslims and the Bosnian Croats benefited: it could increase the Croatian pressure on the Serbs in the Knin. In the meantime the UN were fully powerless.³⁴⁰

That way UNPROFOR had to face increasing problems, Akashi said. The offensive started by the ABiH around Sarajevo was only one of those. That offensive had resulted in an increasing use of heavy weapons on both sides. The Rapid Reaction Force could not respond adequately, because it could not be operational until 15 July. The VRS were not only firing at military targets in their offensive, but also at civil targets to make the ABiH pay a price for the shellings from the Safe Area Sarajevo. That had to do with the highly cynical strategy of the ABiH: civil targets are we used a shield

³³⁶ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan and Gharekhan, 16/06/95, No. UNPF Z-1006.

³³⁷ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. *Oslobodenje*, 30/06/95. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 30/06/95, No. UNPF Z-1081.

³³⁸ Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35 (1998), "Srebrenica Report", § 211-212.

³³⁹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 16/06/95, No. Z-1008, Restricted.

³⁴⁰ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Note Mark Baskin, POZ/CA to HAAU. 'The BH Offensive as one form of increasing polarization', 19/06/95.

for military targets. The ABiH had deployed the weapons they used to fire at the VRS near civilian targets, including the Sarajevo hospital.³⁴¹ If the VRS in their counteroffensive should hit the hospital, the Bosnian Muslims could exploit that in the media and keep on exerting pressure internationally.

The main players in the battle of the ABiH: Delic & Delic

The main executors in the strategy of the ABiH were army Commander Rasim Delic and the Commander of the so-called 2nd Corps of the ABiH in Tuzla, Sead Delic (not related to each other). The area of responsibility area of this 2nd Corps comprised all of north-eastern Bosnia, including Srebrenica and Zepa. Because they were the most important soldiers of the ABiH in this connection, their backgrounds and activities in the battle deserve attention here.

First of all it should be noted that in the political-strategic game they did not seem to play a very important role. The name of Rasim Delic as ABiH Commander is found in UN documents not nearly as often as that of his Bosnian-Serb counterpart Mladic; the name of Sead Delic is hardly mentioned at all. That can partly be explained by the fact that Delic and Delic were staying closer to the line of their political party, the SDA, while Mladic determined his course much more independently from Karadzic, thus offering him the opportunity to develop himself as leader of the Republika Srpska. However, this did not mean that Rasim and Sead Delic and Delic had no influence on the later events around Srebrenica: both had a role in giving orders for military outbreaks of the ABiH from the enclave, and as regards the position of Oric as military Commander in Srebrenica.

The few times that 2nd Corps Commander Sead Delic was mentioned in UN documents, it was not in a very positive sense: 'he was selected by the SDA for his dedication and loyalty to the party rather than for his tactical ability'.³⁴² Sead Delic was also known as a person who took all decisions by himself and did not consult his staff. He had attended the Military Academy where he had been trained as a scout. At the beginning of the war he was Major and Commander of a reconnaissance unit and as Bosnian Muslim he then still fought with the Yugoslav army, the JNA, in Croatia. Consequently, the Croats would consider him a war criminal, but he escaped from Croatia and returned to Bosnian Tuzla by way of Hungary and Serbia.³⁴³

Sead Delic came under attack due to a failed offensive carried out by the 2nd Corps in March 1995 against the Stolice communication tower in the Majevisa hills. The ABiH lost an estimated one thousand men, the hospital in Tuzla was temporarily closed to civilians. In front of Delic's headquarters demonstrations were held by soldiers who had returned from the battle.³⁴⁴ Despite the fact that Sead Delic was severely criticized for the large number of casualties in the attempts to conquer the Majevisa hills and the Ozren mountains, he was officially congratulated on his military successes. The latter was presented during a press conference that seemed to be intended to boost the image of his political party, the SDA.³⁴⁵

In the Yugoslav army Rasim Delic had been a contemporary of Mladic. It was said that with regard to quality Mladic was at the top of his year and Delic at the bottom. Nevertheless Rasim Delic had been one of the few Bosnian Muslims who had risen to the higher ranks within the JNA. He took part in the fighting of the JNA against Croatian Vukovar in 1991, but he left the JNA before the war broke out in Bosnia in 1992. That year he joined the SDA, the party of Izetbegovic. His star rose during the fighting against the army of the Bosnian Croats in 1993-1994. After his appointment as army

³⁴¹ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 29/06/95, No. UNPROFOR Z-1074.

³⁴² UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 25/77, File 1.1.57, SNE 04/04/95 – 23/08/95. Fax Biser to Aguilar, Report for week ending 14 April; 21/04/95.

³⁴³ Confidential interview (5).

³⁴⁴ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 25/77, File 1.1.57, SNE 04/04/95 – 23/08/95. Fax Biser to Aguilar, Report for week ending 14 April; 21/04 and 5/05/95.

³⁴⁵ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 25/77, File 1.1.57, SNE 04/04/95 – 23/08/95. Fax Biser to Corwin, 16/06/95, Report for week ending June 16, 1995.

Commander of the ABiH, within the more hard-line nationalist branch of the SDA Rasim Delic closely worked together with Vice-Presidents Ganic and the deputy Minister of Defence Hasan Cengic, architect of substantial arms deliveries to the Bosnian Muslims by the Islamic countries. Rasim Delic had a major role in transforming the ABiH from undisciplined territorial units and volunteers into a regular army.³⁴⁶

General Rose, Smith's predecessor, got the impression that ABiH Commander Rasim Delic did not like to negotiate personally with Mladic. He sometimes refused to do that and seemed to be physically afraid of Mladic. Rasim Delic knew that at a certain moment during a meeting he would have to give way to Mladic. Mladic managed to intimidate him. When Rasim Delic refused to meet Mladic in person, sometimes for Mladic that in turn was reason to refuse to talk with the ABiH, unless it was with Rasim Delic himself. In fact they would only have shaken hands once, after concluding the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in December 1994. According to Rose a difference between the highest army command of the ABiH and of the VRS that Delic would rarely stick to his words and that in that sense Mladic was the opposite of Rasim Delic. The latter opinion dates back to Rose's time as Commander of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command, that ended early 1995.

General Rose regarded Rasim Delic as 'not a bright officer'. According to Rose, to blame for that was the fact that Rasim Delic followed instructions from the politicians in Sarajevo, and they subsequently determined what happened to the ABiH. Rasim Delic himself was in favour of an all-out war; he considered this the only way to come to a just solution. In many cases he started an offensive that invariably seemed to end in defeat. For that reason Rose called Delic a bad strategist. Late 1994 he simultaneously launched offensives at five different places, at a moment when the ABiH lacked the firepower and logistics to conduct an effective offensive even on one front.³⁴⁷ Delic did not consider UNPROFOR a positive thing. Nevertheless the Americans tried to explain to Delic the importance of dealing with UNPROFOR in a correct manner; the international community would judge the Bosnian government on that basis.³⁴⁸

The staff of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command did not do much business with Rasim Delic. Contacts were usually with Enver Hadzijasovic, chief of staff of the ABiH. General Nicolai only once talked to Rasim Delic on the telephone. That was shortly after the air strikes had started in August during the operation 'Deliberate Force'. Then Rasim Delic personally called Nicolai to thank UNPROFOR that they were at last doing what they should do: bombing the Bosnian Serbs.³⁴⁹ At one of the few meetings general Smith had with general Rasim Delic, on 24 May 1995 in Zenica, Smith asked him about his vision of the war and his intentions. As regards the eastern enclaves Delic said to expect that the VRS would want to attack them to exert pressure on the ABiH. He emphasized that the ABiH troops in the enclave had orders to act only in self-defence. They had to defend themselves, they would do that and then blame the Bosnian Serbs for starting the war. The ABiH was a properly disciplined organization that always followed the orders from the political leaders, according to Delic.³⁵⁰ Earlier in this chapter we saw that usually the pattern was different: the ABiH started attacks from the enclaves, to which the VRS responded more than proportionally.

17. The strategy of the Bosnian Serbs in the fighting

Even before the air strikes at Pale on 25 and 26 May, the intelligence staff of UNPROFOR in Zagreb determined what the main objective of the VRS was: forcing the Bosnian Muslims to the negotiating table. The UN was the instrument to realize that. At the same time the Bosnian Serbs saw the UN as an obstacle to victory and they thought that the presence of the UN in Bosnia delayed its realization. Since

³⁴⁶ John B. Allcock, Marko Milivojevic and John J. Horton, eds., *Conflict in the former Yugoslavia: an encyclopedia*, 1998, p. 71.

³⁴⁷ Rose, *Fighting for Peace*, p. 33, 67, 71, 102, 103, 104, 141, 154, 198, 233.

³⁴⁸ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 30/05/95, No. Z-895.

³⁴⁹ Interview C.H. Nicolai, 11/06/99.

³⁵⁰ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Meeting Gen Smith / Gen Delic 24/05/95, attached to Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 25/05/95, No. Z-861.

the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had imposed the embargo against the Bosnian Serbs in August 1994, the factor time had become ever more important and pressing for the VRS. Yet the advantages of the UN presence seemed to compensate its drawbacks from the perspective of the Bosnian Serbs: as long as the UN remained present, the arms embargo against the Bosnian Muslims would also remain in force and it also restrained too open arms deliveries by Islamic countries. Moreover, in the political isolation of the Bosnian Serbs, the UN gradually was the only organization that confirmed the more or less independent status of the Republika Srpska.³⁵¹ Of course also the Bosnian-Serb forces, the VRS, had their strategy in the struggle against the Bosnian Muslims – again over the heads of UNPROFOR.

The fact that the Bosnian Serbs were dissatisfied about the way they were treated by the UN, has already been discussed in detail above. They kept complaining that their rights were not recognized and that UNPROFOR was damaging the Bosnian-Serb interests. Karadzic said to be under pressure from population and Parliament to end the not so profitable relation with UNPROFOR. The Cessation of Hostilities Agreement had been violated so often that in the end it no longer existed. Consequently, the Bosnian Serbs were not prepared to discuss a new cease-fire, but only a final end to the war. Karadzic pleaded for an immediate end to the war and a flexible attitude by parties to come to a territorial arrangement. It has already been discussed at the strategy of the Bosnian Muslims that this was exactly what the Bosnian Muslims did not want because the factor time was to their advantage. Akashi got the impression that in the end the Bosnian Serbs saw resumption of the fighting inevitable and resigned themselves to that.³⁵² The big question was what strategy the Bosnian Serbs were going to follow; UNPROFOR, the ABiH and Western intelligence departments were trying to find the answer. However, that did not mean there was much insight into their political and military intentions.

The Bosnian-Serb strategy according to UNPROFOR

Early July 1995 an analysis drawn up by the UN in Zagreb of the 'serb Strategic Culture' was published. This analysis finished with the often-heard idea that the Bosnian Serbs possessed a unique culture, mainly based on historic experiences, which caused them to act irrationally and that their acts could best be understood through a psychological-cultural approach.

The analysis in Zagreb was that mainly political and military factors determined the behaviour of the Bosnian Serbs and their reactions on the battlefield. Moreover, the Bosnian-Serb strategic and political assessment of the situation was well-developed. The rational dimensions of the strategy should not be underestimated by paying too much attention to historic and cultural factors, even though it was clear that those were often referred to in a rhetorical sense. The Bosnian Serbs understood the Western mind better than the West understood the Bosnian-Serb mind. Since the outbreak of the war the West had consistently underestimated the military capabilities of the Bosnian Serbs. There were good reasons to assume that the behaviour of the Bosnian Serbs was the result of calculation. Already at the start of the war Yugoslav military experts had come to the conclusion that the risk of a direct Western military intervention was negligible, because no Western interests were involved and it was not wise for the West to send troops at high costs and run political and military risks.

The Bosnian Serbs also had a keen eye for their own vital interests in the struggle against the Bosnian Muslims. Only twenty percent of the infrastructure and the main economic objects was in the hands of the Bosnian Serbs. Karadzic stated that, according to the Contact Group plan, the Muslim-Croat Federation would get 51% of the Bosnian territory, but that subsequently the Bosnian Croats and the Bosnian Muslims would have 76% of the power plants, 83% of the railroads, and 84% of the road network.

³⁵¹ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87304, File 3300-6 Vol. 4, 01/04/95 – 12/07/95, Operations BH. G2 to COS 'Advantages and disadvantages of UN presence: the BSA view', 24/05/95, relayed DFC to SRS 24/05/95.

³⁵² UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 22/04/95, No. UNPF-HQ Z-644.

In Zagreb they also analysed that to a high degree both Karadzic and Mladic depended on local political and military leaders. The position of the Bosnian Serbs deteriorated and they saw themselves surrounded by enemies. The activities of the Hague Tribunal and the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force invoked a mixture of fear and aggression. In these circumstances it was to be expected that the leadership would become more adventurous and dangerous. That seemed to apply to Mladic to a greater extent than to Karadzic, because military aspects became increasingly important so the influence of Mladic gained weight, while also the international strategy to isolate Karadzic began to have effect.

According to this analysis in a military-strategic sense the VRS would remain utterly on the defensive and their possibilities to carry out large-scale offensive operations were limited. That was because the units were hardly mobile due to the fuel shortage so it was difficult to move them from one front to the next.

As a result the morale of the VRS troops was sinking. The announced complete mobilization, including calling back VRS reserves from Serbia, indicated that the Bosnian Serbs were preparing for the worst. The morale of the VRS caved in, discipline was bad and there was a shortage of officers. Already in mid-April Mladic would have made it clear during a meeting with the Parliament of the Republika Srpska that the Bosnian Serbs could no longer count on successes, or on keeping the territory they were holding, and that they were going to suffer losses. On the other hand, the leadership of the Republika Srpska needed military successes to survive. The VRS were aware that time was working to their disadvantage.

In Zagreb the analysis was also that in view of the increasing fighting power of the Bosnian Muslims, the Bosnian Serbs were left only three options: either wait for a decisive attack by the ABiH; or start a pre-emptive offensive to take a number of strategic objects such as airfields and roads; those were strategically important in the event the arms embargo would be lifted; or to choose a more an indirect approach by threatening to shell cities, to turn against UNPROFOR, and to take hostages again. What would happen in all events was that the warring factions would continue to provoke UNPROFOR, and the question was how the UN would respond to that.³⁵³

Although much in this analysis sounds plausible, it still should be put into perspective: the actual contents of the strategy pursued by the Bosnian Serbs as regards Eastern Bosnia, was known by neither UNPROFOR, nor the Bosnian Muslims. UNPROFOR's perception of the strategy of the Bosnian Serbs has already been discussed in detail. In this connection the ABiH did not get beyond speculations on the intention of their enemy. Nevertheless it is important to a proper understanding to know what those speculations were.

The Bosnian-Serb strategy according to the ABiH

When considering the strategy of the Bosnian Serbs it was important according to ABiH intelligence officers to include the old plans of the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) during the Cold War. Those plans assumed that Yugoslavia would be attacked from outside. In such an event the border between Croatia and Bosnia would form a defence line, and on the right bank of the Drina (in present Serbia) the JNA would redeploy and lead further resistance. However, that right bank of the Drina was not militarily developed. For that reason it was important to the Serbs to control the area left of the Drina. Moreover, fighting in the Bosnian mountains was not easy; consequently, the best alternative was to fight along the Drina. Disturbing factors in this strategy were Srebrenica, Zepa and Gorazde.³⁵⁴ Therefore, the strategic objective of the Serbs would be to take a strip of at least twenty kilometres along the Drina – a strip in which all three eastern enclaves were lying.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ Confidential Information (5). Fax Ravi Solanski UNHCR Zagreb to A. O'Connell UNHCR Geneva, 07/07/95. It is not stated who compiled the study and at what date it was completed.

³⁵⁴ Interview Hazrudin Kistic, 17/05/99 and 18/05/99.

³⁵⁵ Interview Semsudin Murinovic, 17/05/99.

The idea that the strategic objective of the Serbs was to take possession of the eastern enclaves, was not entirely speculative. A European intelligence service also held the opinion that pressure had been exerted from Belgrade on the Bosnian Serbs to attack the eastern enclaves, with the objective of obtaining an additional safety zone of some thirty kilometres along the Drina. That would improve the communications between Serbia and the Republika Srpska, and there were economic motives as well, such as securing the hydroelectric installations in the Drina. Cutting off the connection between the Muslim part of Bosnia and the Sandzjak in Western Serbia, where many Muslims lived, can be important in this relation.³⁵⁶

From the start of the war a central objective of the Bosnian Serbs would have been to deport the Muslim population from Eastern Bosnia, later the eastern enclaves.³⁵⁷ That was also important for a possible affiliation between the Republika Srpska and Serbia.³⁵⁸ Conversely, the strategy of the Bosnian government, according to minister Muratovic, aimed at defending the eastern enclaves to preserve the border between Bosnia and Serbia along the Drina, the old historic border.³⁵⁹ Said European intelligence service rather saw the eastern enclaves as political cards in the game of the Bosnian government, to get help, certainly from the Islamic countries. The eastern enclaves would not have had military-strategic importance for the Bosnian government in Sarajevo and for that reason an exchange of territories had been considered earlier.³⁶⁰

The Bosnian-Serb strategy according to a western intelligence service

This analysis by a Western intelligence service contained a rational analysis of the Bosnian-Serb strategy, but its high abstraction level gave it little predictive value. In this analysis the Republika Srpska had taken over much of the range of ideas of the old JNA, as a result of which there was no coordination in the strategy, with all its consequences. That was caused by the fact that in the former Yugoslavia the power of the state was founded on the People's Army, the territorial defence and the (secret) police as civil defence.³⁶¹ These three had never been under military pressure before. When it did happen it directly caused major problems. These three cornerstones had never matched properly and they had never exercised together. Neither had there ever been exercises with army mobility, or fighting with fire and troops movements in cooperation with territorial defence. For instance, territorial defence did not exchange information on minefields that had been laid and barricades, with the result that the own Yugoslav units ran into minefields.

In the old Yugoslavia the model of a people's defence would only have worked if a doctrine to that effect had existed and the army had been made mobile. The people's defence had never been exercised, but they did use it locally without control. That was because local party bosses had much influence, much more than people in the West were used to. Local uncontrolled use of the people's defence was also contributed to by the presence of the Ministry of Home Affairs with its own troops and paramilitary units. The reason that so many warlords appeared with all warring factions in the conflict in Bosnia, was that regular military defence did not perform properly and adequately.

In a military-tactical sense units in the former Yugoslavia differed from those in the West. In the West a military operation would develop according to a strategy in which the enemy was attacked at its weak spots, surrounded and then defeated. One of the main reasons this went differently in Bosnia, was that politicians – unlike in the West - had a considerable influence on the military strategy. This sometimes caused illogical military attacks and strategies. Sometimes also special regional solutions were

³⁵⁶ Confidential interview (6).

³⁵⁷ Interview Sefko Tihic, 08/03/99.

³⁵⁸ Interview Hasan Muratovic, 30/01/98.

³⁵⁹ Interview Hasan Muratovic, 30/01/98.

³⁶⁰ Confidential interview (6).

³⁶¹ A detailed description of these bodies is found in the part of this report; 'The history preceding the conflict: Yugoslavia up till 1991'.

thought out for military problems, for the sake of special economic or political interests. In practice the conflict in Bosnia was usually about dispelling the opponent as well as the population living in the area. The political leaders were less interested in the manner in which that was realized. In short: the war was fought on the basis of a military philosophy that had never been exercised and was not practicable when Yugoslavia fell apart. Later they did develop military structures, but those were aimed at ethnic cleansing.

This Western intelligence service also noted that there was cooperation between the old Yugoslav army, the JNA (later VJ), and the army of the Bosnian Serbs, the VRS. That cooperation did decline over the course of time and got a more secretive character. Mladic had a special line with Milosevic through the General Staff in Belgrade; JNA chief of staff general Perisic was first of all a soldier, he obeyed orders and was a cooperative man. Unlike Mladic, he did not push himself on the forefront much. Perisic was mainly an executor of orders and completely subservient to Milosevic. Mladic was more of a political general.

After all, it was certain that in the battle the Bosnian Serbs used means coming from Serbia. These means, pursuant to an alliance between VRS and VJ, included that Serb staff officers were stationed in Pale, that VRS officers were trained in Serbia and that VRS officers were paid through Belgrade. There was an JNA liaison regiment in the Bosnian-Serb Han Pijesak. In addition, the VJ provided a lot of strategic support to the VRS: the VJ arranged repairs, spare parts and kept equipment up to date. The VJ also coordinated and arranged road transport of tanks and APCs in the Republika Srpska. Yet means of transport were in very short supply. Sometimes it took the VRS days to get troops somewhere due to lack of vehicles.³⁶²

The Bosnian-Serb strategy: Karadzic' vision

For UNPROFOR it remained guessing in the conflict what the Bosnian-Serb strategy with regard to the eastern enclaves specifically meant. They did know that for a number of reasons the Bosnian Serbs would like to lay their hands on the eastern enclaves, but that was quite a different thing than fathoming their specific strategy.

At first sight it seemed that the Bosnian-Serb strategy with regard to the eastern enclaves was based on long-term considerations. According to the Chief General Staff of the VRS, later Minister of Defence of the Republika Srpska, general Manojlo Milovanovic, the idea among the VRS was that in all events the enclaves would remain isolated after the war and that the Muslim population would leave on their own accord, mainly because after war the international relief would slowly come to a stop. The Muslim population would gradually move to the territory of the Muslim-Croat Federation. They would have disappeared within ten to fifteen years.³⁶³ D.Ludlow, former Private Secretary of Lord Owen, also voiced this vision in retrospect, after the fall of Srebrenica: though the Bosnian Serbs had the ambition to gain control over the banks of the Drina, they would probably have accepted the isolated enclaves such as Srebrenica and Zepa, because the Bosnian Serbs believed that these areas would not appear viable in the long run and the population would leave on their own accord.³⁶⁴

According to VRS general Milovanovic, from a military point of view it had already been possible to press on with the attack on Srebrenica in 1993. But because of the intervention by general Morillon, the fact that Srebrenica was declared a Safe Area, and the pressure from the international community, the leaders of the Republika Srpska in Pale had decided at the time not to press on with the attack on Srebrenica. After that the VRS initially had no other strategy then keeping the Bosnian Muslims inside, though that was difficult to check because they used all kinds of narrow tracks and horses. However, what had happened after 1993, according to Milovanovic, was that manpower,

³⁶² Confidential interview (6).

³⁶³ Interview Manojlo Milovanovic, 18/11/98.

³⁶⁴ Confidential Information (121).

ammunition and weapons had been brought into the Safe Area by the Bosnian Muslims; not all weapons had been handed over to UNPROFOR. In the Bosnian-Serb vision that meant the ABiH had not carried out their share of the demilitarization agreement. It was clear that military personnel had stayed behind in the Srebrenica enclave, otherwise the ABiH would not have been able to form new brigades and divisions in the enclaves. All these units operated on instructions from high up in the ABiH and attacked the VRS from these Safe Areas. That way the creation of the Safe Areas contributed to a paralyzation of the VRS. The army, small as it already was, had to be concentrated around the enclaves. Srebrenica required continuous deployment of three to four brigades of the VRS, Sarajevo of twelve brigades and Bihac of an entire corps. That way the enclaves occupied a major part of the available VRS troops, which reduced the offensive force of the VRS.³⁶⁵

The military strategy of the Bosnian Serbs developed by anticipating on the ABiH strategy, which Karadzic did as follows from his perspective. His analysis, laid down in his directives of 8 March 1995, on which the following is based, can be considered rather adequate in a military sense, although in his analysis it seemed he rather overestimated the military capabilities of the ABiH at a number of points.

According to Karadzic, the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement had treated the Muslims and the Croats preferentially: in the meantime they had been able to improve their armament. After the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement the Bosnian Muslims, in the eyes of the Bosnian Serbs, had in no way observed the provisions of the agreement and the ABiH had started a major reorganization to regain their strength: among other things, in the Safe Areas, manoeuvring units, divisions and corps had been formed and there had been large-scale exercises. Manpower, weapons and equipment had been brought to strength, through own production as well as illegal import. The ABiH had been preparing to start a new offensive already before the end of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, according to Karadzic. In his opinion the military leaders and most political leaders of the Bosnian Muslims were in favour of continuation of the war. The Bosnian Muslims were thought to hope that offensive action would bring more advantage than changes in the Contact Group plan.

Karadzic concluded to his dissatisfaction that the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement had also contributed to keeping alive the eastern enclaves and Sarajevo, because supplying of the enclaves had restarted to a certain extent in 1995. That was unfavourable because it increased pressure on the Bosnian Serbs and drained the VRS potential. Moreover, Karadzic feared, the Muslims and Croats assumed that the conflict that slumbered within the bosom of the Bosnian-Serb leadership between Mladic and him would get worse. The Bosnian Serbs would be forced to accept negotiations, but then under conditions that became more unfavourable with the lapse of time.³⁶⁶

Karadzic did not expect much support from the Russians. Because of their own political and economic problems, the Russians would not be able to stand up to the Americans. Karadzic even went as far as to think that there was a secret agreement between the Americans and the Russians. The Americans would be after a dominant position in the Balkans, and military presence in a large number of Balkan countries.

Karadzic thought that the West was backing the Bosnian Muslims. He also wondered whether the West-European countries realized that this would cause an islamization of Europe; in his analysis Western Europe did realize the risk of a spread of the Islam, but Western Europe thought that the Islamic factor in Europe could be controlled with non-military methods. The West assumed, Karadzic thought, that if the Bosnian Serbs should not accept the Contact Group plan, the West would strive after a military solution without deployment of NATO ground troops. In the long run the intention of the West would be that a steady balance of power would develop between the Muslim-Croat Federation and the Bosnian Serbs in Bosnia. Karadzic saw that as the way the West was trying to get the Bosnian Serbs under control.

³⁶⁵ Interview Manojlo Milovanovic, 18/11/98.

³⁶⁶ ICTY (IT 98-33) OTP 425/a. Karadzic, Directive No. 7, 08/03/95, No. 2/2-11.

Also in military-strategic sense the West chose the side of the Bosnian Muslims, according to Karadzic: the Bosnian Muslims were to expect little pressure from the West to accept a political arrangement, and they assumed that the results of a military offensive of the ABiH would get the blessing of the international community. If the ABiH should not be successful, the Bosnian Muslims would use NATO to exert pressure on the Bosnian Serbs to stop a VRS counteroffensive. A bright spot for Karadzic was that he considered deployment of NATO ground troops highly unlikely.

Karadzic realized that the military means of the ABiH were considerable: he estimated the strength of the ABiH at 270,000 men, divided over six army corps with 112 brigades and another 45 independent battalions. The ABiH should be in the possession of 120 tanks, 80 armoured vehicles, 340 artillery guns, 90 multiple rocket launchers, 230 light rocket launchers, 1800 mortars, 450 PAT anti-aircraft guns, 700 PAM anti-aircraft guns, 200 Stinger or Strela anti-aircraft missiles, 370 POR anti-tank missiles, 16 helicopters and 17 light and agricultural airplanes.

Karadzic's expectations on 8 March were, that an ABiH spring offensive - in Northern and Eastern Bosnia - would be aimed at the Posavina corridor at Brcko, the Majevisa hills, at Vlasenica and at Han Pijesak (see map Eastern Bosnia). In reality however, it would appear that the ABiH offensive was only aimed at one of these four areas: the Majevisa hills. According to Karadzic the Majevisa hills and the Posavina corridor at Brcko were likely targets of an ABiH offensive because these were the areas that were going to the Bosnian Muslims according to the Contact Group plan. Han Pijesak would be likely because that was the home of the VRS headquarters, and Vlasenica because that housed the headquarters of the VRS Drina Corps.

Otherwise Karadzic thought that the attention of the ABiH would mainly be focused on the siege of Sarajevo. An attack on the Posavina corridor at Brcko, strategically important because it connected the west and the east of the Republika Srpska, would depend on the support of the Croats, and their intentions with the Krajina. In a subsequent offensive the ABiH would even direct their attention to connecting the eastern enclaves with Central Bosnia and reaching the Drina; the latter was probably not within the possibilities of the ABiH.

With their tactics the ABiH would focus on sending sabotage units behind the front line for surprise attacks deep into Bosnian-Serb territory on headquarters, artillery sites and communication lines. Then when panic had been created, stronger units could attack the front. The ABiH tactics should also be aimed at diversion manoeuvres to occupy the VRS units.

Karadzic had little respect for the Muslim-Croat Federation in Bosnia, and expected to have little to fear from them in a military sense. According to him that was caused by the fact that the Muslim-Croat Federation was burdened by mistrust between Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats. On the other hand, in his opinion these two groups had no need for a new military conflict with each other, and they would want to avoid further armed conflicts. Karadzic hardly feared a joint action against the Bosnian Serbs, and that was a correct estimate at the moment; coordination of the two armies by a joint staff was still far away. Yet the American sponsors of the Muslim-Croat Federation did work on that. The Americans had appointed general-major J. Sewall to help improve the integration of the Armed forces of Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats. Already late May 1995 Sewall told Akashi that then he was already surprised about the degree of cooperation and coordination that had been reached so quickly.³⁶⁷ Karadzic's estimate in March still was that Croats in the framework of the Muslim-Croat Federation would only honour those matters that were in the Croats' interest, such as joint operation in the Posavina corridor because of the vicinity of Croatia, and against the Serb-proclaimed republic in Croatia, the Republika Srpska Krajina, because of the battle the Croats were fighting there against the Serbs.

However, Karadzic also saw opportunities in the unstable balance between Croats and Muslims. He thought it possible that partly a battle could be fought by Croats and Serbs against Muslims. That would be possible because Karadzic assumed that Croatian policy makers were prepared to enter into

³⁶⁷ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 30/05/95, No. Z-895.

an alliance with the Republika Srpska, to eliminate the Bosnian Muslims in the Muslim-Croat Federation as a political factor. For the Croats that did have to be compensated by integration of the Republika Srpska Krajina as an autonomous area in Croatia.

The estimate that the Bosnian Croats could partly make a pact with the Bosnian Serbs, was a striking miscalculation of Karadzic. Below we will see that indeed the Bosnian Croats not always joined forces with the Bosnian Muslims, but that did not mean the Bosnian Croats then entered into a pact with the Bosnian Serbs. It also happened that the Bosnian Croats preferred to stay on the sideline when Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Muslims were fighting each other. The Bosnian Croats expressly had their own agenda in the fight against the Bosnian Serbs.

Karadzic did realize that cooperation between the Bosnian Serbs and the Bosnian Croats was not going to be easy. That's because the forces of the Bosnian Muslims would support those of the Bosnian Croats when it came to keeping the VRS busy on Bosnian territory. Then together they could prevent the forces of the Bosnian Serbs from smothering an attack by the Croats on the Republika Srpska Krajina at an early stage.

For that moment, on 8 March, it was still a matter of sabre rattling to bring about a peaceful reintegration. However, the military option was not excluded and this compelled Karadzic to a highly complicated game of chess.

It also appeared from Karadzic's directives that at that moment the VRS were up to their necks in problems. According to Karadzic, the main task of the VRS was to defend the conquered area. The priority was to prevent the ABiH from breaking the siege of Sarajevo; after all, that was the most important city for both warring factions. The second priority was to prevent a surprise attack by the ABiH, that could for instance take place north of Zvornik, in the Majevisa hills and at Brcko. The strategic position of the VRS would also have to be improved by shortening the front lines. A number of conscripts would have to be sent home to improve the economic situation in the Republika Srpska.

In the opinion of Karadzic, combat actions should be aimed at inflicting the greatest possible losses in personnel and material on the ABiH. That way the ABiH had to be weakened until they were destroyed. The international community would then be forced to recognize the situation on the ground, of which Karadzic hoped that it would look as much as possible like the situation of that moment that was favourable to the VRS. That also was the right moment and the optimum situation to negotiate peace, and conditions would have been created for a glorious end to the war. The main purpose of all efforts, said Karadzic, was to realize a united Serb state.

According to Karadzic that led to a strategy to be followed by the army of the Bosnian Serbs, the VRS, as regards the eastern enclaves, including Srebrenica. The defence of the eastern enclaves, and of the northwestern front in Eastern Bosnia (roughly the line Zvornik – Tuzla – Kladanj), became the task of the so-called Drina Corps of the VRS that was stationed in Eastern Bosnia. This Drina Corps would have to bring about a separation between Srebrenica and Zepa as soon as possible; there still was communication and traffic of people between these two enclaves, and that would have to be prevented to isolate the enclaves as much as possible in order to weaken them. If that was followed by well-considered combat actions - without defining those further - that would create an unbearable and unsafe situation as a result of which there would be no hope of survival or life for the inhabitants of Srebrenica and Zepa. Apparently already in March 1995 the Bosnian Serbs were anticipating a possible withdrawal of UNPROFOR from the enclaves. In that case the Drina Corps had to be ready to destroy the ABiH in these enclaves and to achieve a final liberation of the Drina valley. Karadzic's plans for Goradze were more concrete than for Srebrenica. There an operation had to be planned to reduce the size of the enclave to a small protected area around the city centre. The ABiH had to be fully defeated there as well. In any case the ABiH had to be denied the possibility to open a corridor in order to link up with the troops around Sarajevo. However, the greatest priority for the Drina Corps was the area east of Tuzla: along the line Kalesija - Simin Han the ABiH should be cut off, and in the regions Teocak, Sapna and Vitinica the ABiH had to be destroyed. (see map). Together this should remove the threat of an ABiH breakthrough to the Drina north of Zvornik. The area itself that was vulnerable to

the VRS was outside the territory of the Drina Corps, but that was a matter for a different VRS Corps (the East Bosnia Corps in Bijeljina).³⁶⁸

The Bosnian Serbs finally also needed better public relations, Karadzic thought. A more aggressive propaganda campaign had to expose the prejudiced and hostile attitude within UNPROFOR and some humanitarian organizations. UNPROFOR and the Muslim population had to become dependent on the good will of the Bosnian Serbs, but at the same time condemnation by the international community and the public opinion had to be prevented. Logistic support to UNPROFOR and the population in the enclaves should have to be limited by a restrictive policy as regards issuing clearances, permits to let convoys through. That policy would indeed be implemented and the eastern enclaves would increasingly be burdened by it.

The Bosnian-Serb strategy regarding the enclaves: differences Mladic- Karadzic

Around this time more became known about the military strategy of general Mladic as well: on 7 March Mladic gave Smith some insight into his intentions. Mladic once more broached the subject of the border of the Safe Area Srebrenica; the warring factions had never reached an agreement on the exact border. In Mladic' vision the Safe Area Srebrenica never comprised more than an area of 4.5 by one kilometre around the city. In the event of an attack Mladic was only prepared to accept that area as border of the Safe Area.

Mladic then already had asked Smith to issue orders to UNPROFOR to withdraw from the southwestern part of the enclave. In that area observation posts (OPs) of UNPROFOR had already permitted the ABiH to take up positions. As a result the road south of Srebrenica - which in Mladic' opinion rightfully belonged to the Bosnian Serbs - was a blockade against the Bosnian Serbs. Mladic anticipated that this way the ABiH could build on an attack to connect the Srebrenica enclave with Tuzla (and Gorazde with Sarajevo). In that event the VRS would start a counterattack. To make it more difficult for the ABiH and to prevent their advance to Tuzla, Mladic took a precaution: he would restrict the supply of food, medicines and fuel to the enclaves. Smith concluded from all this that Mladic did not have the capacity to fight on two fronts. If the Croats would start an attack on the Republika Srpska Krajina, and the ABiH in central Bosnia, Mladic was going to need those troops elsewhere than in the enclaves. Therefore he would timely have to secure the area behind the front on the side of the Republika Srpska, where the eastern enclaves were. So if Mladic needed his troops elsewhere, that could cause a VRS attack on the eastern enclaves, Smith had interpreted Mladic.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁸ ICTY (IT 98-33), OTP 425/a. Karadzic, Directive No. 7, 08/03/95, No. 2/2-11.

³⁶⁹ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 215, File BHC95 07/03/95-14/03/95. Meeting Gen Smith and Gen Mladic 07/03/95, Ref 8594. BHC FWD to DOKL. 091100A Mrt 95. Outgoing fax No. 122/95. UN Conf.



Karadzic and Mladic had different opinions on the eastern enclaves. Karadzic saw forcing back the population on such a small area as part of his strategy to create a situation in the enclaves that would be unbearable for the population. Moreover, he thought that the Safe Areas were illegal, because in his opinion there was no basis for them in international law.³⁷⁰ A first signal that Karadzic wanted to get rid of the enclaves was his statement on the subject in a speech he delivered on 23 May. The Americans, for that matter, did not know then how this announcement by Karadzic fitted in the VRS strategy; the idea was that the Bosnian Serbs were busy 'to clean up the map'.³⁷¹

For Mladic this was exactly the other way round: he on the other hand was prepared to accept the Safe Areas as an area where the population could be housed. However, Mladic also had eyes for the development of the ABiH in the enclaves and he feared a possible connection between Srebrenica and Tuzla. That seemed unrealistic in view of the problems that the ABiH also had to contend with, but it did mark the vulnerability of the VRS around the eastern enclaves, and Mladic' fear that for the VRS roads to move the troops and supplies would be taken by the ABiH. Moreover, Mladic was under pressure to reorganize his defence and he was worried about the ABiH outbreaks from Srebrenica and Gorazde. Mladic would not worry too much about Tuzla, because he could closely control this area.³⁷²

The Bosnian-Serb strategy in practice in spring 1995

The ABiH offensive that started late March in the Majeвица hills, was a thorn in the flesh of Mladic. Despite the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement note that the ABiH had started these operations. It was hardly acceptable for Mladic that in the meantime the VRS had been threatened with the use of air power. According to Mladic, that threat was based on UNPROFOR's fear that the Bosnian Serbs were going to take the eastern enclaves.

Mladic was contemplating a response to this ABiH offensive. He gave orders to destroy the ABiH in the Majeвица hills. That would have to be done by the East Bosnia Corps and the Drina Corps

³⁷⁰ Interview Jim Baxter, 16/10/00.

³⁷¹ Confidential Information (6).

³⁷² Interview Jim Baxter, 16/10/00.

of the VRS. This attack had a great priority for Mladic, which also appeared in the form of helicopter support: from Belgrade many helicopters flew equipment for the VRS to the Majevisa hills. The importance of this attack was reflected in the possibility it offered if successful: to cut off the 2nd ABiH Corps (the Corps in Northeast Bosnia) from the main ABiH force in Central Bosnia. This 2nd ABiH Corps also held the strategically important airfield of Dubrava (in UN jargon: Tuzla Air Base).³⁷³ It was not very successful. The fights stranded in the Majevisa hills and there was not a chance of cutting off the 2nd Corps and widening the Posavina corridor at Brcko. Tuzla Air Base remained unusable for both the VRS and ABiH.

This elaboration on the development of the ABiH offensive in the Majevisa hills late March is important, because it reveals a pattern in the behaviour of the forces of the Bosnian Croats: they only supported the ABiH in the fight against the Bosnian Serbs when they themselves had an interest. In the case of the Posavina corridor at Brcko the Croats clearly had an interest: this narrow corridor was close to Croatia, and it was a weak but strategically important place for the Bosnian Serbs. However, for the Bosnian Croats there was no interest in the ABiH offensive in the Majevisa hills. They could easily have supported the ABiH, but they did not. The Bosnian Muslims themselves in Tuzla did not have the vehicles and artillery to win the battle of the Majevisa hills against the Bosnian Serbs, so eventually it ended in a draw.

Also when taking the eastern enclaves the pattern would show that Croats only helped the ABiH when they themselves had an interest. A European intelligence service suspected a different reason for this lack of support by the Bosnian Croats. This service had two indications for it. First of all, prior to the attack on the eastern enclaves there would have been some coordination between the Croatian President Tudjman and the Serb President Milosevic. They would have agreed to more or less give the Bosnian Serbs the green light to tackle the eastern enclaves, without provoking direct support by the Croats to the ABiH. Those conversations should have been held on a special telephone hotline between Belgrade and Zagreb. There was no confirmation that these contacts had actually taken place. However, the Americans thought that arrangements between Milosevic and Tudjman came in the category: 'false rumors': such a deal would not have existed. According to them the Croats did support the ABiH, but never readily and they never gave extensive support.³⁷⁴

There was a second reason why this European intelligence service thought that the Croats would not come to the rescue of the ABiH in the event of an attack by the Bosnian Serbs on the eastern enclaves. That was because in the summer of 1995 the VRS were removing troops from the region around Brcko, even though that was the weakest point of the VRS. The VRS would only do that if they knew that in the meantime the Croats would not undertake anything in the Brcko region. Again, this is without evidence.³⁷⁵

Late June, early July, the Bosnian Serbs seemed to be prepared to continue the fighting. Mladic informed Janvier that the Bosnian Serbs had chosen for the war option. After two earlier meetings at the time of the hostage crisis, Janvier had a third meeting with Mladic in Zvornik by the end of June. There Janvier once more tried 'de manière très pédagogique' to sound out even the slightest chance of a breakthrough in the minds of the Bosnian Serbs, now that at their third meeting the problem of the hostages had been resolved. However, Mladic thought that still nothing had been done towards peace negotiations, while the sanctions against the Bosnian Serbs continued. He also thought that the initiatives of Bildt and statements by EU government leaders at the summit in Cannes meant insufficient concessions to the Bosnian Serbs.³⁷⁶ Mladic made it clear that war was the only option left.

³⁷³ ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 426/a. Colonel-general Ratko Mladic, Directive No. 7/1, 31 March 1995, No. 02/2-15.

³⁷⁴ Confidential Interview (7).

³⁷⁵ Confidential interview (6).

³⁷⁶ UNNY,DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 01/07/95, No. UNPF Z-1082.

Prior knowledge on the Bosnian-Serb strategy: a review

The conclusion of all opinions about the strategy of the Bosnian Serbs, is that nobody knew the real intentions of the Bosnian Serbs. That also applied to the UN. As regards the eastern enclaves general Smith in Sarajevo came close with his analysis that the VRS were trying to exhaust the ABiH (and UNPROFOR), but that too never got beyond an 'educated guess' and it was not based on hard military intelligence. Moreover, Smith did not think either that the entire Srebrenica enclave would be rounded up, but that the VRS would only try to reduce it.

Smith's analysis was mainly correct from a military point of view, but it was not shared in the western capitals. For instance, they were at odds with the analysis made by the government in London. That was partly caused by different interpretations of the developments, but also because Smith mainly looked at what was to be expected from a military-strategic point of view rather than what was politically feasible. Smith's analysis had also been presented to the French intelligence community, but in Paris it found little credence as well. Smith also discussed his thesis with general Clark of the Pentagon. He too had a different opinion: there would be no attack on the enclaves.³⁷⁷

Even if it had been known that the eastern enclaves were going to be attacked, then in a military-strategic sense the attack on Srebrenica still came more or less as a surprise, also for the American intelligence community. Moreover, Gorazde was more valuable as a military target; it was strategically located on a connecting road between Sarajevo and Montenegro, it was larger and had more inhabitants, and it had an ammunition factory. So it was logical that if there were to be an attack, Gorazde would be the first target.³⁷⁸

When one wonders what was known in the Netherlands about the military strategy of the warring factions, the answer is: little. There was hardly any insight into the strategy pursued by the Bosnian Serbs. Many estimates and expectations were based on political analyses, or on messages seeping through from the Contact Group in the direction of The Hague.

The Dutch Military Intelligence Service (MID) did try to gather information on military strategies, but they tended to be off the mark. Early May for instance, the service stated that though talks on an extension of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement had yielded nothing, it was not expected that this would lead to new large-scale offensive operations by the Bosnian Muslims or Bosnian Serbs. The Bosnian Muslims would not favour that, because they wanted to prevent counteractions and possible Yugoslav intervention.

The MID seemed to have more insight into the developments in Croatia. In May 1995 the MID anticipated the Croatian preparations for an attack on Knin, the capital of the Republika Srpska Krajina, and the possibility that Western Slavonia would be overrun.³⁷⁹

Mid-May 1995 the MID thought they had indications that Mladic was trying to get permission from the Bosnian-Serb political leaders for a large-scale offensive. That would take away the initiative from the Muslims and boost the morale of the VRS. However, this plan should have met with resistance from the Bosnian-Serb Parliament. Possibly the rivalry between Mladic and Karadzic played a part and maybe Karadzic feared that if the offensive were successful, Mladic would gain too much prestige and influence. Possibly the Croatian actions against the Republika Srpska Krajina in Western Slavonia played a part. Also the lack of unity among the Serbs in the Republika Srpska and the Republika Srpska Krajina should have played a role in this reticence.³⁸⁰

More in general, it was not the habit of the MID to venture into military-strategic estimates in the conflict. One of the few examples that the MID did, involved the offensive by the ABiH late May to break the siege of Sarajevo. The unusually large concentrations of ABiH troops had not escaped the attention of the MID, and neither had the fact that this seemed to indicate a strategy change. If up to

³⁷⁷ Interview Jim Baxter, 16/10/00.

³⁷⁸ Confidential interview (6).

³⁷⁹ MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, no. 20/95, completed 021400 May 1995.

³⁸⁰ MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, no. 22/95, completed 161200 May 1995.

then the strategy had been aimed at using relatively small-scale operations to force the VRS to use their reserves and to spread the heavy weapons of the VRS,³⁸¹ now the ABiH were carrying out a large-scale operation. The MID thought, and with some justification, that this might mean that the ABiH were overestimating their own military powers; the ABiH would not be able to withstand Bosnian-Serb counteraction and intensification of the shelling of Sarajevo.³⁸² Indeed the ABiH suffered unexpectedly high losses and were not able to render sufficient logistic support to their deployed units. Consequently, the new mode of operation did not give the ABiH the desired result.³⁸³

But this was an incidental example of military-strategic estimate with regard to the ABiH, there was no question of any estimate of the VRS strategy with regard to Eastern Bosnia in the MID reports. The theme advance knowledge of an attack on Srebrenica will be discussed in much detail in the separate Appendix to this report on intelligence.

18. Conclusion

The situation that developed in spring 1995 for UNPROFOR, can be characterized as sinking further and further away in a morass. That was caused by a number of circumstances that will be summarized here. They are distinguished here at an analytical level, but in practice of course they interacted continuously.

The recommencement of the hostilities between the warring factions was the main problem for UNPROFOR. The cease-fire, agreed between the warring factions, officially ended on 1 May 1995. However, the hostilities had already started again well before that time. The pattern was that the forces of the Bosnian Muslims, the ABiH, started the offensive, after which the forces of the Bosnian Serbs, the VRS, in most cases responded more than proportionally. The ABiH were prompted to do so for military-strategic considerations: with offensive actions they tried to recapture as much terrain as possible from the VRS, and first of all to keep the VRS busy. During the cease-fire the VRS had a favourable starting position with regard to the terrain they held, but the VRS had great problems maintaining their terrain over the entire long front line. This way time was to the advantage of the ABiH, also because already for a long time the Bosnian Muslims presented themselves as the 'underdog' in the international media, though their military strength was increasing all the time.

That put UNPROFOR in the firing line in spring 1995. The Bosnian Serbs suspected UNPROFOR of being prejudiced against them, in line with the prevalent international opinion that was set against the Bosnian Serbs. Conversely, the Bosnian Muslims expected UNPROFOR to protect them against the Bosnian Serbs and, if necessary, would fight with them against these Bosnian Serbs.

The Bosnian Serbs were convinced of UNPROFOR's partiality in favour of the Bosnian Muslims. As proof of that they saw, understandable from their perspective, that the Safe Areas, including Srebrenica, became a base of operations for attacks by these Bosnian Muslims – to the great indignation of the Bosnian Serbs, who reminded UNPROFOR that it had been agreed to demilitarize these areas. Another major problem for the Bosnian Serbs was that many of their men were kept occupied to keep the three eastern enclaves (Srebrenica, Zepa and Gorazde) surrounded: those troops could have been very useful elsewhere in the war. Nevertheless nowhere within UNPROFOR it was expected that the Bosnian Serbs would walk over the enclaves, including Srebrenica; they did know that general Mladic considered this Safe Area to comprise a smaller area (around the city of Srebrenica) than the UN assumed.

True to their mandate, UNPROFOR tried to remain neutral in the midst of all this. However, the Bosnian Serbs saw that differently. That caused measures against UNPROFOR, such as stopping convoys over Bosnian-Serb territory that were intended for the Muslim population of Srebrenica and

³⁸¹ MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, no. 20/95, completed 021400B May 1995.

³⁸² MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, no. 28/95, completed 141400B June 1995.

³⁸³ MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, no. 30/95, completed 271400B June 1995.

the other eastern enclaves, as well as for the UNPROFOR troops themselves. That had serious consequences for the situation of the population and UNPROFOR alike. NATO air strikes on Pale late May, aimed against the Bosnian Serbs, only worsened the hold the Bosnian Serbs had over UNPROFOR. The Bosnian Serbs responded by taking UN personnel hostage, once more emphasizing the vulnerability of UNPROFOR.

Political initiatives in the first six months of 1995 were to no avail in the end. The policy of the international community remained aimed at isolating the Bosnian Serbs, but for the time being that had no influence on the fighting. Milosevic tried to benefit by Karadzic' isolation by setting himself up as the one who could make a peaceful end to the conflict possible: political affairs had to be arranged with him rather than with Karadzic, his message was. Within the Bosnian-Serb leadership Karadzic indeed did not seem to be prepared to accept any political solution whatsoever, because his sole objective was to keep the area for the Bosnian Serbs. That also brought him into conflict with Mladic, who was facing military problems conquering territory. That again contributed to Karadzic' isolation.

The British-French initiative to set up a Rapid Reaction Force, a 'forceful' units, with artillery, yielded little. That was mainly because this unit would be deployed under the same regime as UNPROFOR. As a result the Rapid Reaction Force threatened to become part of the problem rather than the solution to it.

The international decision-making process regarding 'how to go on with UNPROFOR' generally proceeded with difficulty, mainly because of the different visions of the troop contributing nations, including the Netherlands. The governments of France and the United Kingdom, with many troops on the ground in Bosnia, tended to give the safety of these troops the highest priority. That became even stronger when British and French soldiers were taken hostage. The United States were the greatest advocates of strong measures (air strikes) against the Bosnian Serbs, also because unlike Europe they had no direct interest in the form of troops on the ground in Bosnia. However, air strikes could cause an escalation of the conflict and withdrawal of UNPROFOR from Bosnia. In that case American ground forces would be deployed, in accordance with an imprudent promise by the American President Clinton to NATO. However, the American government really did not like the idea that their ground troops would actually have to get involved in the withdrawal of UNPROFOR. The Europeans could still be checked with that when they were pressing for more forceful measures against the Bosnian Serbs.

For UNPROFOR the question continually was: 'how to prevent muddling through'. In that connection also from UNPROFOR many proposals were reviewed, with the focus on a stricter approach of the Bosnian Serbs, and more 'forceful' action by UNPROFOR to make this peace force less vulnerable. General Smith in Sarajevo was a strong advocate of that. However, that continuously met with the objection that such action would not be covered by the mandate: after all, that did not go beyond peacekeeping. That was regularly pointed out to Smith by his superior in Zagreb, general Janvier, who preached cautiousness - also with a view to the troops. Janvier in turn referred to his political superior in Zagreb, the special envoy of UN Secretary-General Akashi. He himself did not expressed strong views, but it was clear that he anticipated the fear among the UN in New York that the conflict would escalate. That was particularly prevalent within the Security Council, in accordance with the described positions of the various troop contributing nations and the United States. UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali himself also made an effort to find ways to prevent muddling through. In the Security Council he and general Janvier defended the plan to withdraw UNPROFOR from the eastern enclaves to reduce the vulnerability of UNPROFOR. That would make more 'forceful' action against the Bosnian Serbs possible. However, this plan was rejected in the Security Council, because it was not in line with the positions of the countries concerned, and also because it meant loss of face for the UN Security Council if the eastern enclaves were abandoned.

So eventually it did end in muddling through for UNPROFOR, under increasingly dramatic circumstances: open hostilities over the heads of UNPROFOR; halted supplies; a Muslim population that increasingly turned against them; and no prospect of an improvement of the situation.

Chapter 2

Air power: Close Air Support and air strikes

1. Introduction

A proper understanding of the rest of this report requires that the chronology will now be broken. The previous chapters discussed the phenomena ‘Close Air Support’ and ‘air strikes’. This chapter explains more thematically what these concepts exactly meant, what the difference between them was, and how decisions on these subjects were taken in the period preceding the fall of Srebrenica. At the end of this chapter the reader will chronologically be back at the point where the previous chapter ended, late June 1995. Armed with this knowledge the reader will have a better insight into the force and the value of air power at the time of the attack on Srebrenica.

The prologue to his report already pointed out the crucial difference between Close Air Support and air strikes and involves the two manners relevant here to use air power in the structure chosen for UNPROFOR. The two ways of using air power caused much misunderstanding, which may happen easily if the concepts are used indiscriminately. Hence, it is highly important to understand these two ways of using air power.

The difference between Close Air Support and air strikes

In practice in Bosnia two main types of air power were used: Close Air Support and air strikes.³⁸⁴ The conceptual difference between the two was essential, but tended to escape the notice of politicians and the media. That sometimes caused confusion about the various types of Air Power. Quite often the concepts were mixed up, not only in the political arena but also in military circles. That would also affect Dutchbat.

Close Air Support was defined as the use of air power for direct support of the UN troops on the ground. A request for it had to come from an UNPROFOR Battalion Commander and could be made if one of the contending parties attacked his unit or fired at it.

There is no definition for the concept air strikes within NATO. Here it involved the use of air power aimed at destruction; large-scale bombing that could for instance be carried out if one of the warring factions violated an agreement on the use of heavy weapons (in the zones declared by NATO known as Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones). It should be emphasized that battalion commanders had nothing to do with air strikes; the relevant decisions were taken at the highest level, so in Zagreb or New York. For air strikes the pilot was briefed on the position of his target that he had to find himself, without the assistance of a Forward Air Controller on the ground to guide the pilot to the target. Usual targets for air strikes were installations for air defence, radar installations, command posts, liaison centres and ammunition depots. For hitting such targets there were target lists, drawn up jointly by UNPROFOR and NATO. Both UNPROFOR and the highest local NATO authority, Admiral Leighton Smith, could take the initiative for consultation on the desirability of an air strike. In all cases the (Special Representative of) the UN Secretary-General had to decide on the request before NATO did.

³⁸⁴ The Force Commander’s Concept of Employment of Air Power of 5 September 1994 defined Close Air Support as: ‘The use of air power against hostile ground attacks in close proximity to the UNPROFOR forces that are directly threatened. This action requires the detailed integration of each air mission with the fire and movement of friendly forces. It is used strictly when ground weapon systems are inadequate for the situation at hand’. Air strikes were defined as: ‘This is a generic term used to describe the use of aircraft to engage ground targets not in close proximity to UNPROFOR troops. In the case of UNPROFOR, it is used to refer to NATO preplanned missions’. (UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 79, File 2.5.4, Air Support 17/08/93- 06/02/95).

Until late May 1995 air power had been used nine times (Close Air Support or air strikes). Close Air Support had not yet been requested by Dutchbat. In Part II it has been described that in a different eastern enclave, Gorazde, Close Air Support had been asked for in April 1994. The most well-known and also the most drastic instance of air strikes happened during the bombings of Pale on 25 and 26 May. The previous chapter contains an extensive description of the demoralization this resulted in for UNPROFOR. This chapter will describe Close Air Support and air strikes in a more general sense. Central issues are: how did the decision-making process on the subject proceed within and between the UN and NATO? How did this decision-making shift in the course of time when it appeared that the use of air power was not without consequences on the ground, due to reprisals by the Bosnian Serbs?

The military context in Bosnia changed considerably between 1992 and 1995. This context had a major influence on the use of air power; in the period between August 1993 and March 1994 it usually sufficed for UNPROFOR to threaten to use air power. During that period the many training flights over Bosnia and air presence³⁸⁵ near 'hot spots' usually proved sufficient to deter the warring factions. Gradually this deterrent lost its effect and the warring factions increasingly tested UNPROFOR.

As a result of NATO actions in February 1994 around Sarajevo and in April 1994 near Gorazde, the reputation of Close Air Support could be restored a little; then NATO, assuming individual responsibility in this connection, declared Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones. Declaring the zones was linked to an ultimatum and the threat of attacking these heavy weapons from the air. That forced the warring factions to withdraw their heavy weapons from these zones.

Then NATO considered the possibility to also declare such Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones around the other four Safe Areas (Bihac, Tuzla, Zepa and Srebrenica). That caused the problem that NATO had to do three things at the time: be active in the Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones, support UNPROFOR on the ground, and enforce the No Fly Zone. It appeared that NATO did not have enough aircraft available for all those tasks. It required a substantial number of additional aircraft for which, unless more aircraft carriers were allocated, bases had to be found outside Italy, with all the additional problems of obtaining overflight rights from the countries involved. It was mainly for this reason that indeed the number of Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones would not be increased.

During the period from April 1994 to July 1995 the conflict escalated further. During this period there were threats of force as well as use of it. This period also painfully identified the limitations of the use of Close Air Support in the Bosnian conflict: the Bosnian Serbs started taking UN soldiers hostage as reprisal, and using their air defence against NATO aircraft. The difference in ideas between UN and NATO was also tersely revealed. The UN seemed to be satisfied with the existing arrangements for the use of Close Air Support, while NATO had its reservations with regard to the current arrangements. A major issue in this connection was whether NATO wanted to accept that UNPROFOR would send out a warning prior to an air strike and that it should be UNPROFOR rather than NATO that gave targets their priority.³⁸⁶

2. Backgrounds of the differences of opinion between NATO and UN

When declaring the Safe Areas under Resolution 836 of the UN Security Council on 3 June 1993, the use of air power in Bosnia seemed to offer potential for new and unprecedented possibilities for a UN peace operation. When the lighter weapons of UNPROFOR on the ground would no longer be sufficient to cope with the situation, air power could be called in.

At the same time it was clear from the start that use of this air power was full of pitfalls and that the consequences were uncertain. Those who introduced Resolution 836 had agreed that the authority

³⁸⁵ 'Presence' was defined by UNPROFOR as 'Training or overflight/orbiting performed over an area of tension above 5000 feet AGL to show the availability of air power'. (UNPROFOR Operations Order 14/94, 15/07/94. UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 79, File2.5.4, Air Support 17/08/93 – 06/02/94).

³⁸⁶ Confidential Information (147)

to use Close Air Support had to be vested in soldiers. At the same time the UN secretariat expressed concerns that the use of air power could entail risks for the safety of the troops and the humanitarian convoys. Consequently, the UN vision was that this air power should only be used reluctantly. It could only be used in self defence for the UN troops.³⁸⁷

That way right at the start the seeds were sown of a continuous fight within and between the UN and NATO on the question in what degree force in the form of air power had to be applied and whether the authority to use it should be in the hands of soldiers or diplomats. Those discussions would also continue extensively between 1993 and 1995. In those discussions the military capabilities of the Bosnian Serbs also continuously played a role in the background.

It is important to follow the discussion on the use of air power in the second half of 1994 and the first half of 1995, to gain an insight into the visions and conditions that determined the use of air power at the time of the fall of Srebrenica. Moreover, it will appear that this discussion under the predecessor of General Janvier, as Force Commander the highest ranking soldier within UNPROFOR in 1995, did not proceed much differently than in his period in command. The procedure with regard to the use of air power in specific situations will be discussed further in Chapter 6; this chapter describes what in a general sense the considerations whether or not to use air power were in the context of UNPROFOR.

Superficially speaking, optimism on the use of air power could stem from the Gulf war, during which air power had been used successfully: there supreme air power in open and level terrain had paved the way for the ground troops. However, this experience created incorrect expectations when it was applied to the Bosnian conflict. That was the opinion of, among others, the American Secretary of Defence, Perry. He declared: 'no responsible military commander believes we can change the outcome of the war with an air campaign alone. Bosnia is not Iraq. Bosnia is wooded, mountainous and often blanketed by clouds. The Serbs spread out their weapons over a wide area and often place them in the middle of population centers'.³⁸⁸

Not only the terrain conditions were difficult in Bosnia, lack of experience was another complication for the use of air power. Neither the UN nor NATO had experience in using air power in a conflict such as in Bosnia. Characteristics of that partly intrastate conflict were: ethnic cleansing, sieges, guerrilla tactics, unclear front lines and highly dispersed troops. The military characteristics of the conflict in Bosnia made parties little vulnerable to air actions such as NATO could have carried out: on the ground the conflict was mainly fought out in populated areas (including the access roads to these populated areas). The warring factions for instance had a habit of deploying heavy weapons near schools and hospitals. Large-scale military operations, after concentration of troops and equipment, were rare. Actions of the warring factions often aimed at terrorizing and chasing away the population in order to ethnically cleanse the area concerned.

Specifically in the case of Close Air Support there were still other hurdles to clear: the dispersion of the troops of the contending parties, their mobility, and the time that lapsed when requesting Close Air Support, added to the requirement of the minimum application of force, made the use of Close Air Support not always easy, to put it mildly.³⁸⁹

Use of air power had still other limitations, for instance technical: aircraft could only stay in the air for a limited period, and their use depended on the weather conditions, that were not always favourable in Bosnia.

Yet in practice the political limitations of air power would prove to be the most relevant: use of air power only had a momentary effect. Even if it could play a dominant and decisive role in battles high in the conflict spectre, it could not independently end a conflict. For peacekeeping, unlike in the case of peace-enforcement, air power could not play that decisive role. Air power had a provocative

³⁸⁷ NIOD, Coll. Wahlgren. Code Cable, Annan to Stoltenberg for Wahlgren, 07/06/93, No. MSC-945.

³⁸⁸ Prepared remarks of Secretary of Defense William J. Perry at the 100th Landon Lecture Series, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kan., March 9, 1995, *Defense Viewpoint*, Vol. 10, No. 21.

³⁸⁹ De Lapresle in Biermann and Vadset, *UN Peacekeeping in Trouble*, p. 140.

nature and for that reason it could only be used for peacekeeping when political, military and geographic factors allowed it. Nevertheless Close Air Support offered substantial possibilities because of the high mobility of the air forces, the possibilities for patrolling, for air reconnaissance, and rapid fire support. With these advantages air cover could contribute to keeping the number of troops on the ground limited and to preventing escalation of the conflict. That did require a rapid decision to turn the 'key' to activate air power, and that was exactly what was lacking at UNPROFOR, as will appear later in this chapter. After all, a battalion on the ground in trouble does not want to wait for hours for Close Air Support to arrive.

Air power did have a major support role in the field of deterrence, and in the field of gathering intelligence, even if UNPROFOR hardly shared in it, for reasons explained in the Appendix to this report on intelligence. At the same time it seemed that the capacity for air reconnaissance of the aircraft stationed in Italy, including the Dutch F-16 photo reconnaissance aircraft, was not used to the full.³⁹⁰

The background of said political limitations of air power was that in general the UN and NATO had different ideas about the use of force. These differences also stemmed from a different development history, culture and a different objective of these two organizations: NATO was originally intended as alliance for the use of troops for 'high intensity warfare'. The doctrine and tactics of NATO air forces were aimed at reaching strategic and tactical goals, in cooperation with ground forces that were deployed to fight. In short, NATO was intended and organized to win a war. The UN on the other hand was intended and organized to keep the peace. The UN saw the use of force as a defensive instrument to protect the troops in the event of danger. NATO did want to see force as a defensive means as well, but also saw it as a means to make the Bosnian Serbs behave in a certain way: hence, they shared a more offensive vision of air power. The UN Security Council resolution declaring the Safe Areas permitted the use of force in reply to a shelling or armed invasion of the Safe Areas. If this need would arise the UN and NATO would have to cooperate closely. However, this cooperation was anything but natural: though NATO did act to support UNPROFOR, that did not mean this organization was prepared to be just the subcontractor of the UN. NATO also wanted to keep an eye on their own credibility. The vision of the conflict and mainly its approach differed fundamentally between NATO and UN. The fact that the main member states in both the UN and NATO were the same, was no guarantee that they spoke with the same voice at both forums. For that to happen both organizations still had too much specific dynamics.³⁹¹

UN's vision of the use of air power

The previously mentioned differences between NATO and UN as organizations had their effect on the structure in which UNPROFOR had to operate as was not designed according to the pattern of NATO, but to that of the UN. The military and political logic behind the deployment of such a peace force was fundamentally different than deployment of combat units. In the specific case of UNPROFOR the composition, deployment, armament and logistic support of its units can also depended on the approval of the warring factions (peacekeeping), and was not geared to peace-enforcement. UN troops could no longer carry out their mandate as soon as they would be engaged in war with one of the parties. Close Air Support would still be possible in such an event, but Akashi considered that irresponsible if UN personnel in isolated and vulnerable positions could become target for retaliation. That straitjacket imposed limitations upon the use of air power to solve the Bosnian conflict, because negotiations had to remain possible.

For that reason Akashi was reluctant to use air power. One of his considerations was the effect these actions could easily have on the impartiality of the UN: 'the man you bomb today, is the same man whose cooperation you may require tomorrow for the passage of a humanitarian convoy'. Thus

³⁹⁰ Confidential Information (147)

³⁹¹ See Tharoor, 'UN Peacekeeping in Europe', *Survival*, 37(Winter 1995-96)125.

Akashi described the continuous dilemma for the UN organization, for which it was difficult to find a way out. According to Akashi it was important in a UN operation to carefully balance all factors that could influence the attitude of the warring factions. Moreover, preventing escalation of incidents required continuous contact with the warring factions.

For Akashi, who made the final decision on the use of air power, deterring attacks on the Safe Areas was a major challenge for that reason. As long as UNPROFOR also had to operate in areas under control of the Bosnian Serbs, intervention against those same Bosnian Serbs had to be balanced carefully against the background of the required impartiality. That necessitated continuous explanation to the warring factions and to the members of the international community. Akashi recognized that automatism in a response in a war could be a good thing, but for a UN operation such a reaction entailed the risk of overlooking consequences that affected the role as credible intermediary.³⁹² For NATO against their background it was difficult to adjust to that.

Akashi was not the only one who held these views. Also for someone like EU negotiator Lord Owen the perception of impartiality was important. He gave as example the problem of the heavy weapons in the Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones. If the Bosnian Serbs had these weapons there, they could be threatened with air strikes. But impartiality meant that if the Bosnian Muslims had weapons in the same zone, they would also have to be attacked. However, the latter was unlikely to happen because the United States would not accept it.³⁹³

Already before July 1995 these self-imposed limitations in the execution of enforcement measures with air power had caused much disappointment and discussion in international politics and the media on the performance of UNPROFOR.³⁹⁴ Attempts to come to a joint approach together with NATO were complicated and sometimes controversial. For instance NATO commanders received orders from their superiors that came from the decision-taking bodies of NATO, but these instructions had to be in line with the intentions of the Security Council and allow for the limitations of the troops on the ground. If not, consultations were required between NATO and UN, within UNPROFOR, within the governments of the troop-contributing nations, and within the NATO member states.³⁹⁵

NATO's vision of the use of air power

Diametrically opposed to the vision of the UN and Akashi was the American vision, together with the American-dominated NATO vision. From that side there was continuous pressure to use air power. They also had little understanding for the fact that it were professional UN soldiers, from NATO countries even, who advocated restraint in the use of military means rather than using those. From the perception of UNPROFOR such a lack of understanding was due to the fact that the Americans were not represented in Bosnia with ground troops, and due to a lack of insight into the assignment of UNPROFOR which consisted of ensuring humanitarian relief and protection of the population in the Safe Areas.³⁹⁶

There were Americans at every level of the decision-making process within NATO, and they dominated this process. Though the United States was not represented in UNPROFOR with ground troops, there were Americans in all major staff sections of the staffs in Zagreb, Sarajevo and Tuzla. However, none of them was at the decision-making level: decisions on Close Air Support were the prerogative of Akashi, on whom the Americans had little influence. If the Americans wanted to influence Akashi, they mainly had to do that through Kofi Annan in New York. For the American policymakers Akashi was a 'prince of darkness', and they ventilated that vision so extensively that his reputation began to suffer. What the Americans annoyed for instance, was that Akashi held the opinion

³⁹² Akashi, 'The Limits of UN Diplomacy and the Future of Conflict Mediation', *Survival*, 37 (Winter 1995-96).

³⁹³ Owen, 'The limits of the UN peace-enforcement', *Internationale Spectator*, 49(1995)377.

³⁹⁴ Akashi, 'The Limits of UN Diplomacy and the Future of Conflict Mediation', *Survival*, 37 (1995-96)(Winter 1995-96)96.

³⁹⁵ Confidential Information (161).

³⁹⁶ ABZ, DEU/ARA/03356. Memorandum PA/Washington to DEU, 02/02/95.

that it should also be possible to punish the Bosnian Muslims using Close Air Support. For instance, behind closed doors in Zagreb Akashi once said that for every five times the Bosnian Serbs had to be attacked with Close Air Support, he wanted to punish the Bosnian Muslims at least once.³⁹⁷ In that connection the Dutch Permanent Representative at the UN, Biegman, spoke of Akashi's 'notorious even-handedness'.³⁹⁸

Particularly the American UN ambassador Madeleine Albright tried to convince the UN to use air power. She did that by attempting to win France and the United Kingdom for her ideas to use air power, in order to jointly exert pressure on Boutros-Ghali to give NATO more room and to get rid of Akashi.³⁹⁹ In May 1995 the situation in Sarajevo was more awkward than it had been since 1993, but Akashi refused to ask for military support because he wanted to continue finding a political solution, was the judgment of Foreign Affairs civil servant Hattinga van 't Sant in a Memorandum to his superiors.⁴⁰⁰

The highest NATO soldier on the scene: Admiral Leighton Smith

As a natural result of the differences in opinion between NATO and the UN at the diplomatic level, the soldiers of the two organizations also regularly were at odds. On the side of the UN there were the Force Commanders in Zagreb, Generals Janvier and before him De Lapresle, as well as their junior commanders in Sarajevo, generals Smith and before him Rose. On the side of NATO there were the highest NATO soldier in Europe, the American Joulwan, (in military terms known as Supreme Allied Commander Europe or SACEUR); and his subordinate, the highest NATO soldier on the scene, the American Admiral Leighton Smith (in military terms known as Commander in Chief Allied Forces Southern Europe or CINCSOUTH), not to be confused with the British (UN) General Rupert Smith in Sarajevo.

Using air power required the approval of both the UN and NATO, for Close Air Support as well as air strikes. That was known as the dual key procedure. For the UN initially Akashi held that key, after the air strikes on Pale it went to Boutros-Ghali, and from 22 June it was back with Akashi. The second key, NATO's, was held by Admiral Leighton Smith.

Admiral Smith became extensively acquainted with the various kinds of problems in the talks on Bosnia. For instance, he regularly found that there was a 'disconnect' between politicians and soldiers. For instance the Contact Group would have made plans without military input. It had happened that soldiers from the United States, the United Kingdom and France assessed a Contact Group plan from a military viewpoint, and then recommended not to publish it in that particular form because it was not feasible from a military point of view. Subsequently, the plan was still published without any modification.

In addition to this gap between political guidelines and military means, Smith also concluded that there was 'political inconsistency' about what had to happen in Bosnia, but Leighton Smith himself put that into perspective when he told the NIOD investigators: 'my ideas did not matter'. That did not make his ideas as a professional soldier less outspoken.

Leighton Smith found himself in a difficult intermediate position: between NATO and UNPROFOR, and between Americans and Europeans. In retrospect Leighton Smith identified the following pattern: he had felt himself put under pressure by the United States to use more extensive force. He had felt uneasy about that, for at the same time he did understand UNPROFOR's wish to prevent troubles for the troops on the ground due to the use of force. However, Smith also worried about the safety of the pilots of NATO aircraft over Bosnia: they were vulnerable to the Air Defence

³⁹⁷ Confidential interview (50).

³⁹⁸DCBC, 1975. Code Biegman 382, 01/06/96.

³⁹⁹ ABZ, DWH/ARA/00844. Code Jacobovits 320, 09/05/95; ABZ, Embassy Washington, No. 139296.

⁴⁰⁰ ABZ, DIE/2001/00023. Memorandum Plv DEU to e.g. S, DGPZ, 18/05/95, No. DEU-414/95.

Systems of the Bosnian Serbs. Yet eliminating those would mean massive air strikes, and that was something the UN opposed.

The pressure on Smith from the United States was intended to use NATO to control matters in Bosnia. The policy formulating National Security Council in Washington was manned by civil servants and politicians who had a strong opinion and more than once adopted an aggressive attitude, but who did not have any military experience themselves. As a result it happened that they tried to let soldiers do things, without knowing what they could and could not. That caused friction, also within NATO. One of the main pushers of the use of force had been mediator Holbrooke, who had already been involved in the Bosnia policy as a member of the Contact Group as early as the summer of 1994. However, he and Albright did not show much insight into the backgrounds of the conflict; Smith said that Albright and Holbrooke believed that if in the United States so many cultures could live together, that certainly should be possible in Bosnia where people even spoke the same language. It was difficult to understand for policymakers in Washington what was really going on in Bosnia, Smith thought.

Smith was also under pressure of one of his superiors, the American general and SACEUR Joulwan: 'Joulwan beat the hell out of me to do more', Smith said. Incidentally, it was not always clear for Smith whether Joulwan was wearing his US or NATO hat. According to Smith this pressure of Joulwan on him also meant that Joulwan was indirectly trying to give orders to UNPROFOR. That not only caused 'bad blood' between Smith and Joulwan, but also between Janvier and Joulwan. It did not become any simpler for Smith when also the American mediator Holbrooke tried to tell him what he had to do, while on the other hand his superior Joulwan had told them not to take any orders from Holbrooke: Holbrooke would not know the first thing about a military command structure. Even American senators tried to influence Smith: Senator Ted Stevens (Rep., Alaska) once complained to Smith that the Americans had to spend so much more money than the Europeans on fuel for aircraft. Smith had made it clear that the French had paid with 32 lives and that this was no match for the costs the United States had to make for fuel for aircraft - after that Stevens had never talked about the subject any more. In fact the only Americans from whom Leighton Smith did not feel any pressure were General Shalikasvili (the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) and the American Defence Ministry, the Pentagon.⁴⁰¹

SACEUR, General Joulwan, thought it necessary to exert pressure on Smith because according to him it was not realistic to hold on to the UN rules for peacekeeping in a setting 'where there was no peace to keep'. He thought that in a military sense the UN officials were too narrow-minded and too reluctant to use Close Air Support only because they feared it was outside the scope of the mandate. Joulwan also turned against the British doctrine that Rose supported of wider peacekeeping, meaning that though at the level of UNPROFOR as a whole the mission would keep its peacekeeping character, but that at a lower level (for instance a battalion) fighting was still possible. Precondition here was that to the party to be attacked (the VRS) the connection between violation and response had to be clear. Joulwan did not see much good in this kind of solutions from Rose, because it resulted in operations between Chapter VI and VII of the UN Charter, that is in between peacekeeping and peace-enforcement. That was because the opponent could think that you were engaged in peace-enforcement while you yourself thought it was peacekeeping, Joulwan said.⁴⁰²

On the other hand Admiral Leighton Smith was also under pressure from the UNPROFOR commanders in Zagreb and Sarajevo as regards the dangers for the peacekeepers on the ground. He said he had supported the UNPROFOR commanders in their resistance to what General Rose in Sarajevo referred to as, 'the hawks in NATO', meaning those within NATO who wanted to go further than a solution of the conflict by negotiations. According to Rose, Leighton Smith very well understood the need for a balance between the necessity to use force and the necessity to be able to continue the humanitarian mission.

⁴⁰¹ Interview Leighton Smith, 06/06/00.

⁴⁰² Interview George Joulwan, 08/06/00.

General Rose himself regarded the use of Close Air Support merely as an overture to war and – according to Leighton Smith – had managed to convince the UNPROFOR Force Commander in Zagreb, De Lapresle (Janvier's predecessor), of his views. Rose picked old or earlier hit VRS equipment, wanted the aircraft to first fly over the target for some time, and wanted the VRS warned 20 minutes in advance.⁴⁰³ To Joulwan all that was unacceptable: this procedure could only make the VRS overconfident after one of two times and the seriousness of UNPROFOR would be put to the test; this was too limited and too predictable.

Joulwan said that Rose had not wanted to listen to good advice and was too careful in the use of Close Air Support. When declaring the Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones, NATO Secretary-General Wörner had given clear instructions on their enforcement and demanded strictness to prevent NATO from losing credibility. According to Joulwan, Rose had made a mistake to want to have little to do as possible with the Bosnian-Serb violations of the regime of the Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones. Joulwan also concluded that, when he was in Sarajevo with a deputy NATO Secretary-General, and the headquarters of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command was fired at. During this briefing Joulwan could see on the map that there was VRS artillery in the Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones. Accordingly, Joulwan concluded that Rose did not want to use NATO air power. Joulwan could also see from aerial photographs that the weapons at the Heavy Weapon Collection Points were ready to fire; they were aimed at Sarajevo.⁴⁰⁴

The difference in approach between the UN (UNPROFOR) and NATO can hardly be illustrated more clearly than with this difference of opinion between Joulwan and Rose. Seen from NATO, from a military point of view, it is of course not logical to warn the enemy that an attack is imminent. In this case it would even give the Bosnian Serbs the opportunity to put their anti-aircraft missiles in position against the NATO aircraft. Rose did this (with Akashi's support) because the Bosnian Serbs should not be considered the enemy; that was not in line with the character of the peacekeeping mission. The fact that moreover Rose picked old or earlier hit VRS equipment as target, infuriated Smith and his superior Joulwan. In their opinion, after all, that unnecessarily put the lives of pilots at risk.

Consequently, Admiral Leighton Smith regularly had conflicts with Rose. Moreover, in April 1994 a British naval aircraft (known as Sea Harrier) was shot down over Gorazde. After that, Smith wanted Rose no longer to warn the VRS for an air raid. Rose did not agree with that; he felt bad that an aircraft had been shot down, but he considered it 'a routine hazard'. Smith also responded to this aircraft being shot down by saying that he no longer wanted to accept requests for air strikes that were in fact at a limited (military-tactical) level; he considered it too risky. According to him it would be better to reserve air strikes for more strategic targets such as headquarters, communication centres and logistic installations. Nevertheless if the UN should send requests for air strikes with a non-strategic target, Smith would still loyally honour these requests.⁴⁰⁵

Smith's own experience also played a part here. He had been a navy pilot in Vietnam and he saw the risk of the Air Defence Systems of the Bosnian Serbs. They fired anti-aircraft missiles from so-called Surface-to-Air-Missile (SAM) sites at NATO aircraft patrolling over Bosnia. Smith wanted to take away this risk by eliminating the Air Defence Systems of the Bosnian Serbs. Moreover, he felt supported by General Mike Ryan, his Airforce Commander. However, in the period 1994 – 1995 Smith did not get a chance to eliminate the VRS Air Defence Systems, and that frustrated him. Consequently, in June the Bosnian Serbs shot down an American F-16. After that Smith no longer wanted to send aircraft to areas where Bosnian-Serb SAMs were located: 'we became predictable'. The risk for Western aircraft was even greater because the VRS had a habit of relocating these SAMs.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ Interview Leighton Smith, 06/06/00.

⁴⁰⁴ Interview George Joulwan, 08/06/00.

⁴⁰⁵ Rose, *Fighting for Peace*, p. 114, 118, 143, 160, 170 and 177.

⁴⁰⁶ Interview Leighton Smith, 06/06/00. Smith said, unlike from the American Minister of Defence Perry, he had experienced little support in this from Joulwan.

So Smith wanted to protect the pilots of patrolling western aircraft from being shot at by the Bosnian Serbs, just like UNPROFOR felt strongly about the safety of the ground troops. After the VRS had proved in practice that their air defence was effective, Admiral Smith demanded permission to first carry out air strikes on these Bosnian-Serb Air Defence Systems. Until then he would not respond to requests by UNPROFOR for Close Air Support, he said, because that would be too dangerous for the pilots.

Admiral Smith did not really believe in the proportionality idea supported by UNPROFOR, but he preferred to use force.⁴⁰⁷ However, it appeared rather difficult for NATO to get approval for the use of air power (air strike or Close Air Support): UNPROFOR had to be the first to turn the key, and after that NATO should follow. In the opinion of SACEUR Joulwan, UNPROFOR had more flexibility in the realization of their mandate than they thought. He based that optimistic thought on the idea that NATO soldiers would think more in terms of protecting the area and UN soldiers more in terms of protecting people; protecting a territory with fixed borders was easier to realize than protecting people.

The problem with eliminating the VRS Air Defence Systems, what Smith really wanted, was that it would require a long-term campaign of air strikes, and UNPROFOR did not feel like that at all. Rose could not understand that Smith was in favour of that; had it not been Smith who had shown so much understanding for the safety of peacekeepers on the ground? That could be put at risk by such an air campaign. Rose suspected that Smith was once more being put under pressure by his superior of SACEUR Joulwan to let NATO do something in which Smith himself did not believe and Rose even less. Rose tried to get support from De Lapresle against these ideas on the part of NATO, but he said he could do little against the wish for a stricter NATO air campaign. Eventually the UN did win, and there was no campaign of air strikes on strategic Bosnian-Serb targets.⁴⁰⁸

That put Admiral Smith in a fix between NATO and UNPROFOR. It appeared that up to the highest level (General De Lapresle in Zagreb) UNPROFOR had different ideas about developments in Bosnia than Smith himself had. Smith remained convinced that a firm attitude of UN and NATO was required to make these organizations perform successfully. If that firm attitude was not adopted, it would mean an invitation to the Bosnian Serbs to take not the slightest notice of the UN mandate, Smith thought.⁴⁰⁹

Therefore, NATO and indirectly the United States put pressure on Smith to induce the UN commanders to at least make more use of Close Air Support. In that connection Smith had continually been up and at it with De Lapresle and Janvier, but neither De Lapresle nor Janvier were really in favour of it. They feared that it would endanger the safety of their personnel. Smith concluded that to many people within the UN it was not clear how Close Air Support had to be used, what its effectiveness was, and what could be achieved with it. Another factor here was that NATO overestimated the effectiveness of UNPROFOR somewhat. Unlike NATO, UNPROFOR did not have a centralized command, no unity of command, and there was little consultation; it has already been pointed out that the organizations had been set up for different purposes to begin with. That made cooperation awkward. Then, in between there were still more organizations such as the monitoring mission of the EC (the ECMM), the Contact Group and UNHCR, and there were UNMOs. Through it all there was the problem that in addition there was friction between the UN headquarters in Sarajevo and Zagreb on the question who really was in command in Bosnia.

The main problem for Smith remained however that there was no 'unity of effort' between UNPROFOR and NATO. This difference could not even be removed at the highest level. NATO Secretary-General from October 1994, Claes, and his counterpart at the UN, Boutros-Ghali only wrote; they hardly ever spoke to each other. According to Leighton Smith politicians in general did not speak enough to each other on the question how the gaps between organizations and countries could be

⁴⁰⁷ Interview Leighton Smith, 06/06/00.

⁴⁰⁸ Rose, *Fighting for Peace*, p. 200, 204 en 210.

⁴⁰⁹ Confidential Information (150).

bridged: ‘they could not get their act together’, Leighton Smith said.⁴¹⁰ Boutros-Ghali admitted to the NIOD investigators that indeed his relation with Claes was not too good. According to Boutros-Ghali that was because Claes felt a stronger American influence than his predecessor Wörner (Secretary-General until his death in August 1994).⁴¹¹ At the operational level contacts improved after a liaison officer of the International Military Staff of NATO became the link between the UN headquarters in New York and the NATO headquarters in Brussels. Equipped with a cryptofax this officer could arrange the traffic between the two headquarters. Because this officer was relieved every fortnight, it helped NATO to get to know the UN.⁴¹² Moreover, in Zagreb a NATO liaison officer was stationed who maintained the contacts between Zagreb and the NATO headquarters in Naples (Admiral Smith) and Vicenza (the headquarters of the Fifth Allied Tactical Airforce, in short 5ATAF).

The no-fly zone

One way to use air power was a preventive one. Bosnian airspace was a No Fly Zone. One of the objectives of the NATO operations in Bosnian airspace (in NATO terms known as Deny Flight), was to deny both warring factions the use of the Bosnian airspace, even if it in practice only applied to the Bosnian-Serb airforce. That objective was realized in so far as it concerned fighter aircraft; violation of the no-fly zone over Bosnia by Bosnian-Serb fighter aircraft was a rare. However, NATO fighter aircraft could do little against the use of helicopters by the contending parties and, consequently, a lot of criticism was heard on the failure to maintain the No Fly Zone for helicopter flights.

Both warring factions used helicopters intensively; the VRS mainly used them to move troops and equipment, to carry off casualties and also for trips of Bosnian-Serb liaison officers to Serbia: UNPROFOR units and UNMOs in Zepa and Srebrenica frequently observed helicopter flights over the Drina, usually at night, which was a sign of Serbian support to the VRS. However, this should not lead to the conclusion that the Bosnian Serbs were the main violators of the No Fly Zone; in May 1995 the Bosnian Muslims were responsible for the main part of the observed violations. The ABiH mainly used helicopters to move equipment.⁴¹³

When the No Fly Zone was declared in July 1993, NATO called its violation by helicopters of no military importance. This attitude of NATO changed when it had appeared that the warring factions also used helicopter flights to carry supplies to their troops. Consecutive Force Commanders of UNPROFOR feared revenge actions against UNPROFOR and UNHCR if NATO should try to attack helicopters of the warring factions. The NATO Military Committee accepted that, and urged for a system of permission for helicopter flights.⁴¹⁴ Nothing came of that and in later days the use of helicopters only increased, by both VRS and ABiH. For instance in September 1994 near the Stolice tower – an important communication tower – there even were reports of 130 flights on one day, which also raised doubts about quality of the reports because it was questionable whether there even were so many helicopters on the entire Balkans.⁴¹⁵ These reports came from UNPROFOR; double counts of helicopters seem to offer an explanation for such a high number.

Enforcing the No Fly Zone for helicopters met with a number of hurdles that had to be passed. NATO aircraft that had to follow the movements of helicopters over Bosnia (that could be done with flying radar installations, known as Airborne Warning and Control System or AWACS) seemed to experience quite some trouble. If they succeeded, attacking a helicopter was not so easy for NATO

⁴¹⁰ Interview Leighton Smith, 06/06/00.

⁴¹¹ Interview Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 30/01/00.

⁴¹² Interview Manfred Eisele, 14/10/99.

⁴¹³ The VRS had eighteen Russian-made transport helicopters of the type MI-8 that could carry 24-28 people or 3000 kg freight, the ABiH had six and the VJ 64. In addition, parties respectively had some eighteen, three and 63 light Gazelle helicopters of French/British origin.

⁴¹⁴ Confidential Information (151).

⁴¹⁵ Interview Leighton Smith, 06/06/00.

fighter aircraft in the mountainous terrain of Bosnia. That not only had to do with militarily-technical reasons, but mainly with the existing Rules of Engagement for UNPROFOR. Those prescribed that civilian helicopters, possibly with passengers on board, could not be attacked. For that reason a NATO pilot first personally had to confirm visually that it was not a civilian helicopter which was nearly impossible at night or when the helicopter was flying low. This made a complete ban on helicopter flights the obvious solution, but it would imply that flights with military helicopters to carry off casualties would not be permitted either. In that case the warring factions would undoubtedly want to test NATO by checking whether NATO would really dare to shoot down a helicopter carrying wounded. Within NATO that led to the conclusion that under the circumstances it would be better to refrain from attacking helicopters altogether. The US ambassador at NATO, Hunter, pointed out to Admiral Smith that this decision did affect NATO's credibility since it made the flying ban for helicopters a dead letter. Admiral Smith had confronted him by saying that he knew a solution: 'shoot them all down'. After that he had never heard again about the problem with maintaining the No Fly Zone for helicopters. The chairman of the NATO Military Committee also suggested to just shoot down all helicopters, but at the same time he pointed at the problem of evacuation of casualties and attempts to test NATO that it would entail.⁴¹⁶ In turn the fact that NATO left all helicopters alone, caused suspicion in Zagreb: there were UN and NATO officers in Zagreb who believed that NATO was not really prepared to hunt down helicopters, had to do with covert support for the Army of the Bosnian Muslims (the ABiH) rather than with fear of bad publicity.⁴¹⁷

3. Air strikes in practice: the second half of 1994

There was a procedure that had to be followed to come to an air strike. Air strikes served a political purpose, and the first step meant that it had to be determined what that political purpose was. Subsequently it had to be determined what military targets would enable the UN to achieve their political purpose. Then it had to be assessed what the military and political consequences of such an action would be, and what the next step would have to be. The answer to these questions would have to be consistent with the previously asked question on the political purpose. Finally the question had to be asked what precautions had to be taken to ensure the safety of UNPROFOR on the ground and whether these precautions could be taken prior to the air strike.

Carrying out the air strike was no concern of the UN 'key holder'. In addition, unlike in the case of Close Air Support, the Force Commander in Zagreb could not delegate carrying out the action to the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo. Neither could the highest NATO authority in the area, Admiral Smith, delegate the action to the commander of the Airforce that was actually going to carry out the attack (5ATAF in Vicenza referred to earlier).⁴¹⁸

Air strikes definitely had their practical limitations, resulting from the described request procedure. That made them ineffective for eliminating artillery and mortars because these could quickly be relocated. If they were deployed in densely populated areas, an air strike was in fact not a realistic option. The geographic conditions in Bosnia and the weather conditions did not make air strikes (and other airborne operations) any easier either. An additional problem was that proportionality was the basis: there had to be a certain relation between violation and punishment. At the same time an air strike had to be strong enough to be effective. Moreover, to have the desired effect every next air strike had to be stronger than the previous one. A complicating factor was that the warring factions could take precautions to reduce their vulnerability to subsequent air strikes, for instance by preparing their Air Defence Systems for counteractions against NATO aircraft: the risk that NATO aircraft could be shot down by the Bosnian-Serb air defence warned NATO to operate cautiously in Bosnian airspace. A

⁴¹⁶ Confidential Information (162); interview Leighton-Smith 06/06/00.

⁴¹⁷ Confidential Information (75).

⁴¹⁸ DCBC, 1485. Fax OCHKlu, 'Explanation commonly used terms operation 'Deny Flight', 26/04/94; De Lapresle in Biermann and Vadset, *UN Peacekeeping in Trouble*, p. 143.

highly complicating additional factor was that before air strikes could be carried out, the troops on the ground and the various UN organizations in the field had to be warned. That made them less vulnerable for countermeasures. Air strikes could also have undesired effects: the Bosnian Serbs could respond by taking UN personnel hostage, stopping convoys or breaking off negotiations.

The question whether misbehaviour of the warring factions should be punished with air strikes was a delicate subject that was bothering UNPROFOR and NATO. Discussions on the subject mainly became heated due to three causes: firstly, rather soon the warring factions did not care much about the Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones around Sarajevo and Gorazde that had been declared by NATO in the first half of 1994; secondly, UN helicopters and UNPROFOR on the ground were under fire; and finally, the VRS threatened to shoot down aeroplanes with humanitarian relief that flew to Sarajevo, if the UN did not meet the demands of the VRS.

In September 1994 all this was reason for NATO Admiral Smith to suggest to start air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs to UNPROFOR Force Commander De Lapresle. Smith thought that the VRS were trying to push back political frontiers, and they could do as they liked. Direct reason for Smith to start meddling with politics was that NATO pilots were running risks in their aircraft: on 8 September 1994 the VRS fired at two British navy Sea Harriers with Surface-to-Air missiles (type SA-7), and elsewhere the same threatened to happen with other anti-aircraft missiles (type SA-6 and SA-2) because there the VRS were following NATO aircraft with their target tracking radar. Admiral Smith was convinced the VRS would increase such activities to test the credibility of the UN and NATO. For that reason he thought it necessary to send a signal to make the VRS change their behaviour and he proposed a series of air strikes. He also directly announced to Force Commander De Lapresle that if he should not accept this, Smith would take it to the highest political level.⁴¹⁹

Smith's premonition in the letter appeared to be correct. UNPROFOR indeed refused his request. In September 1994 Force Commander De Lapresle in Zagreb and Commander Bosnia-Herzegovina Command Rose were not prepared to start air strikes 'based on other considerations external to the United Nations', unmistakably meaning the United States. The series of air strikes proposed by Smith on four command centres and logistic installations as well as seven weapon sites, all of the VRS, was way beyond what they wanted. That would only cause counter-attacks by their VRS on UN personnel on the ground and on the Safe Areas, they feared. De Lapresle emphasized that for peacekeeping the use of force should be related to the established violation. He reverted to the objectives of air strikes by pointing out that when these were used the force should be proportional to the violation, and that it should be used as soon as possible after an incident to make that relation clear.

De Lapresle had a clear bottom-line: 'In this civil war, all is based on provocation and reaction'. De Lapresle's greatest fear was that the UN would lose its impartiality by using force without sufficient evidence and without relation to the violations; he argued that an uncomprehended air strike would not only risk the supposed impartiality of UNPROFOR, but would also mean the end of UNPROFOR's freedom of movement so their humanitarian task could no longer be performed. Another objection of the Force Commander against air strikes was that the troop-contributing nations had made their soldiers available as peacekeepers and not for fighting.

De Lapresle reiterated that his main staff officers and higher commanders in Bosnia, all from countries that contributed troops and were members of NATO, fully supported him. He was convinced of the correctness of his decision not to permit air strikes at the scale requested by Smith. De Lapresle even expressly informed Smith that he was not under command of the UN authorities. The final reason why De Lapresle thought these air strikes could not be carried out was, that they required protective measures. He was referring to the withdrawal plans for UNPROFOR that NATO was preparing, but that were far from ready at the moment. De Lapresle did recognize the necessity for

⁴¹⁹ DCBC, 1505. Smith to de Lapresle, 11/09/94, unnumbered; Confidential Information (162). Smith wrote that he was acting under orders, but not from whom. Probably from SACEUR, general Joulwan, who presented Smith's letter to the acting NATO Secretary-General that same day.

UNPROFOR and NATO to improve their mutual understanding. As a result the plan arose to have De Lapresle brief NATO on the situation, and to have the Permanent Representatives of the NATO member states from Brussels visit Sarajevo.⁴²⁰

A few days later NATO was brought up to date by generals De Lapresle and Rose. De Lapresle had done so earlier on 29 June 1994 in Brussels. Then he had opposed ‘frappes aériennes’ (air strikes) if there was no clear political objective and the political and military consequences had not been assessed thoroughly. If on a high level NATO and the UN would decide that air strikes were the right answer, then that was a grave mistake for the future of UNPROFOR, De Lapresle said. On 15 September 1994 De Lapresle and Rose were present at a meeting with the NATO Military Committee. There they were given the opportunity to adjust the image NATO had with regard to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. It became a repetition of moves.⁴²¹ De Lapresle and Rose once more explained that after all UNPROFOR’s mandate comprised only peacekeeping, and that UNPROFOR would never cross the line to a combat situation. De Lapresle remained opposed to air strikes; about Close Air Support he said that UNPROFOR only decided what requests would be made for Close Air Support. The question whether the request was accepted depended on many factors that were usually not known outside UNPROFOR, and it was certainly not true that all kinds of violations culminated until, when a certain level was exceeded, UNPROFOR decided to take action. De Lapresle’s major fears remained that the dialogue with the warring factions would be broken off. The remaining alternative, humiliation of UNPROFOR, was a lesser problem in his opinion than losing UNPROFOR’s neutrality.⁴²²

The interventions of De Lapresle, intended to prevent the use of air power to avoid risking the troops on the ground, had no effect. Within NATO, in particular in the United States, the prevailing opinion remained that a firmer hand was required for the Bosnian Serbs. That showed for instance shortly after De Lapresle’s appearance at the NATO Military Committee, at a meeting of the NATO ministers in Sevilla on 29 and 30 September 1994. The American Minister of Defence, Perry, presented proposals at this meeting to let NATO respond more ‘forceful’ to the Bosnian-Serb provocations. It was clear to the participants of this summit that the Americans had an additional objective in mind, i.e. to force the Bosnian Serbs to accept the Contact Group Peace Plan.

Though Perry’s British and French colleagues, Rifkind and Léotard, mitigated his ideas a little, they did reach agreement on how forceful had to be defined: attacking more than one target, and no more advance warnings. Rifkind stated that on the other hand if the Bosnian Serbs were no longer warned, that could cause problems in the form of countermeasures by the VRS, which could hinder the humanitarian relief.

The Netherlands was a not unimportant player in the airspace over Bosnia, but was not involved in this consultation between the United States, France and the United Kingdom: that had taken place outside the conference room. Yet the Netherlands did support the proposed line of these three, through Minister Voorhoeve of Defence, who then had his first meeting with NATO ministers since he had become a minister, well over a month earlier. Voorhoeve too pointed at possible counter-productive results of inexpert use of ‘forceful’ actions for the inhabitants of Srebrenica and for Dutchbat.⁴²³

Here also the use of the word ‘forceful’ covered up the differences of opinion between Americans and Europeans: unlike the impression Perry gave at a press conference, the American proposals were not accepted decisions and neither was there an agreed NATO view.⁴²⁴ The differences on the interpretation of the word ‘forceful’ directly surfaced again: the Americans blamed the British

⁴²⁰ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 79, File 2.5.4. Air Support 17/08/93 – 06/02/95. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 12/09/94, No. Z-1397; Letter de Lapresle to Admiral Smith, 12/09/94. Secret.

⁴²¹ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 62/77, File 2.8 Nato 25/05/93 – 05/06/95. Fax Office of the FC to Commander BHC Fwd, Remarks of LtGen de Lapresle to NATO [29/06/94], 02/0794, No. FC/94/409.

⁴²² DCBC, 1505. HPMV to CDS, report 36th MC/PS, 15/09/94.

⁴²³ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05276. Code Van Mierlo 377, 03/10/94.

⁴²⁴ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05276. Code Veenendaal NATO 1534, 03/10/94.

for their ambiguous attitude; initially, in Sevilla they had shown themselves advocates of a more forceful course of action, and after that they once again opted for muddling through.⁴²⁵

Forceful action: will UN and NATO reach agreement?

Force Commander General De Lapresle remained against this more 'forceful' action. In the first place he thought it would increase the risks for the UN personnel, and he wondered whether the troop-contributing nations and the permanent members of the Security Council were prepared to take that risk; it would mean risking more casualties among UN personnel. De Lapresle once more listed the reasons to oppose that. It had appeared to him that the Bosnian Serbs did 'understand' a direct response by the UN to a VRS action, but not when it came much later. And in practice it would always take 24 hours to respond to a VRS action, at least when it involved inhabited areas. And in practice it nearly always involved attacks in inhabited areas: warring factions liked to deploy their heavy weapons there to make the risk of collateral damage caused by the opponents as high as possible in the hope that they would not dare to attack.

The 24 hours response time was caused by the fact that for bombing a target in inhabited areas NATO had to allocate aircraft with the correct bombs; bombs that could be aimed exactly, known as Precision Guided Munition. That technique was still highly advanced in 1995 and there were only few aircraft that could drop these bombs. Precision Guided Munition means that during its fall the bomb can find the target with the aid of sensors, usually because someone on the ground (a Forward Air Controller) aims a laser beam at the target. Such bombs are unlike the then more common 'dumb bombs'; these are not able to be aimed at the target as soon as they have been dropped. And the problem was that most aircraft were armed with these 'dumb bombs': these only had a one percent chance to hit a small target such as a tank or a gun and could hardly be used to bomb targets in inhabited areas.

In his argument against more forceful action De Lapresle pointed out that in peacekeeping it was the custom to give the warring faction to be attacked a short advance warning, and accordingly General Rose did so in practice. If they chose not to warn the party to be attacked any more, that would lead to more casualties among UN personnel, and that had to be balanced with the life of one single pilot. Finally De Lapresle compared the air actions with the Rules of Engagement for UNPROFOR: those did not even permit retaliation.

At the NATO summit in Sevilla the idea had been broached to give NATO at least four targets before starting air actions; that was in line with Smith's ideas to start a series of air strikes. However, there was little understanding for these thoughts within UNPROFOR; there were hardly any areas with four targets. And then there still was the general objection on the part of UNPROFOR that the Bosnian Serbs had to be aware of the justification of attacks on those targets at the moment. If not, it would only cause an increased risk for the UN personnel in a wider area.

Akashi and De Lapresle began to suspect NATO of using air power against the Bosnian Serbs as a secondary objective of putting pressure on the Bosnian Serbs to accept the Contact Group plan. Akashi and De Lapresle rejected that: according to them NATO air power was intended as support for UNPROFOR and not to strive after political objectives. The Bosnian Serbs had to be put under pressure to accept the Contact Group plan with economic and political means. If NATO should use air power to increase that pressure, it could only lead to escalation, departure of UNPROFOR, and a public opinion in the Republika Srpska that turned against the political process.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁵ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05241. Code Van Mierlo 184, 27/10/94. Assistant Secretary of State Kornblum said that to Van Mierlo.

⁴²⁶ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 07 and 08/10/94, Nos. Z-1525 and Z-1529. Record of Discussions, Meeting of SRSG, FC and Staff to Review Fixed Targets, and the Implications of NATO Defence Ministers' Meeting, Seville, 30/09/94.

However, within NATO the train thundered on; it were mainly the Americans who kept emphasizing that the Bosnian Serbs had to be tackled with air strikes. They were not to be stopped by Akashi or De Lapresle. The United States already made a list of decisions for the North Atlantic Council to the effect that in the event of air strikes no advance warning should be given any more and that at least four targets had to be authorized.⁴²⁷ Akashi still tried to put it to Perry that this was a disastrous plan when the American Minister of Defence visited Split, but his arguments fell on deaf ears. The American position in the North Atlantic Council of 5 October 1994 in Brussels was that first NATO had to determine how to use air power. That way they were driving at a confrontation with the UN: if Boutros-Ghali did not agree with this line, he should just inform NATO about it and then it could be discussed. The Netherlands supported that vision, but other troop-contributing nations adopted a more cautious attitude: the French did not want to leave the proportionality principle, and the British wanted to consult with the UNPROFOR commanders on the consequences of the NATO decision. The Danes had their doubts about the wisdom of the decision to attack four targets, and the Norwegians wanted more insight into the UN position before NATO took a decision.

However, the United States kept deliberately aiming at a policy of informing rather than consulting the UN. The Americans wanted to end the 'pin-prick' operations that endangered the pilots, as NATO Admiral Smith had earlier made clear to UN General Rose. NATO's first worry must be the safety of the crews, they decided.⁴²⁸ Boutros-Ghali was informed of the - unchanged - NATO decision without asking his approval, in accordance with the American line. Subsequently it was no surprise that Boutros-Ghali could only inform his NATO colleague, substitute Secretary-General Balanzino⁴²⁹, that the Brussels decisions 'create problems for me'. The Russians had already asked him how the NATO decisions related to those of the Security Council and the neutral position of UNPROFOR. The Russians wondered whether NATO took into account the consequences for the humanitarian relief and the responses by the Bosnian Serbs who undoubtedly would start taking hostages.⁴³⁰

For the UN command in Zagreb it remained to be seen what it was that NATO really wanted. There were no real objections to attacks on the Bosnian-Serb Air Defence Systems provided that these were small-scale and provided they were carried out according to the dual key procedure. Akashi warned that NATO could not just override the current procedures for the use of air power. Consequently, Zagreb saw the planned air strikes as NATO actions rather than UNPROFOR actions. For practical reasons alone Zagreb already had problems with this NATO *alleingang*. The question arose for instance: if four targets were assigned, did NATO pick one or were all four of them attacked? It already was a great problem to warn UNPROFOR personnel in the field at short notice when one target was attacked. NATO seemed to fully overlook that. Another objection was that NATO only focused on one party: the Bosnian Serbs. However, more UNPROFOR soldiers had been killed as a result of actions of the Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats than through actions of the Bosnian Serbs. According to Akashi, the main reason that as far as UNPROFOR was concerned air power would only be used against the VRS was a practical one: only the Surface-to-Air missiles of the VRS constituted a risk to the NATO aircraft and that way hindered the use of air power; and only the VRS had fighter aircraft. The other warring factions in Bosnia did not have those.

The NATO proposals were made plausible with arguments for a more effective use of the aircraft, but Akashi thought that in addition there were all kinds of other motives for the American call for more forceful action: according to him the proposals were actually meant to exert pressure on the Bosnian Serbs. At least the Bosnian-Serb regime in Pale had understood it like that, he reported to Annan. Neither did Akashi want to have anything to do with reasons of internal American nature to

⁴²⁷ DCBC, no. 2021. Secure Fax DCBC to Sitten Klu, 051819Z Oct 94, no. 1451.

⁴²⁸ Confidential Information (151).

⁴²⁹ Balanzino, Deputy NATO Secretary-General under Wörner, became acting Secretary-General after the latter's death on 13 August 1994. He held that post until Claes became Secretary-General on 17 October 1994.

⁴³⁰ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 07/10/94, No. MSC-3256. Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations to The Secretary-General, 06/10/94, No. 541/n.

come to a more forceful course of action. Those reasons were that American Congress was still exerting pressure to lift the arms embargo against the Bosnian Muslims. The European troop-contributing nations did not like that because it entailed the risk of an escalation with all the connected risks for the UNPROFOR ground forces. That escalation could eventually result in withdrawal of UNPROFOR. That in turn would mean that the American ground forces would have to come to Bosnia (see previous chapter). The American government wanted to prevent that and for that reason they appeared to want to get ahead of Congress by a more forceful action (read: air strikes) against the Bosnian Serbs. Akashi also considered another American argument irrelevant, that of the American air force being only too happy to prove that they could play a role in a conflict like the one in Bosnia. The American reasoning was that until that moment the NATO aircraft had not been deployed in the correct manner over Bosnia; Akashi and the staff in Zagreb considered that absurd arguments. With 'the correct manner' the Americans meant that the aircraft had not been used for air strikes but only in an attempt to make an impression on the Bosnian Serbs. The UN could use a similar argument: the white-painted armoured vehicles were not used for their intended purpose either. In short, NATO thought that UNPROFOR had to deter the Bosnian Serbs, with NATO support. Akashi was convinced that the deterrence theories did not work in Bosnia. Those theories were only effective if UNPROFOR could escalate in the same manner as the contending parties could.⁴³¹ And that was not within the possibilities of UNPROFOR.

So what it came down to was that Akashi thought that what NATO wanted would lead to escalation, and he did not want that. That fundamental difference of opinion caused a lot of tussle. The apparent result was that NATO got the best of it: In October 1994 NATO and UN confirmed that they were determined to make an effective use of air power to deter attacks on UNPROFOR or the Safe Areas. In practice cooperation between UN and NATO remained necessary because of the dual key systems, so future conflicts remained possible.

The wording of the compromise between UN and NATO was that if air strikes were necessary, the highest authorities of UN and NATO on site would observe the following procedure: in accordance with the proportionality principle targets would be chosen from a prearranged list of targets. As a rule that would be three or four targets. Less was also an option, if it was not possible to identify so many targets. More than four would also have to be possible on occasion. Then it was the task of Force Commander De Lapresle to determine the priorities and sequence. As regards the advance warning of the contending parties to be attacked it had been determined that a general warning would be sent ('there will be an air strike'), but not a tactical warning (where and when the attack would). An exception to that could be made if Akashi and De Lapresle considered it necessary to prevent casualties among the population or UNPROFOR. However, such a warning could not be issued without permission from NATO Admiral Smith. This arrangement seemed to indicate that NATO had made itself subordinate to the UN again, but that did not appear from the way in which this arrangement was made public: NATO was the first to make their views clear to the press, the troop-contributing nations and Russia. That raised some eyebrows in New York because the UN has already planned a meeting of the troop-contributing nations to make it clear what the agreement entailed.⁴³²

The proof of the pudding

The first test for the reassessed relations between UN and NATO came on 21 November 1994. It became a telling example of the use of air power, including the discussion on how exactly such deployment should be arranged and what the consequences of the attack would be.

⁴³¹ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 13/10/94, No. Z-1560.

⁴³² NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Only Cable Annan to Knutsson on mission with the Secretary-General. 28/10/94, No. 3519.

During the previous weeks VRS fighter aircraft had departed from the Bosnian-Serb airfield of Udbina, in the Krajina in Croatia; a clear violation of the flying ban. These fighter aircraft had attacked nearby Bihac, one of the six Safe Areas. In response, on 21 November NATO carried out an air strike on this airfield, the most extensive one so far in the Bosnian war. In the decision-making process for this specific attack the familiar pattern of different views between UN and NATO cropped up again: De Lapresle and Rose declared to oppose attacks on aircraft and air defence systems, because VRS soldiers might be killed. So the target of the attack was limited to rendering the airfield useless. NATO Admiral Smith would have preferred to press ahead, but he accepted that the attack would only be aimed at the runway system and those air defence systems that constituted a direct threat to NATO aircraft. That did remain frustrating for NATO; the wording of Smith's Air Commander, Ryan, was quite explicit: 'You can't bomb the SAM sites unless they shoot at you. You can't pre-emptively take them out. Those kinds of restrictions are wacko. That is a stupid way to run a war.' At a press conference after the successful attack Smith too could not disguise the discord between UN and NATO either. According to him it applied for the UN that 'their principle concern is the safety of their forces and their mission, being peacekeeping'. That was what the attack had been geared to, 'rather than what some of us might consider more military effective.'⁴³³

Right away there was a new opportunity to test the cooperation between UN and NATO. The next day, on 22 November, the VRS fired two Surface-to-Air missiles (type SA-2) at two British aircraft patrolling over Bihac. It were near misses but NATO was in uproar again. NATO Admiral Smith wanted to respond by attacking all Air Defence Systems deployed in Bihac. Again the UN put up a fight. Rose did not want to respond to the incident, because he was afraid a NATO air strike would end in a war orchestrated by Mladic. Rose considered it wiser to send one more warning first. However, Rose was overruled: Not only De Lapresle but now even Akashi thought they had warned enough but apparently the Bosnian Serbs were not prepared to listen. Smith and De Lapresle did agree to keep a second group of aircraft standby to attack other SAM sites. However, that would not happen until the moment that VRS air defence acted against NATO aircraft. The attacks were carried out on 23 November and they were successful.⁴³⁴

In the meantime the VRS continued their offensive on the ground in Bihac. In response to that on 25 November NATO aircraft took off again that were authorized to give Close Air Support. However, that did not happen because the aircraft could not find the tanks and the artillery. Bosnian-Serb air defence had already been in action again to be able to fire anti-aircraft missiles at NATO aircraft. For that reason Admiral Smith requested permission to attack the SAM site from which that had happened. Although the circumstances had not materially changed, Akashi did not permit air strikes this time, for two reasons: in the first place he did not want to disturb the 'extremely sensitive negotiations' that had started between the Bosnian Muslims and the Bosnian Serbs. The second argument was even more important: Akashi considered the combative attitude of the VRS at that moment a reason not to start air strikes, in view of the risks for the UN personnel on the ground and for the mission as the whole.

That way it looked as if there were not going to be any air strikes for the time being because the Bosnian Serbs were playing cat and mouse with UNPROFOR and NATO. Akashi did realize the far-reaching character of his intention not to permit any new air strikes for the time being; that was a reason for him to apply to his 'superiors': the UN in New York and the troop-contributing nations would first have to declare themselves on new air strikes.⁴³⁵

Akashi's intention also caused discord between him and Force Commander De Lapresle. They agreed on their rejection of new air strikes, but Akashi recognized that this meant that the Bosnian-Serb Air Defence Systems remained operational. He realized that as a result enforcing the No Fly Zone and

⁴³³ Lutgert and De Winter, *Check the horizon*, p. 321-327, p. 301-315. The quoted statements by Ryan come from: M.P. Kelly, 'Good to go'. *The rescue of Scott O'Grady from Bosnia*, Annapolis, 1996, p. 15-16.

⁴³⁴ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 22/11/94, No. Z-1769.

⁴³⁵ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Only Cable Akashi to the Secretary-General, 26/11/94, No. Z-1806.

giving Close Air Support might be no longer possible in the future. De Lapresle opposed that. He stated not to have any objections against future Close Air Support. Neither did De Lapresle have any objections against Rose's idea of limited air strikes (only attack unimportant equipment, and warn 20 minutes in advance).⁴³⁶

Akashi was under pressure from NATO, that wanted to continue large-scale air strikes on the Bosnian-Serb Air Defence Systems. Akashi feared that NATO would carry out new air strikes without observing the agreed the dual key procedure, so he reverted to a kill-or-cure remedy. For fear of the negative consequences of new air strikes Akashi proposed as 'the lesser of two evils' to provisionally suspend *all* NATO flights over Bosnia, so also the regular patrol flights. New York realized that new problems had developed in the relation with NATO. Therefore, Boutros-Ghali sent his Undersecretary-General for Political Affairs, Goulding, to Brussels to clarify matters.

During this period (late November) the VRS were very active with their air defence. In five days' time no less than fifteen NATO aircraft had been followed by the so-called target tracking radars of the VRS air defence (radar lock-ons), that can be used to send a Surface-to-Air-missile onto its target. In addition, nine Surface-to-Air missiles were actually launched. That made it clear to NATO as well that in such a setting the possibilities to protect UNPROFOR and the Safe Areas were very limited. Yet it was also clear that in the not so near future the problems between the UN and NATO would persist.

Consultation between NATO and UN at the highest level

That the gap between NATO and UN was still deep, appeared from a verbal dispute that broke out at the highest level between these organizations. At the consultation with the troop-contributing nations, UN Undersecretary-General Annan had said that NATO was applying pressure to achieve 'widespread use of air power' in Bosnia to eliminate the Air Defence Systems of the Bosnian Serbs. NATO on the other hand stated that it was only about the safety of NATO fighter aircraft (and also UN transport aircraft). At the consultation acting NATO Secretary-General Balanzino stated that suppression of the Air Defence Systems was bound to the principle of the dual key; for consolation he promised the UN that NATO would stick to this dual key procedure. Balanzino also pointed out that the limitation was that only sites that were a threat to NATO aircraft could be target. That was not the same as the 'widespread campaign' of air strikes, for which neither the Military Committee nor the North Atlantic Council had given permission.

With these statements the NATO Secretary-General did take a sting out of the conflict between UN and NATO. Claes' promise that NATO would stick to the dual key procedure, meant a return to the well-known routine, in which the UN took the lead. Boutros-Ghali took another sting from the conflict because he was of the opinion that actual suspension of all NATO flights would cause more problems than it would solve. That meant Boutros-Ghali rebuked his Special Representative Akashi, who was the one who had proposed to suspend these flights. Boutros-Ghali tried to cover that diplomatically by pointing out that at least Akashi's worries had once more been brought to the attention of the military and political leaders of NATO.

To the dismay of New York the affair had an unpleasant end because a UN spokesman in Sarajevo gave 'exactly the wrong signal at an extremely delicate time' by stating that it was indeed true that NATO had suspended flights over Bosnia on the request of the UN; which was what Akashi had proposed but the UN Secretary-General had not agreed and in reality it had not come to that. While Boutros-Ghali had personally done his best to keep this idea of Akashi behind closed doors, a spokesman unwillingly brought the discord out into the open.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁶ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 26/11/94, No. Z-1807 with attached Interoffice Memorandum de Lapresle to Akashi (Only), 25/11/94.

⁴³⁷ NIOD Coll. Ashton. Only Cables Annan to Akashi, info Goulding, 30/11/94, No. 3974, 01/12/94, No. 3987 and 02/12/94, No. 4005; Letter Sergio Balanzino to Kofi Annan, 30/11/94, No. DSG/94/895.

Reactions of the Bosnian Serbs

The Western media welcomed the new air actions: at last the time of empty threats was over. It did become clear that these attacks started a chain reaction in the relation between Bosnian Serbs on the one hand and NATO and UN on the other.

The attack at the airfield of Udbina on 21 November did not directly invoke reactions on the part of the Bosnian Serbs, but countermeasures taken by the VRS caused major problems for both NATO and the UN: hostages were taken and the freedom of movement of UNPROFOR was restricted. After that the Bosnian Serbs made it increasingly difficult for NATO to operate freely in the airspace over Bosnia by activating their Air Defence Systems (with Surface-to-Air missiles of the type SA-2 and SA-6): the Bosnian Serbs in fact no longer permitted NATO aircraft to fly over Bosnia without their approval. Consequently, the humanitarian flights at Sarajevo came to a halt and Sarajevo airport remained besieged. This event induced the newly appointed NATO Secretary-General Claes to say that he had learned his lesson that peace-enforcement and peacekeeping did not mix. A decisive peace could not be imposed by NATO from the air, as long as on the ground the UN was commanded, deployed and equipped for peacekeeping, Claes thought.⁴³⁸

The Bosnian Serbs complained bitterly about NATO: during the air strikes of 23 November 'vandal NATO aircraft' had caused damage, many civilians and VRS soldiers had been killed or wounded and extensive material damage had been inflicted. The Bosnian Serbs also complained about damage caused by the air strikes on 25 November. However, that was not justified because that day NATO had not dropped any arms. There had been hits at three locations but they came from pieces of Surface-to-Air missiles that the VRS had fired at NATO aircraft that day.

The Bosnian Serbs then declared to General Rose in Sarajevo that in their opinion UNPROFOR was not an enemy, but NATO was. NATO used UNPROFOR as a shield to carry out actions against the VRS, the reproach was. The VRS made the reopening of Sarajevo airport dependent on a written guarantee by the Security Council or the Secretary-General that NATO aircraft would not take action, unless NATO aircraft themselves were attacked. Akashi did feel for such a declaration on NATO's role in Bosnia, in view of all misunderstandings that existed among the warring factions and in the media.

That way Akashi underestimated the problems such a declaration would cause among the warring factions and his political bosses: members of the Bosnian government still believed that it was NATO's task to intervene on their behalf. In turn many Bosnian Serbs thought that too: NATO supported the Bosnian Muslims. Annan did not agree to draw up such a declaration because of the problems it would cause with NATO. Such an explanation would first have to be tuned with NATO and Annan pointed out that Boutros-Ghali wanted to prevent that, because of the tensed relations with NATO. Akashi himself should issue a declaration in Annan's opinion.⁴³⁹

4. Discussions on air strikes in spring 1995

Between November and April it remained relatively quiet in the field of the use of air power. The discussions on the subject only broke out again when the contending parties resumed the fighting in the period April/May 1995. By then Rose had been succeeded by Smith, and De Lapresle by Janvier. The changed situation and new people at the key positions also caused new discussions within the UN on the deployment of air power.

In April 1995 the situation had been reached that it was clear to everybody of the UNPROFOR staff in Zagreb that the UN mandate in its current form no longer worked. Furthermore the situation

⁴³⁸ Biermann and Vadset, *UN Peacekeeping in Trouble*, p. 25-26, 39.

⁴³⁹ Confidential information (158). UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 62/77, File 2.8, Nato 23/05/93 – 05/07/95. Outgoing Fax Andreev to Akashi, 05/12/94, No. CCA-BHC-394; UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 59, File 2.5 BHC 04/07/94 – 31/12/94. Fax MA to Comd to HQ UNPROFOR Zagreb, 03/12/94, Exchanges Karadzic/Rose.

was characterized by hopelessness, because no military or political solution could be anticipated. There were major problems on the ground and in the air. On the ground UNPROFOR was confronted with the situation that casualties among UNPROFOR soldiers kept increasing. By now it was clear about the use of air power that it caused major risks for UNPROFOR because UN soldiers were potential hostages, as would once again soon appear.⁴⁴⁰

The Commander Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo, General Smith, saw that the existing possibilities to use air power were inadequate for three fundamental reasons. Firstly he emphasized that these procedures were geared to minor violations, for instance of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement or the ban on the use of heavy weapons in certain zones. According to Smith those procedures were no longer suitable because the acts of the warring factions could no longer be classified as 'minor violations'. Then there was the problem that air power had an 'all or nothing' character: UNPROFOR did not possess any instrument between filing a protest at the warring factions and actions from the air. Finally he pointed out that it could be decided to use air power, but that could not protect the population in the Safe Areas.⁴⁴¹

Force Commander General Janvier in Zagreb also recognized a number of fundamental problems connected with the use of air power. For instance on 12 May in Paris he made it clear to Boutros-Ghali that air power had lost its deterrent effect. The contending parties were no longer impressed when aircraft flew over their positions and they were only threatened with the use of air power. Janvier did not oppose air strikes, but the threshold for it should be high. Otherwise the same problems as in November would reoccur: a cat-and-mouse play by which the Bosnian Serbs benefited. Furthermore, Janvier wanted to keep up UNPROFOR's neutrality: use of air power could only be possible if the Bosnian Muslims would demilitarize the Safe Areas.⁴⁴² For only then it would be possible to determine that if the VRS shelled a Safe Area, this did not serve any military purpose. Then the procedure to request Close Air Support could be started.

In contrast to these fundamental problems for the use of air power, at the same time the UN was under increasing international pressure to use air power. The public opinion still was that the population in the Safe Areas had to be protected that way. That was not hindered by the fact that Boutros-Ghali once more pointed out to the Security Council that UNPROFOR only had a mandate to deter attacks on the Safe Areas and that air power had its limitations on deterring such attacks on Safe Areas.⁴⁴³

The reply by UNPROFOR spokesmen to the question how probable it was that there would be new air strikes did not help the troublesome considerations about the use of air power either. In a general sense that reply was unfortunate. These spokesmen gave the impression that the activities in the air would be limited because of the fears that the VRS would take hostages. In view of the many fundamental problems with the use of air power their expectation was not so strange, but they should not have said it. That fostered speculations about a new, more restrictive policy as regards the user of air power, while on the other hand it was stated that policy was unchanged.

In a reaction to what the spokesmen had said, the UN headquarters in New York intervened and came with the following line the spokesmen had to follow. Indeed New York stated that the policy was unchanged: air strikes had always been and would always be an option. Determining the effectiveness of air strikes was done by UN/UNPROFOR and NATO jointly, also with a view to its consequences. In practice the UN wanted to determine for each case separately whether to call in support from NATO. For every decision in this connection Force Commander Janvier would take into account the arrangements between NATO and the UN, but still every time balance them against the

⁴⁴⁰ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Non-Paper for FC/DFC Only, Secret, 'Current position. Where we stand', 14/05/95.

⁴⁴¹ NIOD, Coll. Smith. BHC Situation Report signed Lt Gen R.A. Smith, 05/04/95.

⁴⁴² NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Paper: 'Briefing to SecGen. Options in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Paris – 12/05/95', Secret, 12/05/95.

⁴⁴³ Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council Resolutions 982 (1995) and 987 (1995), 30/05/95, No. S/1995/444, §§ 40 and 58.

safety of the own troops. This position was arrived at after contacts between the NATO Military Committee and Janvier, while Janvier expressed his surprise that NATO had not applied to the UN Secretary-General.⁴⁴⁴ The impression that still the policy regarding air strikes had become more restrictive, had not been removed by the confirmation of the old policy: after all, also in November air strikes had already been cancelled because of possible countermeasures on the ground by the Bosnian Serbs.

For Janvier's staff in Zagreb indeed the safety of the own troops was in all cases an important factor. As a consequence Zagreb anticipated that, still in a general sense, a vicious circle would develop if air strikes were started. After all, many of the air actions against the Bosnian Serbs that UNPROFOR had permitted, had been caused by provocations of the ABiH, in the opinion of Zagreb. Then the propaganda machine of the Bosnian Muslims provoked a reaction by the Bosnian Serbs. That VRS reaction usually turned out as an overreaction, which in turn gave the Bosnian Muslims ammunition for a next round in the propaganda war to stir the UN into action.

The first time there were air strikes again was late May at Pale; these attacks have already been discussed in the previous chapter. These had been carefully prepared by Akashi, Janvier and NATO Admiral Smith. Because the ammunition site was near some villages, it had been divided into two sectors. In one of the sectors there was little risk of collateral damage. That sector was attacked first on 25 May to demonstrate the intentions of UNPROFOR. On 26 May it appeared necessary once more to demonstrate UNPROFOR's forcefulness. Then it appeared that the image of Akashi as a person who was very reluctant to use force, required some putting into perspective: Akashi had no problems whatsoever with these new air strikes. Now UNPROFOR was even more aggressive than NATO: Akashi wanted to attack the entire ammunition site, but this time it had exactly been Admiral Smith and his Air commander General Ryan who had been reluctant for fear of hitting civilians.⁴⁴⁵

Boutros-Ghali too strongly opposed the idea that Akashi did not want much in this connection. The problem that was troubling Akashi in many cases was, according to Boutros-Ghali, that he received contradictory military advice, partly based on visions of the governments of France and the United Kingdom. The long struggle between American institutes such as Congress, the White House, the State Department, the CIA and the Pentagon, before policy decisions could be taken was not really helpful either. Nevertheless the result on the American side always was that the Americans wanted to show that they were doing something in Bosnia, and that was only possible in the form of NATO air strikes.⁴⁴⁶

Of course the response of the VRS to the use of air power had a substantial influence on the discussions. The response of the VRS to Close Air Support and particularly on air strikes was extremely violent and aimed at UNPROFOR: UNMOs and UN personnel at isolated observation posts were taken hostage, the supply route to the Safe Areas was closed, aircraft bringing aid to Sarajevo were fired at, and UNPROFOR was ignored. Experience had taught that the response of the Bosnian Serbs came quickly after the use of air power and would paralyze UNPROFOR for two to six weeks.⁴⁴⁷

Consequences of the air strikes on Pale for the use of air power

Paralyzation of UNPROFOR was exactly what happened after the air strikes at Pale on 25 and 26 May 1995. The Bosnian Serbs stated that UNPROFOR had taken sides and acted accordingly by taking

⁴⁴⁴ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cables Annan to Akashi, 30/03/95, No. MSC-1006; 31/03/95, No.1028; Akashi to Annan, 31/03/95, Z-519; ABZ, DEU/ARA/03356. Code Veenendaal 776 from PV Navo to Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence, 17/05/95.

⁴⁴⁵ Confidential interview (50).

⁴⁴⁶ Interview Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 30/01/01.

⁴⁴⁷ BLS/Kab. Interoffice Memorandum G 2 to COS, 'VRS reaction to NATO air strikes', 11/04/95. Sent by fax UNPF HQ G 3 Land Ops to G-2 Crisis staff, 25/04/95.

hundreds of hostages among UN personnel.⁴⁴⁸ The previous chapter already discussed in detail what consequences of these air strikes were for UNPROFOR; here we will once more look at the consequences of these air strikes on UN policy as regards the use of Close Air Support. Those consequences were considerable, certainly in combination with the cancellation of the plan to withdraw UNPROFOR from the eastern enclaves (also referred to in the previous chapter). That kept UNPROFOR vulnerable and there was nothing to do but ‘muddle through’ for UNPROFOR. The same applied for the use of air power

Janvier wanted to avoid further confrontations and a further increase of the tension and the use of Close Air Support. UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali also saw how considerable the consequences of the use of air power were. For that reason he took a far-reaching political decision on the use of Close Air Support after the air strikes at Pale: from now on Boutros-Ghali wanted to be consulted personally both for air strikes and Close Air Support, he informed Akashi in a confidential instruction. In practice that meant that the UN key for the use of air power was now in the hands of the Secretary-General himself. Though that might cause problems due to time pressure, still Boutros-Ghali wanted to be involved; he stated as reason that ‘in the Bosnian-Serb mind’ the difference between air strikes and Close Air Support was not recognized sufficiently.⁴⁴⁹ Air strikes were soon out of the question as a result of the hostage crisis, Close Air Support remained available as support for the commanders on the ground, even if there were doubts about it among the press.

The Bosnian Serbs had been punished by the air strikes on Pale, but they did not submit. On eight consecutive days they fired at NATO aircraft with shoulder-launched missiles and air defence. It did not stop at threats: on 2 June 1995 the VRS shot down an American F-16. It was going to be an incident with major consequences. The cause was that on that day VRS fighter aircraft were taking off from the repaired airfield of Udbina, and that had attracted NATO aircraft. Presumably that was exactly what they wanted, because an anti-aircraft battery (type SA-6) had purposefully been deployed in the vicinity of the airfield. That way the VRS tried to be sure of a NATO target. Here in a certain sense NATO had to pay for not fully eliminating the VRS air defence in November.⁴⁵⁰

The pilot, Scott O’Grady, managed to eject from the aircraft and landed in Bosnian-Serb territory, in Bihac. Subsequently, the Bosnian Serbs played a game of psychological warfare with regard to his fate. Mladic told Janvier that he had the pilots of the crashed aircraft in his power. Janvier called NATO Admiral Smith who then knew that he did not have to believe Mladic: there had only been one pilot on board the aircraft and Mladic had spoken of pilots. Even apart from that Mladic’ message to Janvier was not consistent with the facts: O’Grady had indeed managed to stay out of the hands of the Bosnian Serbs.

Then discussions broke out on the question whether a rescue operation had to be organized; that was not without risks with O’Grady being in Bosnian-Serb territory. NATO Admiral Smith proposed a rescue operation. The French government appeared to have objections to that, because still French UN personnel were held hostage.⁴⁵¹ Joulwan said that he had informed NATO Secretary-

⁴⁴⁸ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 62/77, File 2.8 Nato 25/05/93 – 05/07/95. The statements came from Parliament chairman Momcilo Krajisnik on Radio Knin, 26/05/95, 16.00 hrs. Krajisnik also came with the reproach that the Bosnian troops were using the Safe Areas, including Srebrenica, as base of operations. UNPROFOR 26/05/95, 23.30 hrs.

⁴⁴⁹ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Only Cable Janvier to Smith, 30/05/95.

⁴⁵⁰ DCBC, 2822. Deny Flight Intsum 004/Jun/95, 071400Z Jun 95.

⁴⁵¹ Later, in September, two French pilots ended up in the same situation as O’Grady. For them too, a rescue operation was discussed: Joulwan wanted a rescue mission for *every* shot down pilot, not only for O’Grady. In this connection NATO Admiral Smith only wanted to inform UNPROFOR and not ask their permission. At the start of the operation Smith had telephoned the NATO liaison officer at the UNPF staff of Janvier in Zagreb, Rudd, with the message: ‘tell Janvier I’m going to get them’. Janvier only replied that he wished Smith success and asked to tell him if he needed any help. At this point Janvier at least was helpful enough not to attempt to stop the rescue operation, even though such an operation was not without risks for UNPROFOR. Attempts to rescue them on 21 September failed; later they were still released through negotiations. Smith told the NIOD that the French pilots had been tortured by the Bosnian Serbs (broken legs, contusions) but that Paris had carefully kept that quiet.

General Claes that he would not be bothered by it and that he did want to go after O'Grady. In his opinion that was within the Rules of Engagement.

Indeed a rescue operation was launched for pilot Scott O'Grady, with the result that he was taken to safety by American marines on 8 June; subsequently O'Grady became a hero in the United States. The VRS did not come into action when he was liberated, though they were in the vicinity. Eventually shooting down O'Grady and the subsequent rescue operation had little effect on the relations between VRS and UNPROFOR. Something else did change: it further limited the possibilities for the use of air power.

5. After the O'Grady incident: air power in July 1995

Shooting down the F-16 of O'Grady taught NATO much about the possibilities of the Air Defence Systems of the Bosnian Serbs: it appears that the VRS were able and prepared to utilize the possibilities of an integrated Air Defence System. Such a system meant that already from a great distance the VRS radars could lock onto the NATO aircraft, and that information on aircraft movements was relayed to their Air Defence in real-time. Then it had become clear that the VRS actually intended to make use of their possibilities and that is what they did.

The VRS Air Defence in July 1995

The VRS had the availability of this highly adequate integrated Air Defence System because they had full control over the 'old' Yugoslav Air Defence System. That had been modernized in the early nineties and after the disintegration of Yugoslavia it had been maintained

This integrated system was composed of radar installations and air defence installations that covered a large area and were interconnected. The area where the radar systems were deployed that were used by VRS at least included Serbia and Montenegro. Consequently, the area covered by these radar systems stretched far beyond the former Yugoslavia. The result was that the Bosnian Serbs could benefit optimally from this system: they could already see NATO aircraft on their radar screens shortly after they had departed from Italy or from carriers in the Adriatic Sea. By the way, this system was not exclusively available to the Bosnian Serbs: the Serb regime in Belgrade could also monitor the airspace over Bosnia. However, there are no indications that Belgrade also played a decisive role in the command and control of the Bosnian-Serb Air Defence Systems, or the support of the VRS radar target tracking.

In the above, reference has repeatedly been made to the option, occasionally discussed in NATO circles, to eliminate the entire integrated Air Defence System used by the VRS. Some remarks should be made here. First of all this in itself was impossible for NATO because parts of the systems were located outside Bosnia, in Serbia and Montenegro. The mandate did not cover that. So NATO actions had to be limited to systems in Bosnia. Additionally, the problem arose that the VRS were able to move their launching installations for surface-to-air missiles against NATO aircraft (SAM sites), which they regularly did. That applied to the radar-guided Surface-to-Air Missiles of the types SA-2 and SA-6; radar-guided systems, intended for aircraft at high altitude. Of those, the SA-6 was the most dangerous type, for this was the most advanced one and had a shoot-without-warning-capacity of which NATO had received proof. NATO made substantial intelligence efforts to trace where the SAM sites of those types were moved to, but they only succeeded partially. In addition the VRS had many Surface-to-Air-missiles of the types SA-7 and SA-9; those were portable systems that could be launched from the shoulder and that were not radar-guided but heat-seeking. These systems were only suitable to attack aircraft at lower altitudes. Finally they had a lot of conventional anti-aircraft artillery; these systems could be moved too, but they were not a major problem for aircraft flying fast and at high altitude.

For NATO the problem with these systems was that their effectiveness for the Air Defence Systems increased strongly during the conflict, even to such an extent that finally NATO could no

longer act freely. Initially, NATO flew patrols at an altitude of over 10,000 feet, and that was outside the range of all anti-aircraft guns. After some time that was no longer sufficient; the aircraft had to fly lower to carry out an operation. However, the Bosnian Serbs got to know their enemy in a number of ways; for instance at the stage when they were no longer flying over Bosnia, but were flying patrols over the Adriatic Sea. The Bosnian Serbs knew that something was about to happen as soon as an aircraft steered for Bosnia, and when aircraft flew back to Italy the VRS knew they could go ahead again on the ground. In addition, the VRS could monitor the communications of NATO fighter aircraft; only the Netherlands and the United States had cryptologically secure connections. However, because other countries did not use these, the Netherlands and the United States were forced not to use their secure connections.⁴⁵² In all those manners the VRS found out when and where NATO aircraft were flying, when the aircraft left Bosnia, and when they were going to refuel.

For NATO this meant an increased risk for the aircraft, that prompted for a more reluctant realization of the operation Deny Flight, and giving Close Air Support. To prevent things from happening again, or worse, for new operations over Bosnian-Serb territory the Air Defence Systems in the widest sense had to be eliminated, so not only the SAM sites that were a direct threat to the NATO aircraft; exactly what NATO had advocated all the time, but the UN did not permit for fear of VRS casualties and escalation.

Another limitation of NATO's freedom to act was that because of the risk of the VRS Air Defence Systems, every NATO aircraft had to be escorted by so-called SEAD aircraft. SEAD means Suppression of Enemy Air Defence; such aircraft were intended for self-defence, to eliminate the SAM sites that formed a direct threat to the NATO aircraft. Another problem with the SEAD aircraft was that there were only few of them, so only thirty percent of the former NATO capacity could be utilized. Consequently, for reconnaissance flights they increasingly had to rely on unmanned aircraft (Remote Piloted Vehicles or RPVs) and satellites, but that also had its limitations in comparison to the old situation in which the NATO aircraft did it all on their own. Training flights and flights for Close Air Support were also in a tight spot because they could no longer fly over land without an escort of SEAD aircraft. These new circumstances made the highest NATO soldier in Europe, SACEUR Joulwan, assume on 5 July that new air strikes to protect the Safe Areas had become unlikely.

The major problem NATO was facing, was that though they could eliminate the radar installations, that did not take away the threat of the mobile air defence batteries. That applied less to Eastern Bosnia, where there were no troop concentrations and few military installations. The most important there were the systems at the VRS headquarters in Han Pijesak, 18 km from Srebrenica as the crow flies. These two systems deployed at Han Pijesak had a range (in military terms: a mission envelope) as far as the vicinity of Srebrenica. That made flying over Srebrenica even more problematic for NATO. The main threat for Eastern Bosnia came from the anti-aircraft missiles launched from the shoulder; if there were VRS troops concentrations, the presence of such anti-aircraft missiles could be expected.⁴⁵³

All this had major consequences for the possibilities to use Close Air Support, also at the time of the VRS attack on Srebrenica. Now the situation had developed that for in itself rather simple Close Air Support missions and entire air fleet had to be composed. The capacity no longer existed to be able to render Close Air Support 24 hours a day. Moreover, on the authority of NATO the aircraft that had to give the Close Air Support had to remain out of reach of the VRS air defence; that meant these could no longer patrol over the target area. In practice the aircraft had to remain over the Adriatic Sea. NATO Admiral Smith also emphasized that early July when the VRS attack on the enclave of Srebrenica started; he said he had once more pointed out to Akashi and Janvier that he could not allow aircraft intended for Close Air Support to patrol over Srebrenica.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵² Statement J.L.H. Eikelboom, 02/06/01.

⁴⁵³ DCBC, 881. Note MID/Klu to DCBC, 18 /07/95; DCBC, 1570. Code Veenendaal NATO 1009, 06/07/95; NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury, 21 and 22/06/95.

⁴⁵⁴ Interview Leighton Smith, 06/06/00.

The new NATO policy to no longer permitted NATO aircraft over Bosnia without aircraft for Suppression of Enemy Air Defence did cause a difference of opinion between the Netherlands and the United States. The Netherlands did not want to go so far as to conclude that SEAD was a precondition for enforcing the flying ban. Neither was the Netherlands in favour of offensive action against the integrated Air Defence System of the Bosnian Serbs as the Americans had wanted, but preferred NATO to carry out a study into the best possible use of electronic measures against this system (known in military terms as Electronic Countermeasures or ECM).⁴⁵⁵

Shortly before that the Dutch Air Force had already realized that the measure to have every aircraft escorted by a SEAD aircraft put severe strains on the deployment of the air forces and, consequently, hindered the protection of the Dutch blue helmets in Srebrenica. In the Netherlands there were doubts on the part of the Dutch Air Force about the wisdom of such an American-inspired NATO measure. Though the SEAD aircraft were useful to suppress the VRS air defence in a wider sense, that did not offer a guarantee against individual aircraft being shot down, the Air Force thought. Flying over Bosnia would still remain risky, but to reduce that risk the aircraft already were equipped with means for self-protection. Through regular modification of flying patterns and flying altitude the air force still considered deployment of aircraft over Bosnia acceptable, also without SEAD aircraft. The imposed flying-technical and tactical restrictions only harmed the ability to respond, the Dutch Air Force thought.⁴⁵⁶

On the day of the fall of Srebrenica, 11 July, it also appeared that the threat of the use of VRS air defence was not an empty one. Just before the NATO aircraft arrived over Srebrenica, the VRS activated the radars for the Air Defence Systems.⁴⁵⁷ Near Srebrenica an anti-aircraft missile (type SA-9) was fired that only just missed an American F-16.⁴⁵⁸ In response to that, and for fear of retaliation, the VRS near Srebrenica directly started camouflaging their positions.⁴⁵⁹ That retaliation did not come by the way.

The differences in the analysis between NATO and the Dutch Air Force reflected the difference of opinion between countries with and countries without troops on the ground, of which the Americans were the main example. The Commander in Chief of the Royal Netherlands Airforce, H.J.W.Manderfeld, worded this opinion on the limitation initiated by the United States that there should be no more flying over Bosnia as follows: 'The decision to impose restrictions seems to be founded rather on a different degree of involvement in the conflict'. The Dutch vision showed the wish to support the own troops on the ground, while the Americans mainly worried about the safety of the pilots, many of which were Americans.⁴⁶⁰

The Dutch objections increased even more by the way the Americans handled this difference of opinion: there was a complete American *Alleingang*. The American reaction seemed out of proportion and the American analysis on which it was based could not be verified by the Dutch. The British went even further. They even suspected that the Americans had manipulated data on the Bosnian Serb Air Defence System, 'and that not for the first time'. The British linked the American attitude to the unsuccessful attempts of Admiral Smith to get permission to eliminate the airfield of Banja Luka and the surrounding radar and air defence installations.⁴⁶¹

In the American analysis the Bosnian Serbs had more Surface-to-Air missiles than was assumed earlier and their Air Defence System enabled a better mode of command than had been thought

⁴⁵⁵ DCBC, 1572. Fax NLMilRep, Lt Gen H.W.M. Satter, to CDS/SCOCIS, 050745Z Jul 95.

⁴⁵⁶ DPKlu. Note DOPKlu to Defence staff/SCOCIS personal, 03/07/95, No. DOP 95.047.339/956.

⁴⁵⁷NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Chronology of Events UNPROFOR/NATO Close-Air Support to Dutch Battalion at Potocari, 11/07/95.

⁴⁵⁸DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH, Air Desk Log, 11/07/95.

⁴⁵⁹ ABiH Tuzla. 2nd Corps, report of 12/07/95, no. 02/8-10-1253. Contents on the basis of intercepts.

⁴⁶⁰ DS, no. SN95/009/5602. Letter BDL to CDS, 28/08/95, no. BDL 95.062.978, with copies letter BDL to General J.P. Douin, Chef d'Etat Major de L' Armee de l'Air, Air Chief Marshall Sir Michael Graydon, Chief of the Air Staff Royal Air Force, Lieutenant General B. Mende, Inspector der Luftwaffe, 16/08/95, unnumbered.

⁴⁶¹ DCBC, 1574. Code Veenendaal NATO 989, 03/07/95.

possible before. In addition, the intentions of the Bosnian Serbs had changed. They were now deliberately firing at NATO. SACEUR, General Joulwan had concluded from this analysis that it would be better to stay away from the Bosnian air space or to provide all flights with maximum SEAD protection. Stopping Close Air Support was a bridge too far in the Dutch vision, but maximum protection for all flights did not offer a solution either.⁴⁶²

The Dutch objections increased even further by the way the Americans handled this difference of opinion: there was a complete American *Alleingang*. There had been no consultation whatsoever on these limitations with the European air forces that took part in operation Deny Flight. There was no common analysis of the threat. Though the Air Force Commander considered it obvious that the risks had to remain as low as possible, this way the balance between the troops on the ground and the pilots that had to protect them, threatened to be lost. That applied even stronger for countries with troops on the ground in Bosnia. For that reason Manderfeld wanted to improve the decision-making process with his British, French and German colleagues; a position, by the way, he only announced after the fall of Srebrenica.⁴⁶³ NATO Secretary-General Claes told the NIOD that he knew that the Dutch Air Force Commander resisted the American reluctance to let pilots run risks. Claes said he had chosen Manderfeld's side and had agreed with him that NATO should keep their hands free to a greater extent than was the case at that moment. However, that did not result in initiatives to change the NATO policy: there was no more talk about Manderfeld's vision, not within the NATO council and neither within SACEUR.⁴⁶⁴

The conflict between the Americans on the one side and the Dutch on the other existing since spring 1995 could be traced back to the interpretation of the Rules of Engagement for the NATO operation Deny Flight. In fact that interpretation had already been the issue on the air strikes of November 1994, but then there had been no unambiguous statement by the highest NATO and UN authorities.

The Americans wanted that if there was a 'hostile intent' at one of the contending parties, it would not only have to involve a violation of the No Fly Zone over Bosnia by the contending parties, but also the VRS air defence. NATO also wanted to bomb the air defence of which the radars locked onto aircraft. However, UNPROFOR thought that too risky, because it could entail all kinds of repercussions on the ground. Mainly the French made objections because they thought it too dangerous for the ground troops. That resulted in a threat by the Americans that they would withdraw their aircraft from the operation Deny Flight. In turn that invoked accusations from other countries that the consensus within NATO degenerated into the imposition of a decree by one single country.⁴⁶⁵ This squabbling within NATO eventually resulted in a compromise: the contending parties would formally be informed that it was not permitted to let their radars lock on to NATO aircraft. Then if NATO took counteraction, it had to be proportional and could only be directed at the air defence system in question. The Netherlands endorsed the French opinion. Too forceful action could have consequences for the UNPROFOR units, the Netherlands agreed.⁴⁶⁶ Strictly from an 'air force' point of view such a compromise was not the most effective one, and just like after earlier negotiations with the UN, the United States were left with an unhappy feeling. The consequence was that subsequently the Americans forced through restrictions for flying over Bosnia within NATO.

⁴⁶² DCBC, 1571. The Dutch Permanent Military Representative at the NATO Military Committee (Lt Gen Satter) to CDS/SC-OCIS (Cdre Hilderink), 011555Z Jul 96, faxnr. 148.

⁴⁶³ DCBC, 1103. BDL to CDS, 28/08/95, No. BDL 95.062.978.

⁴⁶⁴ Interview W. Claes, 12/03/01.

⁴⁶⁵ DCBC, 2389. Code Hoek 024/95, HPMV to CDS, 08/04/95, No. BuZa dvt776 - HPMV024, report 20nd MC/PS meeting of 20/04/95,

⁴⁶⁶ DCBC, 454. Note CDS to the Minister, 02/05/95, No. SN/95/009/2726.

6. Discussions on air power between UN and NATO at the highest level

It was clear that there were still fundamental differences of opinion between UN and NATO on the use of air power. Late June the matter had returned to the highest political level: NATO Secretary-General Claes applied to Boutros-Ghali to get clarity on the position of the UN as regards the use of air power.

In this intervention Claes focused on the 'dual key' procedure; it may appear from the above that this was only one of the problems in connection with the use of air power. Claes was aiming at that partly because of the fact that after the air strikes on Pale Boutros-Ghali had taken the 'key' in his own hand rather than leaving it with his special representative, Akashi. If it involved air strikes, Boutros-Ghali wanted power of decision, for Close Air Support he at least wanted to be consulted.

Claes stated that this affected the effectiveness of NATO. That was because the effectiveness of air power depended on the speed with which help could be called in for the ground troops and for protection of the Safe Areas. Claes wanted to put the authority to permit Close Air Support back into the operational area. Otherwise the Bosnian Serbs might think that limitations had been imposed upon NATO, and that could only make the VRS overconfident.⁴⁶⁷ Claes gained support from Akashi and Janvier. They too were strong advocates of putting the authority for Close Air Support back into their hands as soon as possible. In a - for him - firm statement Akashi pointed out to New York that though Zagreb did its best to achieve good cooperation with NATO in the region, the efforts there and the effectiveness of UN and NATO would benefit by it if there was a 'policy coordination' that did not leave room for misunderstandings.⁴⁶⁸

Akashi certainly had a point there. There certainly was a necessity of better contact and better coordination between UN and NATO, although it has by now become sufficiently clear that such required more than just Boutros-Ghali handing back the 'key' to Akashi. The problem was deeper, which also appeared from the tone of the letters exchanged between the two Secretaries-General. That was distant and grumpy, which undoubtedly was a consequence of the fact that they seldom spoke to each other, and that NATO was expected to make itself subordinate to the UN. Improving the relations between the two organizations was on the agenda all the time, but it would only be realized later, after the fall of Srebrenica.

For the time being Claes did not go beyond accepting a new series of briefings by NATO in Brussels. He also noted that regularly Zagreb was surprised by proposals from Admiral Smith. If that had to be prevented in future, it was necessary that the UN commanders in Zagreb and Sarajevo and the NATO commander met more often in Zagreb for some more brainwork. Claes also thought that there should be talks with the highest NATO soldier in Europe, General Joulwan.⁴⁶⁹

The next day Boutros-Ghali responded to the letter from his counterpart at NATO. In turn he asked an explanation on a request by NATO Admiral Smith. On 21 June he had telephoned Janvier, when once more two VRS fighter aircraft had departed from the Bosnian-Serb airfield of Banja Luka. The Bosnian-Serb Air Defence Systems made it difficult to attack these aircraft. Subsequently, Smith had asked Janvier permission for a 'major air operation'. Smith wanted nothing less than to eliminate all Bosnian-Serb Air Defence Systems, to put the airfield of Banja Luka, important to the Bosnian Serbs, out of operation and to destroy all aircraft located there. From a military point of view it made sense not to wait until the aircraft were in the air or until the air defence would fire at the own aircraft, but sentiments within the UN were different. That was because Janvier had said 'no' with a view to proportionality: the VRS had only carried out flights and there had been no attacks. In Janvier's opinion that did not justify an air strike on the airfield.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁷ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 62/77, File 2.8 Nato 25/05/93- 05/0795. Letter Willy Claes to Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 21/1995/95, No 1995.

⁴⁶⁸ UNNY, DKPO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 22/1995/95, No. Z-1041.

⁴⁶⁹ NIOD Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury, 07/0795.

⁴⁷⁰ ABZ, PVNAVO, Vml Joeg/No Fly Zone, nr. 118772. Letter Boutros Boutros-Ghali to Willy Claes, 23/06/95.

Now Boutros-Ghali would like to know what Claes thought about these proposals, that he considered radical. An indication of this does exist: The NATO Secretary-General himself had also wanted to bomb the Banja Luka airfield after the American F-16 had been shot down on 2 June, as had been done effectively with Udbina at an earlier stage. Nevertheless Claes instructed SACEUR Joulwan to telephone Admiral Smith who - as he said - 'got beaten hard' by Joulwan. Joulwan took the position that every VRS radar that was switched on was tantamount to hostile intent. For that reason he wanted to attack every radar that was switched on, but without asking UNPROFOR for permission. That means basically he agreed with Smith: he also wanted to eliminate the VRS Air Defence Systems. Smith thought that the Rules of Engagement offered the possibilities to do that.⁴⁷¹

The UN wanted to be involved and feared that NATO would fail to consult the UN. Already in November Annan had asked NATO to confirm that this organization would observe the dual key procedure, while the UN would take the lead because they were the first to turn the key. Now NATO had made a proposal and the UN had refused it. Boutros-Ghali also pointed out that the powers were still in his hands and not in those of Akashi in Zagreb. Boutros-Ghali told Claes that he could understand that enforcing the No Fly Zones entailed risks and technical problems, but still the mandate did not permit operations of the kind Admiral Smith wanted now. Therefore, Boutros-Ghali would like to hear from Claes that NATO would keep basing their actions on the Security Council resolutions. If NATO considered this kind of air operations necessary to enforce the No-Fly Zone, that would require authorization from the Security Council, according to Boutros-Ghali.⁴⁷² Claes was forced to personally call Admiral Smith to order because of his insistence to bomb against the resolutions.⁴⁷³

The pressure on Boutros-Ghali to at least return the 'key' for Close Air Support to Akashi, if Boutros-Ghali himself would keep the 'key' for air strikes, was successful. In addition to Claes, the British Minister Rifkind and Undersecretary-General Annan had urged to do that. Boutros-Ghali declared that one of the reasons to take this into his own hands was to reduce the pressure on Akashi; a remarkable reasoning, if only because taking it back had been kept quiet.

Pressure had been exerted on Boutros-Ghali by his own UN headquarters and it had been pointed out to him that the matter of the authorization had to be handled better, also because there was no arrangement for delegation of that authority if Boutros-Ghali left for Geneva. The description of a meeting on the subject comes from General Eisele, Assistant Secretary-General for Planning and Support of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the UN. The meeting was attended by: Boutros-Ghali, Goulding (Undersecretary-General and head of the Department for Political Affairs), Gharekhan (Senior Advisor to the Secretary-General), Kofi Annan (Undersecretary-General and head of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations), Iqbal Riza (Chief cabinet of the Secretary-General) and Eisele himself. It had been preceded by extensive talks with Janvier and Akashi. At the meeting Boutros-Ghali had explained his principle: 'I do not trust any person in the world.' Then Boutros-Ghali wanted to end the discussion without a decision having been taken. Eisele had responded that such was not possible; in his own words a remarkable act because 'His Imperial Highness' did not wish to be contradicted. The attending civil servants agreed that a solution had to be found; someone in the chain of command had to be appointed; Boutros-Ghali would be too far removed from the former Yugoslavia.

Subsequently, the meeting discussed the option to give the 'key' to Annan. That wasn't possible either because he was travelling around the world too much. Boutros-Ghali then asked Eisele who he did propose to make key holder. Eisele stated that it should be the military commander on the ground. Boutros-Ghali responded that it should not be the 'English general' (Smith). Janvier had said to have no objections to that. Then Akashi was discussed. He had already had the 'key' before. Boutros-Ghali had no objections to delegation to Akashi, but Eisele himself thought that in fact Zagreb was too far

⁴⁷¹ Interviews George Joulwan and Leighton Smith, 06/06/00 and 08/06/00.

⁴⁷² ABZ, PVNAVO. Vml Joeg/No Fly Zone No. 118772. Letter Boutros Boutros-Ghali to Willy Claes, 23/06/95.

⁴⁷³ Interview W. Claes, 12/03/01.

away from Bosnia. The 'key' would have to be placed lower in the UN organization, in the same way as NATO had organized it. Then Janvier was discussed. However, Boutros-Ghali argued that if Janvier took the decision, Boutros-Ghali would still be blamed for a wrong decision by the media and the Security Council. Eisele had responded that he was right, but that Boutros-Ghali had to trust his subordinates. In view of Boutros-Ghali's statement that he trusted nobody, the compliment Goulding gave Eisele afterwards was understandable: he said he had been brave at the meeting. He had the impression that the other people present had only considered Eisele impolite because he had contradicted Boutros-Ghali. However, to everybody's surprise a written memo appeared to delegate the authority for Close Air Support to Zagreb and then further down if there was reason to do so.⁴⁷⁴

When this difference of opinion had been settled, on 22 June the decision was taken that Akashi could decide again on Close Air Support. However, Boutros-Ghali did want to retain the authority to decide on air strikes. According to one of those present it was amazing to see how difficult it was for Boutros-Ghali to delegate, and yet he did not want to see how incorrect it was to keep the 'key' for air strikes himself. According to him, conflicts on the use of air power would remain deeply seated with this construction: that was because the United States wanted to use air power as much as possible, while France and the United Kingdom preferred not to use it at all. Particularly the United Kingdom could not handle the Bosnian-Serb countermeasures that were the consequence of the use of air power for their troops on the ground. However the British did not want to say in public that they disagreed with the Americans.

This analysis – that only referred to air strikes, not to Close Air Support – was that the British and the French found it convenient that Boutros-Ghali had taken back the power of decision for air strikes rather than giving it to, for instance, a soldier.⁴⁷⁵ In view of Boutros-Ghali's cautiousness there was reasonable certainty that new air strikes were not really likely. Though Boutros-Ghali informed his counterpart at NATO, Claes, that he would not hesitate to allow air strikes, but if it was necessary to request those, Boutros-Ghali first wanted to see an extensive motivation for that request with an explanation of the circumstances, the objectives, and the consequences for the UN personnel on the ground.⁴⁷⁶ That already put up a substantial barrier against air strikes, for it would cause substantial delays. Janvier was not happy either that Boutros-Ghali retained this 'key'; on 3 June he had already informed the ministers of defence of NATO and WEU that he would like to see this authority at the executive military level, preferably at General Smith in Sarajevo.⁴⁷⁷

After all these discussions air strikes were no longer a fundamental subject of discussion until the moment of the attack on Srebrenica. On 30 June the Bosnian Prime Minister Siladjic did have contact with NATO Secretary-General Claes about Close Air Support. On that opportunity Siladjic expressed his worries about the factual rejection of air strikes that was the consequence of the discussions between and within NATO and UN. Subsequently Siladjic asked Claes what would happen if the Bosnian Serbs would try to annex the eastern enclaves. Would NATO render Close Air Support to the ABiH? Claes did not take Siladjic words too seriously; Siladjic was a provoking superhawk, he thought.⁴⁷⁸

Claes had replied that NATO was particularly worried about the position of the Dutch UN troops and the population in Srebrenica. The NATO discussion partners also pointed out to Siladjic that if the Dutch troops would be attacked, 'it could be assumed that UNPROFOR would turn their key'. In consultation with the UN it would also be possible for NATO to act in the event the

⁴⁷⁴ Interview Manfred Eisele, 14/10/99.

⁴⁷⁵ Confidential interview (63).

⁴⁷⁶ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Code Cable The Secretary-General to Akashi, 22/05/95, No. MSC-2058; ABZ, PVNAVO. Vml Joeg/No Fly Zone no. 118772. Letter Boutros Boutros-Ghali to Willy Claes, 23/06/95; NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury, 22/06/95.

⁴⁷⁷ DCBC, 1876. Code Van Mierlo 72, 06/06/95.

⁴⁷⁸ Interview W. Claes, 12/03/01.

population would come under fire, Siladjic was told. The latter was questionable, but it would not be NATO's fault.⁴⁷⁹

Meanwhile in the former Yugoslavia

In addition to the more general discussions on key holders, meanwhile a specific discussion started on the rejection by Janvier (not a key holder for that matter) of NATO Admiral Smith's plans for large-scale air strikes he had proposed. The UN was blamed for that in the American press. Akashi had told journalists that Janvier had rejected Smith's request. Akashi's staff had briefed him that Janvier had not taken a decision, but had only explained that the mandate for Deny Flight did not cover the kind of large-scale air strikes such as Smith had proposed. For that same reason Janvier already had problems with NATO intercepting VRS aircraft, even it was an obvious violation of the No-Fly-Zone regime.

The negative publicity in the American press invoked the question within the UNPF staff of Janvier in Zagreb whether perhaps Akashi tried to use this to put pressure on Janvier or was maybe trying to divert the attention from himself. In any case it was clear that the tone in the American media was devastating for UNPROFOR: they considered it a step back that the UN gave up enforcement of the No-Fly Zone for respect of the Bosnian Serbs. It became even worse due to a not too wise response by a UN spokesman in Zagreb: he had explained that Smith's request had been schemed by NATO, in the expectation it would be rejected. Then NATO could hold the UN responsible for the policy not to carry out any more air strikes, leaving the blame with the UN. A response from New York to these statements was not long in coming: Annan spoke of an 'extreme lack of judgement'. This misinformation of the press could easily have been avoided if it had simply been said that the UN Security Council resolution authorizing the air actions (Resolution 816 of 31 March 1993) was limited to actions from the Bosnian airspace to enforce the flying ban. That also meant that the actions requested by Admiral Smith were not permitted; that was because Smith's actions had a preventive character and that was not permitted in this Resolution.⁴⁸⁰

To clarify what exactly the policy as regards air strikes was, Janvier and NATO Admiral Smith spoke to each other on 27 June 1995. They agreed that NATO would no longer carry out preventive strikes (in military terms: pre-emptive missions) without observing the dual-key procedure. However, if there would be a threat because a Bosnian-Serb target tracking radar locked onto NATO aircraft, missiles would be launched at it. That fitted within 'internationally recognized military standards' as the Bosnian Serbs had been informed earlier. This did mean – as explained above - that all missions over Bosnia, training missions, air reconnaissance as well as Close Air Support, had to be accompanied by SEAD aircraft to suppress the Bosnian-Serb radar; so in this sense the Americans got their way. As the availability of such SEAD aircraft was limited, this meant the end of air presence over Bosnia and the response time for requesting Close Air Support was increased. Nevertheless Close Air Support would be available 24 hours a day within the arranged time limit of four hours.⁴⁸¹ Every day 35 flights would be available for the UN. Janvier said to be satisfied with that and that he was aware of the risks for the pilots.⁴⁸²

7. Conclusions

At the time of the start of the Dutchbat mission in 1994, expectations were that air power would be used forcefully if necessary, and that, if necessary, the Dutch UN soldiers could count on prompt and

⁴⁷⁹ DCBC, 1583. Code Veenendaal NATO 994, 03/07/95. The code mentioned a raid by Serbia.

⁴⁸⁰ John Pomfret, 'U.N. rejects NATO Request to Bomb Serb Airfield After 'No Fly' Violations', *The Washington Post*, 22/07/95; UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 22/06/95, No. MSC-2066.

⁴⁸¹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 28/06/95, No. Z-1067.

⁴⁸² UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 30/06/95, No. Z-1078.

adequate support from the air. Those expectations appeared false.⁴⁸³ The UN showed reluctance to use air power. UNPROFOR was facing the problem that in fact it did not have any instruments between protesting to the contending parties and an action from the air.

A major problem as regards the use of air power (in the form of air strikes or Close Air Support) was the different approach of the conflict by the UN and NATO. The UN stuck to neutrality in the conflict and to the mandate of UNPROFOR that was aimed at peacekeeping, while under American pressure NATO preferred to focus on peace-enforcing. On various occasions the two organizations were pitted against each other: the UN kept an eye on the safety of their peacekeepers on the ground, NATO was focused on the safety of the NATO pilots over Bosnia and the credibility of their organization. That explains why on the part of NATO there was continuous criticism on the careful manner in which the UN handled air power.

The friction between the two organizations became even stronger by the proven ability of the Bosnian-Serb Air Defence to fire at NATO aircraft. For that reason NATO wanted to put an end to that, preferably by pre-emptively also eliminating the Air Defence Systems. However, the mandate did not permit such pre-emptive elimination. In practice it appeared once again that peacekeeping on the ground and peace-enforcing from the air did not really match. For successive UNPROFOR Force commanders it was a spectre that as a consequence of a disproportional reaction by NATO the impartiality of the UN would be lost, endangering the humanitarian mission in Bosnia.

There were also differences of opinion about exactly what warring faction had to be attacked. At the UN headquarters in Zagreb they were not happy to note that air power was only used against the Bosnian Serbs even though more peacekeepers had fallen through the Bosnian Muslims and Croats doing. On top of that the UN suspected that the United States not only wanted to use air power according to the applying procedures, but also for political reasons: they wanted to get tougher with the Bosnian Serbs. Proof of the deep mistrust between these two organizations existed for example at the highest levels of the UN which asked NATO several times for the assurance that NATO would not independently decide to carry out air strikes: there were fears for an American *Alleingang* in this respect. NATO was asked to keep observing the 'dual key' procedure: the UN decided to use air power, and then it only came after NATO had approved it as well. NATO always confirmed this procedure, but the mistrust remained.

Large-scale deployment of air power in the form of air strikes was not really suitable to attack the dispersed mortars and artillery of the warring factions. Moreover, the Bosnian Serbs kept relocating these systems so the NATO aircraft remained vulnerable to them. Air power also became blunt because the Bosnian Serbs started taking hostages. That happened for instance after the air strikes on Pale.

Air power lost its deterrent effect: the capacity of the Bosnian-Serb Air Defence required additional escort aircraft. That considerably reduced NATO's capacity to render Close Air Support.

A later evaluation study among UNPROFOR officers once more showed 'the' UN approach. The respondents stated to welcome support for UNPROFOR by NATO, even considered it essential. They had not failed to identify the problem, that was that the UN and NATO were followers of different philosophies. NATO did not feel the same involvement in an impartial mode of operation as the UN. The UN officers saw NATO as an organization that could compensate the operational weakness of the UN and could contribute means that the UN did not possess. Nevertheless the majority of the UN officers – even those coming from NATO countries – thought that NATO had to operate exclusively in a supportive role, so under UN command.

Consequently, this study showed the problems that had appeared in practice with the use of Close Air Support and air strikes: there was no consensus on the applicability of Close Air Support in a peace operation, and there were grave doubts about the usefulness of offensive air strikes in a

⁴⁸³ DMKlu M95077091/1617. Director Operations (MGen G.F.A. Macco) to MinDef d.t.v. CDS, 04/10/95, No. DOP95.072.078.

peacekeeping operation. The higher the military rank, the more doubt about the use of air power. Air power was considered an instrument for war rather than for peacekeeping. They named as (better) alternatives for air power: more troops and better protection of the troops.

The possibility to request Close Air Support for protection of peacekeepers was generally appreciated, provided that it did not mean the UN was choosing sides. The use of Close Air Support to defend Safe Areas was a controversial issue, which was partly explained by the discussions on Close Air Support around the fall of Srebrenica. Reservations on the use of Close Air Support were also related to the generally existing impression that the Security Council took decisions without allowing for the ideas of the Force Commander in Zagreb. Officers were almost unanimous in that, even though many did not believe it would be realistic to expect improvement of the communication between New York and the field.⁴⁸⁴

An evaluation among the Dutch UN staff officers, asked about their experiences in 1996, also revealed the following. According to them there had been considerable pressure by NATO to come to a more forceful course of action, and that while the risk of the consequences of those NATO operations was for the UN troops on the ground. The Dutch officers defended the principle of decision-making according to the dual key as necessary. The UN staff officers had also noted that NATO officials had a tendency to treat the UN condescendingly and conceitedly. Nevertheless they called the relation between UN General Janvier in Zagreb, NATO Admiral Smith in Naples and UN General Smith in Sarajevo good. Finally the UN officers expressed their opinion that the cooperation with NATO as regards Close Air Support had been good, certainly after the procedures had been cut short and authority had been transferred to military hands.⁴⁸⁵ Indeed air power only became really effective again when UNPROFOR became less vulnerable to hostage-takings - after the fall of Srebrenica.

⁴⁸⁴ Biermann in Biermann and Vadset, *UN Peacekeeping in Trouble*, p. 100-106. For this study 1200 officers of all ranks and coming from various countries, including the Netherlands, have been approached.

⁴⁸⁵ DOKL. Record of an evaluation of UN key personnel, 26/04/96, No. DPS BLS/3651. Landmachtstaf, Zaak nr. BLS/721.

Chapter 3

No air actions on release of the hostages: a deal between Janvier and Mladic?

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter it became clear that during the month of June the procedure for using air power would increasingly meet with hindrances, in particular in view of the consequences to be anticipated. Those consequences could be in the air (the risk that NATO aircraft would become target of the VRS air defence still was considerable), as well as on the ground (late May the Bosnian Serbs had ignored the air strikes on Pale by taking hostages among UN personnel). Early June the question was realistic to what extent the use of air power was still an option. In that connection it is useful now to consider the vision of the two leading figures as far as the use of air power was concerned: UN General Janvier and VRS General Mladic. There is reason for a further consideration of their vision because they discussed, among other things, the use of air power. This chapter will systematically deal with the question how their meeting should be seen in view of the (hindrances to) the further use of air power.

The meeting between generals Janvier and Mladic took place on 4 June 1995, in the Bosnian-Serb city of Zvornik in Eastern Bosnia. Their meeting is surrounded with rumours. Many people contend that there, after the air strikes at Pale on 25 and 26 May, arrangements of some kind should have been made on the release of UN hostages in exchange for abandoning further air actions against the Bosnian Serbs. These assertions should be investigated further because this meeting between Janvier and Mladic has been linked to the Bosnian-Serb attack on Srebrenica, as well as to not giving Close Air Support to Dutchbat during the attack, also because the military UN top should want to get rid of the enclaves.

This link regularly cropped up in the media. The meeting will first be assessed on the basis of reports from the public domain: what appeared about it in the press and in messages between government and Parliament? Then the findings from NIOD's own investigation will be discussed and a conclusion will be drawn as regards the question what the relevance has been of the meeting in Zvornik for the fall of Srebrenica.

2. Rumours in the media about a 'deal'

Reuter correspondent Kurt Schork in Sarajevo was the first to report that General Janvier had had a secret meeting with General Mladic. Schork also quoted a 'UN official' who had said that the UN had been in a hurry to make a 'deal' regarding the hostages.⁴⁸⁶ Janvier had been furious about this report.⁴⁸⁷

On 22 and 23 June 1995 *The Washington Post* and the *International Herald Tribune* fueled the gossip machine by mentioning a deal made by the French Government to get the hostages released, in which also Greece and Russia should have been involved. A UN spokesman should have confirmed that there was a link with air strikes. According to the newspapers the link was clear: after the talks in Zvornik on 4 June, on 9 June this UN spokesman, with reference to the meeting of Akashi, Smith and Janvier in Split (see Chapter 1), had declared rather surprisingly for Akashi that from now on the UN would strictly stick to the rules for peacekeeping, which implied that the UN would not use force or choose sides. Surprising because that suggested that there would not be any more air strikes; that was new. This could be seen as a clear sign from the UN to NATO that no more force (air strikes) would be used; if the UN did not turn the 'key' for air power, NATO could not do that either. It was not a coincidence

486 NIOD, Coll. De Ruyter. *Reuter*, REU1327 3 OVR 556, 1159 190695 GMT

487 NIOD, Coll. De Ruyter. Note by COS (Nicolai) to report *Reuter* of 19/06/95.

that refraining from further force had been the main demand of Mladic and Karadzic. 'Now the Serbs know no-one is going to punish them. These two guys have let the cat out of the bag', a western official was quoted.

These newspapers quoted more possible evidence for an independent French role: Chirac should have ensured the Russian President Jeltsin that 'the troubled era of air strikes in Bosnia was over'. A request from NATO Admiral Smith to Janvier to bomb the airfield of Banja Luka (see Chapter 2) should have been a scheme to make the UN recognize that a deal between Janvier and Mladic had resulted in a no air strike policy.⁴⁸⁸

A few days later rumours also appeared in the media in the United Kingdom: on 27 June *The Times* reported that soldiers in Bosnia had suspicions that a concession had been made to the Serbs in exchange for release of the hostages, though rumours on a 'no air strikes' deal remained without evidence. That is because diplomatic circles, according to *The Times*, had stated that it was not of the habit of the Serbs to unconditionally accept something. The British Foreign Office then argued against this that a secret agreement could not have been concluded without consulting the troop-contributing nations. UN sources in New York and Zagreb were very definite: when the Bosnian Serbs asked to stop the air strikes, they had received the answer that this was 'out of the question'. NATO officials said that they had not been told anything about a change in their mission.⁴⁸⁹

New suspicions about the relation between the release of hostages and abandoning the use of air power had arisen after 6 June when the former Force Commander, the French General De Lapresle, had unexpectedly appeared in Pale even before hostages were released.⁴⁹⁰ It is likely that his presence there had to do with his activities for EU and Bildt. De Lapresle had been assigned to the latter's mission by the French Government.

Also in the Netherlands extensive reports appeared on rumours about a possible deal. These persisted also after the fall of Srebrenica and were repeated in the media from time to time. For instance on 2 November 1995 *NRC Handelsblad* took over a report from the Berlin newspaper *Tageszeitung* stating that on instruction of the French President Janvier had refused to carry out air strikes during the offensive against Srebrenica. The newspaper had understood from sources at the French Government and French sources in Zagreb that Chirac had given Janvier instructions to that effect already before the attack on Srebrenica had started.⁴⁹¹ Two days earlier *NRC Handelsblad* referred to the British newspaper *The Independent*, that had concluded that not honouring the 'desperate requests' for Close Air Support was a deliberate policy. These reports also revived the thought that the UN was refusing Dutchbat Close Air Support because the militarily UN top already wanted to get rid of the enclaves.⁴⁹²

On 29 May 1996 this process was repeated. That day *Newsday* in an article by Roy Gutman once more referred to a declaration issued on behalf of Akashi on 9 June 1995 in which he had stated that from now on the UN would strictly stick by the rules for peacekeeping. The *International Herald Tribune* had already stated that about a year earlier. The conclusion derived by *Newsday* from this declaration did go a bit far: the paper called it a triumph for the Bosnian Serbs that it had been said that UNPROFOR would cease all hostile actions. That had given the Bosnian Serbs the green light for an attack on the enclaves, was the interpretation of *Newsday*. Gutman also wrote that Janvier had offered quid pro quo for the release of the hostages not to attack the Bosnian Serbs with NATO air strikes any more. Janvier had been the requesting party and he had proposed the meeting and the deal, according to the author. Mladic had presented a letter to Janvier stating that the VRS would no longer threaten the lives of

488 *The Washington Post*, 22/06/95. *International Herald Tribune*, 23/06/95.

489 *The Times*, 27/06/95.

490 Bildt, *Peace Journey*, p. 30. De Lapresle had been assigned as military advisor to the negotiating team of Bildt and had indeed met with the Bosnian Serb leaders in the last stages of the hostage crisis. During the Gorazde crisis in April 1994 he also had negotiated with Milosevic on the release of the hostages.

491 *NRC Handelsblad* 2/11/95.

492 See ANP, 301134 Oct 95.

UNPROFOR soldiers and UNPROFOR would no longer use air strikes. Signing the agreement would lead to immediate release of what Mladic referred to as the prisoners of war. Even though Gutman reported that Janvier had not signed, he concluded a deal by implication.⁴⁹³

NRC Handelsblad published – also on 29 May 1996 – a long article written by Frank Westerman in which he too reported about the events in Zvornik. In Westerman's words: 'officially the meeting never took place; what was discussed has never been revealed before'. Just like Gutman, Westerman described what Mladic demanded of Janvier and he wrote that Janvier had not signed the document that contained those demands. In Janvier's place General De Lapresle should have completed the negotiations. Westerman called the meeting at Zvornik the first step on the road to the fall of Srebrenica, that way also implying a deal.⁴⁹⁴

Responses to the rumours

As a result until May 1996 lots of rumours went round that there still should have been a deal of some kind between Janvier and Mladic in Zvornik. The departments of Defence and Foreign Affairs thought it necessary to respond to these reports. The responses of the two ministries converged to some extent, but not completely.

The first response from Defence to the reports in May 1996 was that the purport was not new, and that it was a repetition of earlier allegations directed to the UN and General Janvier. The response from Foreign Affairs also was that the tenor of the reports was not new, but that some elements were new and deserved serious attention.

Defence felt no need for such a further in-depth investigation. Letters to Parliament had already discussed in detail the circumstances under which Close Air Support had been given at Srebrenica, the message was. From those replies it appeared that Close Air Support had been given too late and insufficiently, but that there were no indications for a preconceived UN strategy to abandon the Safe Area Srebrenica. Neither stated Defence to have evidence for contacts between President Chirac and Janvier on the use of air power at Srebrenica. There were doubts whether Close Air Support could have prevented the fall of the enclave. For Defence there was nothing new under the sun and the Public Relations Directorate should just respond calmly to the reports, the motto of the General Policy Directorate was.⁴⁹⁵

That motto was wasted on Colonel De Jonge, Land Operations Officer in Janvier's staff in Zagreb. He was very annoyed about the article by Westerman and felt he had unjustly been quoted as witness and supporter of Westerman's 'conplot theory': this theory meant that a deliberate choice was made not to defend Srebrenica. It became clear to De Jonge, when he spoke to Westerman on 20 May 1996, that he was trying to mobilize support for his theory. De Jonge had already said that he certainly had no indications for that and that he considered the theory completely implausible. With reference to the published article De Jonge once more pointed out that if Janvier would have wanted to give up the enclave, he would never have agreed to the use of the 'blocking position' on 9 July, intended to make sure that indeed the VRS were intending an attack on the enclave (see Chapter 6). Though Janvier had advocated an amendment of the mandate (see Chapter 1), when that did not come he just carried out his assignment. Janvier was too much of an officer not to carry out his orders, De Jonge said. Janvier just did not see much in the use of force, certainly not if he knew he would have to give up an action under pressure of existing or newly taken hostages. De Jonge made all this clear in a draft for a letter to the editor of *NRC Handelsblad*, in response to Westerman's article. Doctoring with that text by the Public Relations Directorate of the Ministry of Defence resulted in new versions of this letter, but by

493 *Newsday*, 29/05/96.

494 *NRC Handelsblad*, 29/05/96.

495 ABZ, DPV/ARA/02109. Memo Sebastiaan Reyn (DAB) to H. van den Heuvel (DV), 29/05/96; Memorandum Plv DGPZ to M, 31/05/96, No. 26/96. That Foreign Affairs thought that London could also ask for an explanation because of the role of General Smith was a misconception. He was absent those days.

then the momentum for inserting such a letter had already passed, so eventually it did not appear in the newspaper.⁴⁹⁶

Foreign Affairs could not put an end to the matter by playing it down, as Defence had proposed. That was because on 13 May 1996 the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs had issued a statement that called the allegations directed at Janvier that he had delayed air power at the instigation of President Chirac, completely unfounded. For that reason Foreign Affairs expected Paris to insist on a further explanation of the latest reports.

Also in Parliament the matter of a possible deal was discussed, one day after the article in *NRC Handelsblad*. Spokesmen in Parliament referred to the article and asked for a response by the ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense. According to Blaauw (VVD) this information was not in line with what had been said in the consultation between House and government. For Hoekema (D66-Democrats) on the other hand, the information was a confirmation of what the government had told Parliament earlier and did the *NRC Handelsblad* article not add anything substantially new. De Hoop Scheffer (CDA-Christian Democrats) considered it expedient to further investigate the UN decision-making process; that seemed to have passed by the Netherlands completely. Valk (PvdA-Labour) wanted the government to discuss a possible secret deal between Janvier and Mladic and the question whether Janvier and Akashi had deliberately aimed at the fall of the enclave. Rosenmöller (GroenLinks-Green Left) would like to have an answer to the question whether the UN had decided in advance to give up Srebrenica and what role the French President Chirac had played in all this.⁴⁹⁷

3. Further investigation into a deal in New York and Paris

Although also Minister Van Mierlo in Parliament called the tenor of the messages in the press not new, some elements and the documents referred to by Westerman were not known in the Netherlands. That deserved serious attention, Van Mierlo thought, the more so because the suggestion had been made that the enclave had fallen, with all its consequences, due to secret deals between the Bosnian Serbs and major countries, particularly France. The information that had become public had to be verified.

In particular a message from Akashi that the Serb President Milosevic had told them during the hostage crisis about arrangements on Close Air Support between Clinton and Chirac drew the attention: Milosevic had asserted to Akashi that the French President Chirac had told him that President Clinton had agreed that there would be no air strikes if these were unacceptable to Chirac. Milosevic had told Akashi this when on 19 June he discussed with him in Belgrade the situation in Bosnia and Croatia. Milosevic had expressed his gratitude to Akashi for the mediation on the release of the hostages, and then he had declared to Akashi that the first step on the road to a peace arrangement had to be the avoidance of further air strikes.⁴⁹⁸ How could such a UN code message end up in the hands of the press, and was it really authentic, Van Mierlo wondered.

Two lines were set out: the Netherlands Permanent Representative at the UN, Biegman, was instructed to ask attention for this matter from Akashi and Kofi Annan.⁴⁹⁹ In addition, the Dutch ambassador in Paris, Wijnaendts, was instructed to confront his French conversation partners with the UN code message referred to in *NRC Handelsblad* and ask them for a response. The earlier declaration by the French who had called reports on contacts between Janvier and Chirac about air power completely unfounded, was not sufficient. It was not the intention to take this matter to the realm of the international relations, the instruction said. It was only about obtaining data to inform Parliament.⁵⁰⁰

496 'Response Col J.H. de Jonge to article Srebrenica in *NRC Handelsblad*. 29/05/96', 03/06/96 (not published).

497 Parliament, TK, uncorrected shorthand report of 30/05/96 (not in Proceedings).

498 NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 19/06/95, No. Z-1020.

499 ABZ, DDI/DVN/PZ 523796. Code Van Mierlo 181 to PV New York, 31/05/96.

500 DCBC, 530.Code Celer Circ 345, 03/06/96.

Report from New York

Biegman set to work in New York. The UN code message referred to in *NRC Handelsblad* was authentic, Annan's top official Tharoor informed Biegman. However, it said nothing about a deal between Janvier and Mladic, as had been suggested in *NRC Handelsblad*. It appeared that indeed General de Lapresle had been sent to the area by the French Government, but the UN had nothing to do with that.⁵⁰¹ In line with that Janvier later denied to have had mutual contacts with de Lapresle during the hostage crisis.⁵⁰² Janvier had always been very loyal and on the level and he had always discussed his meetings with Mladic afterwards with Akashi, according to Tharoor.

Biegman also asked Akashi for information. He did not think there had been a deal, but he also said to Biegman that maybe he had not always known everything that was going on. It was remarkable that Akashi replied to Biegman's question whether Milosevic had told him about the arrangement with Chirac, that the press knew more than he did. Indeed release of the hostages had had the highest priority, Akashi confirmed towards Biegman.

After gaining information from Tharoor and Akashi, late May 1998 UN Ambassador Biegman - as very special exception and under condition of strict confidentiality - also got permission for an interview with Undersecretary-General Kofi Annan himself about the matter of possible arrangements. What exactly was discussed between Janvier, Mladic and de Lapresle, Biegman reported after the interview with Annan, would probably never be revealed. Annan also knew that there had been frictions between Janvier and Chirac, but for New York the nature of those remained a mystery. Eventually New York had concluded that there had been no agreement at all between Mladic and Janvier. If there had been, the Bosnian Serbs had undoubtedly referred to it when late August 1995 new air strikes were launched against them, Annan stated.

Another alleged deal was broached in the conversation with Kofi Annan. *Time* magazine had reported that there should have been a deal between Milosevic and the United States, to the effect that the Bosnian Serbs would be allowed to take the three eastern enclaves and the Croats the western part of Bosnia. The correctness of that could not be confirmed.⁵⁰³ Mladic also referred to that in Potocari where, directly after the fall of Srebrenica, he should have told Displaced Persons that he had permission from the United States to take Srebrenica.⁵⁰⁴ However, any proof for that assertion has never been presented and it does not seem very likely that the American Government, being the pillar of strength for the Bosnians, would have given permission for that.

Report from Paris

In the meantime Ambassador Wijnaendts got to work in Paris. He reported that the French were indeed rather annoyed about the allegations directed at their President that he would have instructed Janvier regarding air power. That fitted the pattern so far: already a year earlier, when on 23 June Roger Cohen pointed an accusing finger at Janvier in the *International Herald Tribune*, Wijnaendts had been told by the military advisor of the Elysée, General Quesnot, that Cohen was wrong with his allegation that Janvier and de Lapresle had made a 'deal'.⁵⁰⁵

Now Wijnaendts reported that Chirac had told Boutros-Ghali that he had to ensure that the hostages were released and that *until that moment* there would be no air strikes. Wijnaendts also reported on the alleged guarantee by Chirac to Milosevic that there would only be air strikes if those were acceptable to Chirac; according to Wijnaendts, Chirac had brought Milosevic quite a different message,

501 ABZ, DDI/DVN/PZ 523796. Code Biegman 389, 05/06/96.

502 *Mission d'Information commune sur les événements de Srebrenica, Audition de M. Bernard Janvier*, 25/01/00.

503 ABZ, DPV UNPROFOR Nederlandse deelname. Code Biegman 389, 05/06/96.

504 ANP 031443 Nov 95. A witness from Srebrenica declared this at a press conference of the Gemeinschaft für bedrohter Völker (GfV) in Bonn. Some doubts about this statement seem justified.

505 ABZ, DIO/ARA/00408. Code Wijnaendts 208, 23/06/95.

that was that he would place himself outside the international order if he did not make sure the hostage-takings were ended.

Wijnaendts continued his report by stating that the meeting between Janvier and Mladic on 4 June in Zvornik had only been a 'technical contact'. The same applied to the talks between the former UNPROFOR Commander De Lapresle and the Bosnian Serbs.

Wijnaendts reported the following on the tricky issue of the contacts between Chirac and Janvier. The French categorically denied that President Chirac should have instructed Janvier to postpone Close Air Support for Dutchbat until all hostages were released. They wondered what reason Chirac could have had to give Janvier such instructions. The French rhetorically wondered whether it had not also been the Dutch who had urged not to carry out air strikes (they meant: Close Air Support) at the time of the fall of Srebrenica when Dutch personnel had been taken hostage in Bratunac; a position by the way only taken by the Dutch Government on 11 July after Bosnian-Serb threats. Air strikes at Srebrenica would only have been useful from a military point of view if those had been massive at a moment before the Bosnian Serbs started their attack, Wijnaendts' spokesman had added.

It had been quite a different matter that Akashi and Janvier thought that the Safe Areas were indefensible. Presumably it had been a mistake of Janvier to say that so openly during his visit to the UN.⁵⁰⁶ Though Janvier agreed with Boutros-Ghali in this respect, he had to convey the message to the Security Council under less favourable circumstances (see Chapter 1).

Own investigation by Voorhoeve and Van Mierlo

In addition to the investigation started in New York and Paris, Foreign Affairs also asked the American Government for comment by the Deputy Secretary of State, Peter Tarnoff. Tarnoff considered an agreement between Clinton and Chirac, as Milosevic had contended, unthinkable. Just to be sure Tarnoff ordered further investigations within the State Department and the National Security Council. The result of that was that the conversations between Clinton and Chirac about air strikes were not denied, but those had also taken place with Kohl and other western leaders. However, at no point in time had the American Government agreed to a ban on NATO air strikes in exchange for release of the hostages.⁵⁰⁷

Ministers Van Mierlo and Voorhoeve themselves met with Akashi on 4 June 1996.⁵⁰⁸ The latter thought that there were major inaccuracies in the reports published in the press during the previous days. In the light of the international consensus that had existed after the air strikes at Pale, it was no surprise that Milosevic had said that there would be no further air strikes, according to Akashi. In addition, Akashi pointed out that at the time of the fall of Srebrenica neither Janvier nor he himself were authorized to decide to use air strikes; Boutros-Ghali had taken up the authority (the 'key') to approve air strikes after the air strikes on Pale.

The possibility for Close Air Support had always remained open. Akashi denied to Voorhoeve and Van Mierlo that arrangements on the subject had been made with the Bosnian Serbs. The French President had not exerted pressure on Janvier either; consequently, the refusal of the requests from Dutchbat for Close Air Support had exclusively been based on Janvier's military judgment and the balancing of risks for the UNPROFOR soldiers, still according to Akashi. That after the meeting between Akashi and generals Janvier and Smith in Split on 9 June a UN spokesman in Sarajevo had said that UNPROFOR would no longer carry out air strikes, was a statement Akashi had not authorized, he said.⁵⁰⁹

506 DCBC, 537. Wijnaendts 156, 04/06/96.

507 ABZ, DDI-DAV 999.241. Codes Jacobovits 309 and 310, 03 and 04/06/96.

508 The Deputy Director Europe had drawn up a list of questions in preparation of the meeting (ABZ, DEU, Srebrenica, no date).

509 Code Van Mierlo 183 to PV New York, 07/06/96.

After this investigation round the ministers replied to Parliament on 7 June 1996. They also asked attention for four parliamentary documents from 1995 describing the sequence of affairs around the fall of Srebrenica ‘in detail’.⁵¹⁰ For the sake of clarity the reply started with a description of the differences between ‘air strikes’ (air strikes on targets in a larger area with a strategic character) and ‘Close Air Support’ (Close Air Support of a purely tactical nature against targets that attacked UN units).

The reply could be summarized as follows. The hostage-takings after the air strikes at Pale on 25 and 26 May 1995 had already taught the UN leaders that air strikes had an adverse effect. The French Government had confirmed to have urged the UN Secretary-General not to carry out any air strikes as long as UN personnel was held hostage. That position was shared by many UN member states, including the Netherlands. At the time President Chirac had asked President Milosevic to bring about the release of the hostages. There had been no promises of any kind and there was no evidence of a ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ between Janvier and Mladic.

Milosevic’s statement, that the French President had ensured him there would be no air strikes without his approval, only applied to the situation as long as there were hostages, the ministers said. Finally Akashi had confirmed that there was an international consensus not to carry out any air strikes as long as the hostage crisis lasted; Close Air Support did remain possible.⁵¹¹

What was not in the letter to the House, but did appear in a draft prepared by Foreign Affairs, was that on 23 June 1995 the UN Secretary-General had written to the NATO Secretary-General that the release of the UNPROFOR personnel had been unconditional. Neither Boutros-Ghali, nor Akashi, nor Janvier had given the Bosnian Serbs any assurance that the use of Close Air Support would no longer be considered. Consequently, Janvier had been completely free to award requests for Close Air Support for Srebrenica. There were no indications that Janvier was under pressure of the French President or that his freedom to take decisions was restricted by arrangements; Janvier did have to take into account possible retaliations against UNPROFOR or the population, the draft text stated. The reason to delete this paragraph probably was to avoid publication of correspondence from third parties that was not addressed to the Netherlands.⁵¹²

4. The rumours on the Bosnian side

Nevertheless rumours on alleged deals with the Bosnian Serbs remained in circulation. The NIOD investigation into this aspect showed that particularly on the Bosnian side the meeting between Janvier and Mladic understandably caught a lot of attention because of the implications of such a deal. Though the meeting had not publicly been announced, the Intelligence offices of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH (the Corps established in Tuzla) knew about it. The Bosnian Muslims also received information on regular meetings between the top of the Republika Srpska and the Serbian Governments because they had a Human Intelligence source (a spy) near those meetings.

At one of these meetings also the meeting between Mladic and Janvier on 4 June in Zvornik was discussed. According to this source Janvier had not told Mladic that he could go ahead with attacks on the Safe Areas, but still Janvier would have made it clear that if the VRS attacked, there would be no air strikes. Whether the ABiH knew about that alleged deal before 11 July remains uncertain.⁵¹³ Moreover, it should not be forgotten that this involves a Bosnian interpretation of a conversation that is not necessarily free from value judgments and undisputed. ABiH army Commander General Rasim Delic on the other hand said he had no evidence for a deal.⁵¹⁴ The Commander of the 2nd Corps, General Sead Delic, neither could say anything more than that he knew that Janvier and Mladic had had

510 TK, 1995-1996, 22 181, Nos. 115, 128, 134 and 138. Also refer to House debate 19/12/95.

511 TK, 1995-1996, 22 181, No. 159 (07/06/96).

512 Draft letter to the Chairman of Parliament, not dated (ABZ, DDI/DEU Srebrenica, No. 192/96).

513 Confidential interview (88).

514 Interview Rasim Delic, 21/04/98.

contact.⁵¹⁵ So it is doubtful whether the Bosnian Muslims knew what was discussed at the meetings in Zvornik.

The story kept buzzing around in Bosnian circles. During the hostage crisis the Bosnian minister without portfolio charged with UN matters, Muratovic, had criticized the contacts between the UN and the Bosnian Serbs and expressed his doubts about the neutrality of UNPROFOR.⁵¹⁶ Later Muratovic told the NIOD about the meeting in Zvornik that Janvier had promised there not to attack the Bosnian Serbs from the air as long as Mladic was in command, not even after the hostages would have been released. For that reason Janvier would have stopped an air attack at Srebrenica, according to Muratovic. Later negotiator Stoltenberg had told Muratovic that there was such a deal. However, there was no written evidence of it. Muratovic also concluded from his contacts with the Serbs that a deal had been made; they told them there would be no Close Air Support. Mladic would have based his decision to attack and his preparations on that deal.⁵¹⁷ When asked about it, Stoltenberg firmly denied that he had ever told Muratovic anything about a deal. It was 'nonsense' and Muratovic's words should not be believed. Stoltenberg did not believe such a deal existed; in his opinion Janvier was an honest and sincere man.⁵¹⁸

There were more people who doubted the reliability of Muratovic's words. His statement should be seen in the light of the fact that the Bosnian Government tended to blame the British and the French for developments they did not like. Everybody in Bosnia, Izetbegovic included, blamed Janvier for the fall of the enclave of Srebrenica and the later tragedy. He had the power and the instruments to intervene to prevent the tragedy, the Bosnians argued. It was concluded from that, that if he had wanted, he could have let Srebrenica survive as Safe Area.⁵¹⁹

Shortly after the replies to Parliament, Muratovic made himself heard again with regard to a possible deal between Janvier and Mladic. The then Bosnian Prime Minister said at a public Srebrenica debate in the Bosnian Parliament that he had evidence about arrangements made between Mladic and Janvier.⁵²⁰ However, Muratovic did not present that evidence and Parliament did not ask for it. These events were noticed in the Netherlands. They were reason for Minister Van Mierlo to ask Muratovic if he was prepared to present such evidence if Van Mierlo would send an envoy to Sarajevo for that purpose. Muratovic had responded positively. The Dutch embassy in Sarajevo was subsequently instructed to remind Muratovic of his promise. If necessary, Van Mierlo would be prepared to get on the phone himself with Muratovic.⁵²¹

The civil servants at Foreign Affairs did not like the fact that Van Mierlo insisted so much on Bosnian evidence of a deal between Janvier and Mladic. Substitute Director-General Political Affairs Van Eenennaam wondered whether this approach sufficiently allowed for responses from the French Government. It could involve material that would be 'incriminating' for Janvier and the French Government would undoubtedly want to be the first to see it. It was understandable that Muratovic did not want to make this material available to Paris, but Paris might get irritated if sooner or later they would find out that a special envoy had been sent to Sarajevo to collect such material. It would be oil on the fire after the French ambassador in The Hague had given 'crystal-clear signs' about the French sensitivity for criticism regarding Janvier. Van Mierlo was not mollified by this civil servants position. He wanted to know all the ins and outs of the matter and he said he placed little trust in Muratovic.

515 Interview Sead Delic, 10/03/99.

516 MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, No. 28/95, completed 141400B June 1995.

517 Interview Hasan Muratovic, 30/01/98.

518 Interview Thorvald Stoltenberg, 22/09/00.

519 Confidential interview (59).

520 ABZ, DDI/DEU, Srebrenica. Code Glaubitz 19, 20/08/96.

521 ABZ, DDI/DEU, Srebrenica. Code Van Mierlo 11, 23/08/96.

statements; then the French would not have a problem either. However, to him it went too far to have the French direct his skepticism.⁵²²

The delegate in Sarajevo, Glaubitz, damped Van Mierlo's expectations. Though Muratovic said to be prepared to supply intercepted messages between Bosnian-Serb units and intercepted UN messages, Glaubitz first wanted to know to what extent really information could be expected that added something to what was already known. Glaubitz emphasized 'that it happens sometimes in this country that what is promised theoretically is not entirely (or entirely not) the same as what is offered in practice.' He had experience with that regarding some issues. The Bosnian authorities were not too anxious to lay all facts about Srebrenica on the table, Glaubitz estimated. There was a considerable risk that a ministerial envoy would not get really new information and would return empty-handed.⁵²³ Thus this trail ended, apparently because Van Mierlo let the matter rest.

5. The report on the meeting with Janvier and Mladic

At the time of the meeting in Zvornik only few people knew exactly what had been discussed. Little openness had been observed about meeting. Even General Smith did not know about it initially, until he heard of it through the Intelligence and security departments; then Zagreb confirmed that the meeting had taken place. At later meetings with Mladic Janvier did inform Smith and they discussed the contents.⁵²⁴

The Dutch people in the UNPROFOR organization did hear something about the meeting, but that remained very vague. For instance the Dutch chief of staff of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo, Brigadier-General Nicolai, said that he had heard that a meeting had taken place and that the main points of discussion had been the resumption of the convoys and the return of the hostages. However, Nicolai did not know what exactly had been discussed.⁵²⁵ According to the additional Dutch Chief of Staff in Zagreb, Major-General Kolsteren, the staff there did not know anything about a deal with Mladic. There were rumours, however those were not strong.⁵²⁶ The Chief Land Operations in Zagreb, Colonel De Jonge, did not even know that Janvier and Mladic spoke to each other in Zvornik. He only heard about it late July.⁵²⁷ As a result, little can be concluded from 'Dutch UN sources' about the meeting in Zvornik. Both leading figures – Mladic and Janvier - refused to speak to the NIOD about this question. Consequently, the following reconstruction is mainly based on systematic research in records and on conversations with people in their vicinity.

Already before the meeting in Zvornik, Janvier had received instructions from Boutros-Ghali that for the time being the use of air power was out of the question. Janvier relayed this to General Smith in Sarajevo with the following words: 'we must definitely avoid any action which may degenerate into confrontation, further escalation of tension and the potential use of air power'. Smith had proposed to Janvier to face the confrontation with the Bosnian Serbs by opening the route across Mount Igman to Sarajevo in order to get supplies to Sarajevo again. Janvier refused because he did not want to face the confrontation, not even if UNPROFOR would let the Bosnian Serbs know about it in advance. Janvier expected that he would soon be involved in the negotiations on the release of the hostages and, in addition to the safety of the personnel, they had absolute priority. His purpose was to achieve, while maintaining 'political freedom to manoeuvre' that the Bosnian Serbs would release

522 ABZ, DDI/DEU. Memorandum Plv DGPZ to M through DGPZ, 26/08/96, no number. With remarks from M of 17/08/96.

523 ABZ, DDI/DEU. Code Glaubitz 25, 03/09/96.

524 Interview Jim Baxter, 16/10/00.

525 Interview C.H. Nicolai, 11/06/99.

526 Interview A.M.W.W. M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99. Kolsteren arrived in Zagreb after the meeting in Zvornik.

527 Interview J.H. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

hostages, and to ensure that headway could be made with a broader political settlement of the conflict.⁵²⁸

A report worded in French is available about the meeting in Zvornik.⁵²⁹ For a meeting that lasted five hours without interruption, a report of four and a half pages is rather brief. Consequently, it only describes the arguments of Janvier and a number of points put forward by Mladic; there is nothing to be learned about the discussions. Only a relatively small part of the report is dedicated to the issues of the hostages and Close Air Support. The enclaves and sending supplies there were other topics.

Although it is not clear when exactly the report was drafted, it is striking that Akashi did not send it to New York until 15 June, after New York had asked for it a day earlier with the words: 'perhaps its transmission to New York was inadvertently overlooked?' Akashi sent the report with 'our apologies for the oversight'.⁵³⁰ A remarkable state of affairs, though it should be noted that Annan did know that the two generals had spoken to each other for five hours; he already reported this at the consultation of the troop-contributing nations on 5 June.⁵³¹ Janvier was not secretive either about his meeting with Mladic and he talked about it, also on 5 June, with the Dutch Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen.⁵³² To the question why Janvier had not sent that report earlier, he said in 2001 that he 'had other things to do than shuffling paper.' After he had informed Akashi and New York by telephone, he considered the rest details. Janvier also said that he had not sent the report on request of the UN; he had only sent it when it was finished.⁵³³

The report on the meeting does not mention any agreement. It does state that at the end of their meeting Mladic demanded that in future there would be no more '*frappes aériennes*'.⁵³⁴ Mladic had also demanded in a telephone conversation with General Smith on 28 May that all flying activity would be stopped. That not only applied to fighter aircraft, but also to transport aircraft because according to Mladic those carried weapons and supplies for the Muslims. If the flights were continued, Mladic would be forced to take 'certain other' measures.⁵³⁵

For Mladic the release of 'prisoners of war' that were still captured, as Mladic called them, was connected with the guarantee that there would be no more air strikes. For that purpose Mladic had drawn up a text and demanded that Janvier would sign it immediately. That text stated that Janvier and Mladic agreed on three items: (1) that the VRS would no longer threaten the lives and safety of the members of UNPROFOR; (2) that UNPROFOR would no longer carry out '*frappes aériennes*' on VRS targets and other targets within the terrain of the Republika Srpska; (3) that signing of the agreement would automatically mean release of all 'prisoners of war'.⁵³⁶ Janvier had not accepted that. Of course the signing of the agreement by Janvier as presented to him by Mladic would have seriously exceeded Janvier's mandate, according to Akashi.⁵³⁷

528 SMG, 1004. Letter Janvier to (Rupert) Smith, 02/06/95.

529 UNNY, DPKO, UNPF Code Cables 14/06/95-30/06/95. 'Rencontre entre le General Janvier et le General Mladic, Commandant and chef les Forces serbes de Bosnie, Bosnie le 4 juin 1995', sent by Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 15/06/94 No. Z-995

530 UNNY, DPKO, UNPF Code Cables 14/06/95-30/06/95. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 15/06/94, No. Z-995.

531 UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 12/1995/95, No. MSC-1948. It is not clear how this information had reached Annan.

532 Bstas. Note CDS to the Minister, 06/06/95, No. S/95/061/2330.

533 *Mission d'Information commune sur les événements de Srebrenica, Audition de M. Bernard Janvier*, 25/01/01.

534 UNNY, DPKO, UNPF Code Cables 14/06/95-30/06/95. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 15/06/94, No. Z-995, with attached 'Rencontre entre le General Janvier et le General Mladic, Commandant and chef les Forces serbes de Bosnie, Bosnie le 04/06/95'.

535 UNNY, DPKO, UNPF Code Cables 14/06/95-30/06/95. Telephone Conversation Gen Smith / Gen Mladic, 28/05/95 UN Confi., attached to Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 26/05/95, No. Z-883.

536 UNNY, DPKO, UNPF Code Cables 14/06/95-30/06/95. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 15/06/94, No. Z-995, with attached 'Rencontre entre le General Janvier et le General Mladic, Commandant and chef les Forces serbes de Bosnie, Bosnie le 04/06/95'.

537 Interview Yasushi Akashi, 25/11/99.

Mladic said in Zvornik, that he understood the report on the agreement in such a manner that the chain of action and reaction now had to be broken and that the attention should be focused on the peace process. However, it would be difficult to convince the Bosnian-Serb authorities to make a gesture and release the hostages, Mladic thought. Now it was the turn of the UN who had to make a gesture of good will in the direction of the Republika Srpska: they wanted to be treated on an equal footing with the other parties.

The report of the meeting also mentions a discourse by Mladic on the Serb history and all kinds of unrealistic far-reaching proposals. In that connection Mladic came with the proposal to start negotiating with the commanders involved in the conflict as soon as possible. This proposal seemed to have been prepared because Mladic used notes. The purpose was to reach a final agreement on the cessation of hostilities. Firstly there had to be a ceasefire based on the lines the troops now occupied. It was Janvier's tasks to gather the army leaders at a neutral location, possibly Paris. A military agreement could subsequently give the diplomats room for negotiations.⁵³⁸

Follow-up: the second meeting between Janvier and Mladic

When on 17 June Janvier and Mladic met for the second time, Close Air Support and hostages were no longer conversation topics; the last hostages were released the next day.

At this meeting Mladic was calm and cheerful, according to the report. He carefully wrote down all remarks by Janvier, and said that he was even prepared to announce a unilateral ceasefire. He was still interested in a meeting of the commanders involved in the conflict, to reach an agreement between soldiers that should immediately and finally lead to a cessation of hostilities. This time Mladic was even prepared to come to Sarajevo for it. But whether 'Docteur Karadzic' supported that did not become clear to Janvier. In addition Mladic complained about the unequal treatment of the Bosnian Serbs; he once more demanded that the Bosnian Serbs would be treated on an equal footing.⁵³⁹

6. External interference with the hostage crisis

On 18 June the last UN hostages were released. This release had been preceded by a long path of diplomatic activity of varying origin.

Mediation by the UN itself appeared impossible: initially the Senior Political Advisor of Boutros-Ghali, C.R. Gharekhan, had been appointed to solve the crisis. However, because the Bosnian Serbs withdrew earlier guarantees for the safety of his flight to Sarajevo, Gharekhan could not reach Sarajevo.⁵⁴⁰ Until then Akashi had tried in vain to contact the authorities in Pale.⁵⁴¹

The Yugoslav Government also got involved in the hostage-takings. Milosevic condemned them rather quickly, after which the French Government asked him already in the early stages of the crisis to use his influence on Karadzic to bring about the release of the hostages.⁵⁴² That accidentally fitted Milosevic's wish to emphasize his position as key figure; that wish had already appeared earlier when Milosevic had not responded strongly to the NATO attacks on Pale of 25 and 26 May. That way it indeed appeared that Milosevic was after gaining credit at the French and the British.⁵⁴³ French pressure on Milosevic to get the (mostly French) hostages released also appeared from consultation between Chirac and Clinton on 27 May, after which Chirac spoke to Milosevic on the very same day.

538 UNNY, DPKO, UNPF Code Cables 14/06/95-30/06/95. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 15/06/94, No. Z-995, with attached 'Rencontre entre le General Janvier et le General Mladic, Commandant and chef les Forces serbes de Bosnie, Bosnie le 04/06/95.

539 DPKO, UNPF Code Cables 14/06/95-30/06/95 Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 20/1994/95, No. Z-1025.

540 UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 05/06/95, No. MSC-1874.

541 Confidential information (67).

542 MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, no. 25/95, completed 301200B May 1995. Conf.

543 ABZ, DPV/ARA/00797. Code Engels 65, 29/05/95.

Chirac should have made it clear to Milosevic that he had to reckon with further sanctions if the situation would not improve quickly, and that he would become the outcast of the international community. Chirac also asked the Russian President Jeltsin to make an effort to get the hostages released. In the meantime, according to the French Chief of Defence Staff Admiral Lanxade, there had to be a pause in the air strikes in order not to increase the risk for the hostages.⁵⁴⁴ That way Lanxade expressed the consensus in the international community: as long as there were hostages, new air strikes were not recommended.

The Contact Group too hoped to exert pressure on Karadzic through Milosevic to get the hostages released.⁵⁴⁵ The American negotiator Frasure would also ask for active interference by Milosevic for the release of the hostages.⁵⁴⁶

The matter of the hostages also appeared on the agenda of the coming summit of the G-7 in the Canadian city of Halifax from 15 to 17 June. Milosevic had invited the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ms Agnelli, to give her a message for the G-7. They met on 13 June in Belgrade. The message entailed that the release of the hostages had to end the confrontations, and that it also had to revitalise the negotiation process on the basis of the Contact Group plan. Milosevic was completely confident that he would succeed in convincing Karadzic to accept a peace proposal.

Agnelli also took along what Milosevic told her about the conversation between Chirac and Milosevic to the North Atlantic Council. However, based on the report, the conversation between Chirac and Milosevic had not (only) been about Close Air Support but (also) about the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force that had to reinforce UNPROFOR in a forceful manner (see Chapter 1). Milosevic had made it clear that deployment of this Rapid Reaction Force was not exactly the best method to bring peace closer. He envisaged the risk of a further escalation because the Bosnian Government could exploit its arrival by 'provocative actions', which in turn could lead to Serb reactions

It had been no coincidence that the hostages were released before Agnelli came to Belgrade, Milosevic also told Agnelli. That had to be seen as a good will gesture. He also disapproved of Karadzic's behaviour in the strongest terms.⁵⁴⁷ So at the meetings with Akashi and Agnelli Milosevic did not say that to him the air strikes were unacceptable or that he connected conditions to a release.

Finally on 12 June Akashi reported at the meeting of the Special Representative that Milosevic had informed Chirac by telephone that the remaining hostages would soon be released.⁵⁴⁸ The Belgrade press had already reported on 2 June that Milosevic had exhaustively consulted with Chirac about a release, and Milosevic had promised it would happen as soon as possible.⁵⁴⁹ Milosevic was the source of the contacts between him and Chirac, as it had also been Milosevic's interpretation that Chirac had ensured him there would be no air strikes without approval by him (Chirac). General Wesley Clark, who negotiated regularly with Milosevic in this capacity of chief of plans for the American Joint Chiefs of Staff, later pointed out that Milosevic had a habit of making what he called 'mischievous charges'. Clark gave as an example that during consultations in 1995 Milosevic had left the room for a telephone conversation with the French President and returned with the words that Chirac was against bombings.⁵⁵⁰ It cannot be ruled out that Akashi has become a victim of a similar statement.

Milosevic's position was shown most clearly when on 5 and 6 June the Greek Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of Defence, Papoulias and Arsenis, spoke to Karadzic in Pale and to Milosevic in Belgrade, in an attempt to make a contribution to the solution of the hostage crisis. The Greeks liked to see themselves as negotiators in the Bosnian conflict and boasted their contact with Milosevic and

544 ABZ, DEU/ARA/05243. Code Wijnaendts 165, 28/05/95.

545 MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, no. 26/95, completed 011400B June 1995.

546 ABZ, Embassy Washington, record 912.11, no. 129431. Code Celer 102 to Emb Washington, 02/06/95.

547 Confidential Information (154).

548 NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury, 12/06/95. Such reports also appeared in the *New York Times* of 7 and 12/06/95. However, these reports did not contain information on a possible 'deal'.

549 Confidential information (158).

550 Nicholas Kravov, 'West braces for Milosevic's "tales"'. *The Washington Times*, 07/03/01.

countries sometimes used that.⁵⁵¹ Milosevic had agreed with his conversation partners that all hostages had to be released unconditionally. He was determined to do everything in his power to achieve that goal. Greek sources reported that Milosevic had indeed urged Karadzic to unconditionally release the hostages. The Bosnian Serbs on the other hand were prepared to release hostages, but underlined the importance of something in return: they wanted guarantees that NATO air strikes would not be repeated.⁵⁵² According to a Greek newspaper the two ministers had only promised that 'NATO air strikes would stop for a period'.⁵⁵³ That did not mean final cessation. So these conversations between the two Greek government officials showed clear differences of insight on the subject between the authorities in Belgrade and those in Pale. Karadzic said that the Bosnian Serbs felt cornered by the hostile attitude of the West. Consequently, the only solution for the Bosnian Serbs was to rely on 'all out actions', Karadzic said.

The Dutch Military Intelligence Service also reported that Karadzic, in addition to stopping the air strikes, also connected the condition to the release of the UN hostages that UNPROFOR would demilitarize the Safe Areas and would more strictly supervise the observance of the weapons embargo.⁵⁵⁴

At the same time also the negotiators Owen and Stoltenberg made efforts to get the hostages released. In that connection Owen spoke to Milosevic, who told him that he was working hard on the matter. Milosevic had sent his own safety advisor Staniscic to Pale and he himself had spoken several times to Mladic who was in an overheated state of mind. Milosevic did not want the Serb nation would be identified with hostage takers.⁵⁵⁵ According to one source, a Canadian Intelligence official, indeed a deal had developed between Belgrade and Pale. He had understood this from the head of the Serb Military Intelligence, Demitriavic. According to him Serbia had supplied aid to the Bosnian Serbs in the form of money, fuel, military goods and ammunition, in exchange for the release of the hostages; especially the fuel and the ammunition should have been used for the attack on Srebrenica. Such a deal has not been reported from any other source.⁵⁵⁶

Milosevic had not been too happy about the Greek intervention, he informed Owen. Initially he had even refused to receive Papoulias because that could possibly cast a shadow over his central position in the matter. The Greeks had traveled to Belgrade and Pale without any consultation with their European colleagues.⁵⁵⁷

In addition to Karadzic there were others in the regime of the Republika Srpska who spoke about the hostage crisis. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republika Srpska, Aleksa Buha, had also said that Milosevic had ensured him that there would be no more air strikes. New York asked Akashi to find out, if possible what the basis for Buha's statement had been.⁵⁵⁸ Although Akashi did not directly reply to the question, he indirectly did with his representation referred to earlier of his meeting with Milosevic on 19 June: that same day he reported to New York that he had heard from Milosevic that there would be no air strikes if those were unacceptable for Chirac.⁵⁵⁹

The Bosnian-Serb Vice-President, Nikola Koljevic, also added his two cents worth. He demanded, according to articles in the Belgrade press, that before the hostages were to be released,

551 Telephone conversation with Tom Miller, 18/06/00.

552 ABZ, DEU/ARA/05243. Code Ath COREU, 08/06/95, No. pesc/ath 269.

553 Confidential information (67).

554 MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, no. 27/95, completed 081400B June 1995.

555 Confidential information (67).

556 Confidential interview (2).

557 Confidential information (67).

558 UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 15/06/95, No. Z-1981. This message was stated in the Weekly Situation Report of 08/06/95, No. UNPF-HQ Z-943 from Akashi to Annan which said that according to Buha 'the release followed signals through diplomatic channels that there would be no more air strikes and that there would be a positive movement in the peace process.' A reply by Akashi has not been found

559 UNNY, DPKO, UNPF Code Cables, 14/06/95 – 30/06/95. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 19/06/95, No. Z-1020.

NATO had to promise not to carry out any further air strikes.⁵⁶⁰ Later Koljevic openly boasted that the release of the hostages had been the result of a deal between French officials and the VRS.⁵⁶¹

According to Koljevic also President Jeltsin had said that Chirac had ensured him ‘that air strikes in Bosnia were finished’.⁵⁶² Assigning a right of veto to the French president for the use of air power in Bosnia was referred to as ‘pure fantasy’ of Milosevic by the American UN ambassador Albright. She did not believe a word of it. According to her Milosevic seldom spoke the truth. That interpretation was not only convenient for Milosevic, it was also factually incorrect, according to Albright: on the contrary, the arrival of Chirac on the stage had meant a break with the policy of his predecessor, Mitterrand. Chirac was advocate of more forceful action against the Bosnian Serbs and for that reason the Americans had been glad with his arrival.⁵⁶³

7. Visions from later days

The American negotiator Holbrooke later wrote in his polemic memoirs that there was ‘substantial, if circumstantial, evidence’ of a secret deal between Janvier and Mladic in Zvornik. However, Holbrooke’s remarks are inconsistent. He writes for instance that it was not clear what assurance, if any, the Bosnian Serbs received. Apparently Holbrooke bases his decision on the fact that the release of the hostages started after the meeting in Zvornik. According to Holbrooke, Washington did not know what exactly had been arranged until the moment his book was published in 1998. In any case, according to Holbrooke, the Bosnian-Serb military efforts dramatically increased after the meeting in Zvornik without the UN or NATO starting air strikes.⁵⁶⁴

The American ambassador in Zagreb, Galbraith, informed the NIOD of his vision about an alleged deal. According to him there certainly had been some kind of deal between Mladic and Janvier in Zvornik. It might not have been an official signing of an agreement, but a token of approval. It did not miss its psychological effect. It was widely known, Galbraith argued, that Janvier wanted to get rid of the enclaves and rumours about a possible agreement were only signs that this picture could be correct. The idea of an agreement in itself already had a positive effect on the morale of the VRS and a negative effect on the morale of the ABiH and on that of UNPROFOR. As a result UNPROFOR soldiers had it at the back of their minds that there would not be any air actions. Even though there was no formal agreement, the rumours had a devastating psychological effect according to him.⁵⁶⁵

Also for another American ambassador in the region it was an indisputable fact that Janvier had made an arrangement with Mladic about the cessation of air strikes and Close Air Support. This spokesman considered it irrelevant whether or not he signed a document on the subject. The crucial issue was mutual understanding on a commitment, and Janvier stuck to that according to this ambassador. Whether or not the French Government instructed Janvier had little relevance, according to this spokesman.⁵⁶⁶ However, these American ambassadors did not possess any evidence either of such an alleged ‘mental deal’. At the end of this chapter we will get back to the question whether a ‘mental deal’ could be likely.

Highplaced French political and military sources said that they did not know of a deal between Mladic and Janvier about Close Air Support, as concession to get the hostages released. Janvier was a rather straightforward troops general, ‘*tres discipliné*’, and he would never have made secret arrangements

560 Confidential information (68).

561 UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cables, 14/06/95 – 30/06/95. Akashi to Annan, 19/06/95, No. UNPF Z-1019.

562 Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, p. 263. Sudetic doesn’t state when and where Koljevic made these statements. Possibly this statement was made during a press conference on 13 June on the occasion of the release of 130 of the remaining 144 hostages.

563 Interview M. Albright, 28/09/01.

564 Holbrooke, *To End a War*, pp. 64-65.

565 Interview Peter Galbraith, 23/06/99.

566 Confidential interview (3)

for the release of the hostages. Neither did these sources know anything about a promise by Clinton to Chirac (no air strikes without Chirac's approval), as Milosevic suggested. Neither would it fit in with the approach advocated by Chirac, according to these sources: conversely, the French President wanted to pursue a strong policy, handle the VRS forcefully and not permit any further humiliation of UNPROFOR; that also appeared from Chirac's personal instruction to retake the Vrbanja bridge in Sarajevo while the hostage crisis still lasted (see Chapter 1).⁵⁶⁷

To sum up: these sources qualified the rumours about a secret deal as nonsense. In any case the French authorities had never asked Janvier to make such an arrangement.⁵⁶⁸ It is true that, in the opinion of the French military advisor - presumably - during the hostage crisis a conversation between Chirac and Janvier had taken place on the initiative of the President.⁵⁶⁹ The contents of this conversation was never disclosed. When assessing such conversations it should not be forgotten that Janvier was also the Commander of the French contingent in the former Yugoslavia.

In order to determine whether there was a deal as contended by Milosevic (no air strikes without Chirac's approval, which Clinton would have accepted), it has been investigated what was known about that among American sources within NATO; after all that was the circle of potential executors of this alleged American political decision. It involved the American representative at NATO, ambassador Hunter and the American Commander in Chief Allied Forces Southern Europe, Admiral Smith. They both said they did not know anything about a statement by President Clinton in that sense.⁵⁷⁰ The Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), also Commander of the American troops in Europe, General Joulwan, also said he did not know anything about French involvement with Close Air Support. Though it would not have surprised him, he had never been informed about it.⁵⁷¹

The Canadian Military Assistant to the Deputy Force Commander in Zagreb, Major Last, did not see any indication either for a deal between Janvier and Mladic. He attended various meetings between Janvier and Mladic (though not the one in Zvornik on 4 June). He saw as evidence of the fact that no 'deal' had been made with Mladic, that later Mladic had never referred to an agreement that was broken, while he did refer to other elements that were discussed in Zvornik.⁵⁷²

Negotiator Carl Bildt worded the same vision. A deal between Janvier and Mladic about Close Air Support seemed highly unlikely to him too. Later Mladic certainly would have broached the subject, but after the bombings in August he had never said anything along the lines of: 'that had not been agreed', although he had been ranting and raving about these air strikes.⁵⁷³

When asked, Boutros-Ghali made it clear to Brussels that, despite the speculative reports in the media regarding secret agreements, neither his representative Akashi nor the Force Commander Janvier had made any concessions to VRS Commander Mladic regarding future use of air power. Boutros-Ghali maintained that he would not hesitate to permit air strikes (he held the 'key' that would allow air strikes to begin) if the conduct of the warring factions or the objectives set out in the Resolutions gave reason to do so.⁵⁷⁴

Also, *The Washington Post* published a report about a deal referred to at the beginning of this chapter. Then Akashi received instructions from New York to explain 'in no uncertain terms' that no assurance whatsoever had been issued to the Bosnian Serbs. In New York the report was considered 'extremely damaging and only an example of many similar stories in other newspapers'. A UN spokesman had suggested to the *Washington Post* that there was a link between the release of the hostages and Close Air Support, but this spokesman was 'ill-advised', according to New York: the use

567 Confidential interview (4)

568 Confidential interview (1)

569 Confidential interview (4)

570 Interviews Leighton Smith and Robert Hunter, resp. 06 and 07/06/00.

571 Interview George Joulwan, 08/06/00.

572 Interview David Last, 05/07/00.

573 Interview Carl Bildt, 13/12/00.

574 Confidential Information (149).

of air power certainly remained an option.⁵⁷⁵ Akashi responded to New York: 'I can state emphatically that neither I nor General Janvier have given such assurances, nor could we condone any such assurances; we have always maintained that the release of the hostages must be, and was, unconditional'.⁵⁷⁶

8. Continuing the use of air power, also during the hostage crisis?

In the meantime in New York the UN had realized already since the start of the hostage crisis, that started right after the air strikes on Pale, that Mladic understood very well that at that moment the strength of NATO air power had already been undermined also without 'deal', and did not amount to much more as long as UN personnel were still held hostage. Already on 27 May Akashi reported to New York that 'reducing risks, calming the situation' and release of the hostages had the highest the priority. For Akashi that meant that air power would no longer be used and that incidents on the ground had to be avoided. He expected that would lead to some relaxation of the conditions under which the UN personnel were held. Unlike in the past, an imminent release was not to be expected according to Akashi. The detention could very well last until the Bosnian Serbs were convinced that there was no longer a threat of actions from the air, according to Akashi, even more so because they might be afraid for more forceful NATO action, in view of the state of mind of the international community.

So while air strikes were out of the question as far as Akashi was concerned as long as there still were hostages, he did not rule out Close Air Support. Despite the worries about the safety of the hostages, shootings at Safe Areas could be accompanied by attacks on UNPROFOR, which would lead to a greater risk for the personnel than the risks for the hostages. Akashi still wanted to take into account that air actions might be needed to implement the UNPROFOR mandate, including use in the Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones around Sarajevo, and to support resupply. The key question was just whether the use of air power was feasible under the given conditions. Akashi wanted a clear statement on this point from the UN Secretary-General and the troop-contributing nations.⁵⁷⁷ Two days later Akashi once more repeated the gist of his message of 27 May that maybe if need be Close Air Support could be used if 'robust defensive action' would be required to prevent more hostages.⁵⁷⁸

The Deputy Force Commander in Zagreb, the Canadian Major-General Crabbe, also informed Annan from Zagreb as early as 26 May, when still only eight UNMOs were being held hostage, that the key was held by the troop-contributing nations. He wondered whether those countries still wanted further actions from the air, with a view to the hostages and possible further hostage-takings. Crabbe wanted to know what the troop-contributing nations wanted and what their worries in this respect were. His question had come up because the General Smith had told him that he did not care what policy UNPROFOR was going to follow. He did want to continue the air campaign to enforce the Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones regime around Sarajevo, but then it should be realized that the UNMOs that were held in Pale might be killed and that there might also be casualties elsewhere. The policy Smith wanted to follow could in the long run mean withdrawal of UNPROFOR, Crabbe estimated. Observation posts of UNPROFOR (OPs) and personnel at Weapon Collection Points would then have to pay the price and possibly have to be withdrawn from the eastern enclaves. If they did not want to continue the air campaign, the limitations of UNPROFOR had to be realized and they should 'thereafter conduct our business accordingly'. Then negotiations about the release of the hostages had the highest priority.⁵⁷⁹

575 UNNY, DKPO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 22/06/95, No. MSC-2066.

576 UNNY, DKPO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 22/06/95, No. UNPROFOR Z-1041.

577 Confidential information (70).

578 Confidential information (70).

579 Confidential information(71).

During the consultation of the troop-contributing nations on 27 May the UN ambassadors decided on the question whether or not to continue the air strikes.⁵⁸⁰ Kofi Annan referred to the outcome of the consultation as 'largely predictable': worries had been expressed about the hostages and the population and there was a difference of opinion on the question what further action had to be taken: six countries 'spoke strongly in favour of more air strikes'. Six other countries were 'equally emphatic that the results of the earlier air strikes did not warrant their continuation'. Eight other countries said it was time for a pause. Kofi Annan concluded from the consultation that there was support to leave further decisions to Akashi and the commanders in the field. It was clear that there was not a unanimous vision within the troop-contributing nations and neither within the Security Council about a future strategy. Annan did not rule out any option but Akashi and the commanders in the field had to decide what option to follow.

It can be concluded from this report about the consultation of the troop-contributing nations that the Islamic countries supported rather more than less Close Air Support. Most NATO countries preferred to leave the decisions to the commanders in the field. It was striking that the majority of the NATO countries wanted to give the right to decide to carry out air strikes to the operational commanders: unlike what Annan told Akashi, not a single country named the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (Akashi) as the authority with the power to decide.

In his report of the meeting Kofi Annan also wrote to Akashi: 'We understand that you have also received further guidance directly from the Secretary-General in this regard.'⁵⁸¹ In fact Boutros-Ghali had assumed all authority to use air power after the air strikes on Pale, because he wanted to be consulted for air strikes as well as for Close Air Support; only after 23 June Akashi was allowed to decide on Close Air Support again (see Chapter 2). It is not clear whether the troop-contributing nations knew about this limitation; the Dutch UN representative did not report it. Only on 7 June (during consultation about the Rapid Reaction Force in New York) the UN admitted that there were problems with the position of Akashi and the original delegation of authorities to him. On that opportunity Kofi Annan also remarked that though future use of air strikes had not been discussed, Close Air Support did remain a major element for the commander on the ground.⁵⁸²

It is not surprising that the weapon of air strike caused doubts as long as UN personnel was still being held hostage and thus had become blunt. The intended purpose of the air strikes had not been achieved, and the Bosnian Serbs had not complied with the obligations that had been arranged for the heavy weapons. The air strikes of 25 and 26 May had not stabilized the situation around Sarajevo and elsewhere in Bosnia. The political advisor of UNPROFOR in Sarajevo, Mihov, directly said that for the time being there should be no more air strikes with the short-term objective of getting the hostages released. That did not necessarily have to get an official touch; the possibility of air strikes would not formally be eliminated.⁵⁸³

Janvier saw the use of force, Close Air Support and air strikes included, as a last resource. It should be attempted to renew talks with the Bosnian Serbs. UNPROFOR had to resume their peacekeeping tasks in so far as possible and try to carry out the mandate.⁵⁸⁴ In a directive to Smith, Janvier did not rule out the use of air power in advance, but he did not recommend it.

Also strong advocates of the use of air power like the Americans, who moreover did not have any hostages taken, did not want to use air strikes for the moment. The American Secretary of Defence, Perry, gave the order that air strikes should no longer be used. Only Close Air Support was still

580 UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 07/06/95, No. MSC-1911, Minutes of TCN meeting on 27/05/95.

581 UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, attn SRSG, FC, Smith, 27/05/95, No. 1810.

582 ABZ, DPV/ARA/02090. Code Biegman 509 to Min. v. BZ cc Min. v, Def/DS/DAB, 07/06/95.

583 UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Fax Deyan Mihov, Acting D-SRSG/CAC BH Command Sarajevo to Yasushi Akashi and Michel Moussali, HCA Civil Affairs, HQ Zagreb, Situation Assessment May 29 1995, sent with Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 29/05/95, No. Z-889.

584 NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Force Commander to LtGen R. Smith Only, 29/05/95, File Ref: FC/95/0801, UN Confi.

allowed.⁵⁸⁵ The British strategy was ‘holding/containment’ until the release of the hostages was certain. Air power would remain available, but it looked like it would be ‘hard to use’ without causing new hostages.⁵⁸⁶

The British position had already been stated to Koljevic, the Vice-President of the Republika Srpska, on 31 May by the British ambassador in Sarajevo, Sir Ivor Roberts. Roberts handed him a EU statement about the hostages; on that occasion Koljevic had said that the hostages would not be released until it had been guaranteed that ‘use of air power’ in future was excluded. Koljevic added that he understood that public guarantees were not possible, but he wanted to investigate the option of personal guarantees. Roberts then emphasized that such guarantees were not possible. The best guarantees against new air strikes were in the hands of the Bosnian Serbs themselves in the form of respect for the Safe Areas and for the status of the UN troops, according to Roberts.⁵⁸⁷

On 12 June the delegates from various European countries of which personnel was being held hostage, were briefed in Belgrade by the Civil Affairs Coordinator of the UN in Belgrade, Kirudja. The Netherlands was also represented there because a number of Dutch UNMOs were among the hostages. Several times Kirudja said he had been in contact with President Milosevic and negotiator Stanisic, the head of the Yugoslav Secret Service who maintained the contacts with Mladic and Karadzic. The different perceptions of Belgrade and Pale of the matter became clear: Belgrade strived after immediate release of the hostages, but Pale was afraid for new air strikes after the release. During the briefing the French delegate, supported by the British delegate, said that Kirudja could inform Pale that for now there were no plans to repeat the air strikes after the release of the hostages: ‘the more rapid they release them unharmed, the less they have to fear air strikes’.⁵⁸⁸ It looks like it that these statements can be interpreted as big talk to promote a speedy release of the hostages; there are no indications that the British or the French Government really supported the positions worded here by their delegates.

According to the Dutch Military Intelligence Service, on 7 June the Bosnian Serbs had released a number of the hostages as ‘token of international approach’ and Mladic did not seem to demand something in return.⁵⁸⁹ The position of the Bosnian Serbs seemed a repetition of an earlier hostage action in April 1995 when Karadzic had said to Stanisic that he possessed information that NATO was in the process of planning a retaliation for what the Serbs had done. Then too the Bosnian Serbs feared the release would create the conditions for renewed NATO air strikes. Stanisic had said at the time that a temporary postponement of air strikes would improve the chances of political talks between Milosevic and the American negotiator Frasure.⁵⁹⁰

9. Conclusion: deal or no deal?

The main conclusion for the question whether or not there was a deal, is that the governments involved of the countries that contributed troops in Bosnia first of all did not want to take any risks as long as ‘their’ UN personnel was still held hostage. That meant the release of the hostages had the priority and that was exactly how the Dutch Government thought about it. For that reason air strikes were out of the question as long as there still were hostages, and not because there was a ‘deal’.⁵⁹¹

If Janvier might have hinted that there would be no more air strikes, even though there are no indications for that, he did not leave the track that had been prepared by politicians. The consensus was that under the current circumstances air strikes would lead nowhere. However, it would have been highly unwise to say a thing like that openly. Moreover, already before the meeting in Zvornik on 4

585 Interview John Shalikhshvili, 07/06/00.

586 ABZ, PVNY. Secure Fax DPV to PV New York, 02/06/95, unnumbered.

587 Interview Lord Owen, 23/06/01.

588 ABZ, DDI-DAV/00246. Code Lenstra 72, 14/06/95.

589 MID/KL. MID/KL, MID/KL, Intsum 107/95, 071200Z Jun 95.

590 CRST. Code Cable Kirudja, D-SRSG/CA to FRY to Akashi info Smith, 14/04/95.

591 Bstas. Ambtelijk BZ en Defensie to MP Kok, Confi. Undated (02/06/95).

June the authority to turn the key for air strikes had been taken away from Zagreb.⁵⁹² So Akashi and Janvier could no longer independently decide to carry out further air strikes.

That was different for Close Air Support. That was not out of the question. After all, orders that no more Close Air Support should be given had not been issued by New York, nor by Zagreb. It also appears from the above that Akashi did not rule out the use of Close Air Support in advance.

However, there has been no Close Air Support and that was because Janvier's first priority was the negotiations about the release of the hostages and safety of the troops; these should not be disturbed. For that reason Janvier gave the order that the use of Close Air Support should be avoided; he did not speak of a ban.⁵⁹³ The staff in Zagreb concluded that the Bosnian Serbs had two possibilities (a) submitting to the UN, but that did not seem very likely because they did not want to be seen as 'bombed to the negotiating table' and (b) holding the hostages to test the determination of the UN and the troop-contributing nations.

That means the hostages were at the heart of the line of thought of the entire UN decision-making chain. If the UN would continue air strikes or Close Air Support, then hostages might be killed and the UN could get the blame. That would put the international community even more to the test. The only thing the UN could set against it, was to stop all air actions. The air activities could only be continued with the full support of the UN in New York and the troop-contributing nations, and it would be the beginning of the end of the mission. If the air campaign was continued, the VRS could go on shelling the Safe Areas and get a tighter grip on the enclaves. When deciding on the policy to be followed, UNPROFOR was also tied to principles such as impartiality and proportionality (the UN response had to be in proportion to the violation). They continuously had to consider the safety of their own personnel and of the population. In the eyes of the soldiers in Zagreb an air campaign also did not make much sense if it could not be followed by political initiatives.⁵⁹⁴

Nevertheless, there were still many rumours that a deal would have been concluded. Right after the meeting in Zvornik all kinds of rumours were heard in Sarajevo and Zagreb that such was the case. Akashi wanted to suppress the rumours and circulated a Memorandum stating emphatically that there was absolutely no deal, but still the rumours persisted.⁵⁹⁵

These rumours re-emerged when late June Bosnian-Serb fighter aircraft from Banja Luka carried out attacks on ABiH positions near Visoko, north-west of Sarajevo. Then NATO Admiral Smith wanted to retaliate by large-scale attacks on the airfield of Banja Luka, but Janvier refused that. The reasons why have been described in the previous chapter. Then it had been the Bosnian Muslims who interpreted Janvier's response as a sign that the UN had secretly promised the Bosnian Serbs not to carry out any more air strikes in exchange for the release of the hostages.⁵⁹⁶ It should not be forgotten however, as stated earlier, that from Bosnian perspective there was a certain interest to present matters as if a deal had been made; such a deal would imply that from now on the UN would leave their enemy, the Bosnian Serbs, alone.

NATO Admiral Smith did want to know all the ins and outs; after he had heard many times that a deal should have been made, at a meeting attended by some ten to twelve people he had asked Janvier whether he had made a deal about Close Air Support. Janvier had denied that.⁵⁹⁷ General Smith in Sarajevo had never seen any proof of a deal in Zvornik either.⁵⁹⁸

In short: there is no proof whatsoever for a formal deal. That there were no more air strikes followed from own argumentation and not from own 'obligation'. Formally laying down not to carry

592 NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Code Cable Janvier to Smith, 30/05/95, No. Z-.

593 NIOD Coll. Karremans. Letter Lieutenant-General Bernard Janvier (to General Smith), 02/06/95.

594 NIOD, Coll. Ashton. 'Concept for Future Ops', undated (late May 1995), no author stated.

595 Interview Tone Bringa, 13/07/99.

596 MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, no. 30/95, completed 271400B June 1995.

597 Interview Leighton Smith, 06/06/00.

598 Interview Rupert Smith, 12/01/00.

out any more air actions would also have been at odds with all interests of the UN or the western powers.

A 'mental deal'?

It can be concluded from the above that there is no evidence about any agreement between Janvier and Mladic about abandoning air strikes in exchange for the release of hostages. The UN denied in no uncertain terms that the release would have been conditionally. They did share the political feeling that air strikes would not be expedient as long as there were hostages.

An employee of Akashi in Zagreb still maintained that Janvier and Mladic should have made a kind of 'mental deal'. Mladic should have managed to convince Janvier that as long as UNPROFOR would not use any large-scale force, the hostages would be released.⁵⁹⁹ There were others who felt that this had been the case, like the American ambassadors in the region referred to earlier. How likely is such a 'mental deal'?

It is possible that Janvier once more explained to Mladic what the current policy regarding air strikes was. That meant that air strikes would not be carried out at that moment without political approval or consultation and, consequently, that air strikes would not be carried out purely on the authority of Zagreb. In that sense Milosevic's statement on his contacts with the French President Chirac should be seen. However, it is not likely that Chirac gave Milosevic a sign that there would never more be any air strikes. Although the French were against air strikes as long as French soldiers were being held hostage, the arrival of a new French President resulted in an even harder line rather than reluctance on the part of the French. Chirac took a much tougher position than his predecessor Mitterrand.⁶⁰⁰ These are more reasons to consider a 'mental deal' unlikely.

One of the two leading figures has the last say. In January 2001, Janvier made a statement before the French parliamentary investigating committee about his meeting with Mladic in Zvornik. Janvier stated that he did not have the authority to decide on Mladic's proposal to release UN personnel in exchange for abandoning air power and that, consequently, he could not consider it a serious item for negotiations. Janvier said he had directly told Mladic that and did not discuss the subject. In this connection Janvier also gave an interpretation of the opinion of some who thought that they did close a (mental) deal. As put forward in this story, in particular some Americans involved remained convinced of that. Janvier declared that he considered the rumours on an alleged deal as manipulation as a consequence of American acts to make the French President and the French untrustworthy in the sense of: 'hostages released as a result of a deal organized by Chirac himself'.⁶⁰¹

It was not possible to take a statement from the other leading figure, Mladic. The description above showed that for the Bosnian Serbs, Milosevic was the main source of information about any deals between Janvier and Mladic. It is not impossible that with such statements on what should have been arranged, Milosevic tried to spread discord and unrest. Against Milosevic's statements is the fact that Mladic did not blame UNPROFOR on later Close Air Support and air strikes for violating an agreement. That Mladic proposed to Janvier to come to an agreement in the sense of: 'no air strikes in exchange for release of the hostages', may have contributed in the public opinion to rumours that such a deal had actually been made. After all, Mladic was the one who had an interest in such a deal. For that matter, Mladic referred to air strikes and not to Close Air Support.

As regards the higher ranks of the UN organization, the conclusion is that no guidelines or instructions have been issued, not by Boutros-Ghali, not by Akashi and not by Janvier that air strikes or Close Air Support were no longer permitted. Boutros-Ghali did stipulate in a confidential missive that no Close Air Support or air strikes were permitted without him having been consulted first. However,

599 Interview Tony Banbury, 11/05/00.

600 ABZ, DDI-DAV/01100. Confidential Memorandum Plv DGPZ to M through DGPZ and S, 02/06/95, unnumbered (report 'Torentjes' consultation).

601 *Mission d'Information commune sur les événements de Srebrenica, Audition de M. Bernard Janvier, 25/01/01.*

at the time of the attack on Srebrenica the authority to permit Close Air Support was back in the hands of Akashi.

What may have been a factor in the later and persisting rumours was the lack of knowledge regarding the distinction between air strikes and Close Air Support. There were no restrictions for Close Air Support. That should not be confused with reluctance on the part of Akashi and Janvier regarding allowing requests for Close Air Support. Neither should it be forgotten that Janvier had a responsibility that extended beyond Srebrenica, and that he had to balance all requests for Close Air Support against all other UN interests in the former Yugoslavia.

The conclusion is that it is not possible to directly link the meeting in Zvornik to the fall of Srebrenica. Also indirectly such a link is highly unlikely. The Bosnian Serbs did not decide to overrun the enclave as a whole until 9 July (see Chapter 6). That same day it was decided in Zagreb to set up a blocking position to be sure that the Bosnian Serbs were intending to attack the enclave. After all, then it would be possible to use Close Air Support, Janvier had said.⁶⁰² So Close Air Support had certainly not been ruled out in advance.

⁶⁰² Interview J.H. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

Chapter 4

The mood in the enclave: May - July 1995

1. Introduction

The preceding chapters dealt with the difficult political and military waters that UNPROFOR had gradually moved into, and how NATO air support for UNPROFOR had started to become increasingly problematic. These chapters presented a picture of an increasingly defeatist UNPROFOR, which, through the lack of a prospect of a political settlement to the conflict in Bosnia, had drifted into a ‘muddling through’ scenario. Before dealing in more detail with the events in and around the enclave in the weeks leading up to the fall of Srebrenica, it is appropriate first to outline the situation in which the occupants of the enclave found themselves in the period between, roughly speaking, 25 May to 6 July 1995. In this, the three groups that were mentioned earlier can be identified: Dutchbat III, the population (including Displaced Persons), and the 28th Division of ABiH. The purpose of this chapter is also to portray the mood as a background against which the ultimate fall of Srebrenica has to be assessed.

On a micro level, the picture of the situation in Srebrenica differed little from that of UNPROFOR in general. The Bosnian Serbs had embarked on a policy of minimizing supplies to this enclave, among others, and there was therefore no other option than to ‘muddle through’ for Dutchbat either, in a situation where they were finding themselves increasingly in a ‘semi-operational status’. The problems with the supplies had an impact not only on the performance of Dutchbat’s duties, but also on daily life in the enclave, and on the performance of ABiH: the population of the enclave went hungry increasingly often because of the frequent suspension of humanitarian convoys, owing to interference from the Bosnian Serbs. The morale of the 28th ABiH Division, which was the Bosnian Muslim army unit located in Srebrenica (and elsewhere), also suffered under the lack of supplies. For more information on the organization of the ABiH in Bosnia, reference is made to Chapter 6 of Part II.

Part II of this report dealt comprehensively with the conditions for the population, and described the impression that Srebrenica and Dutchbat made on the few visitors to succeed in reaching the enclave. It is covered in the part up to the spring of 1995. This chapter will identify in more detail the factors that influenced the performance of Dutchbat, the population and the ABiH in the final two months prior to the fall of Srebrenica.

The conditions for Dutchbat, the population and the 28th ABiH Division were already bad in May 1995, and became steadily worse as a result of the consistent rejection of convoys. Dutchbat had to get by without supplies of diesel.⁶⁰³

With respect to the population, when food convoys did arrive in the enclave, the quantity brought in was inadequate to feed everyone properly. The food supply to the population of the eastern enclaves was still reasonably good in April 1995: 82% of the need was covered. In May too, UNHCR still had regular access to the enclaves. Much changed after the air strikes at the end of May. In June, UNHCR convoys were able to reach Srebrenica only sporadically. The result was that in June it was possible to satisfy only 30% of the food requirement.⁶⁰⁴

The provision of information to the population left much to be desired, which encouraged rumours, and made it easier for the Bosnian Serbs to engage in psychological warfare. The departure of 28th Division Commander Naser Oric from the enclave in April 1995 had consequences for the cohesion of the ABiH; as the conditions continued to deteriorate, desertion by and departure of ABiH

⁶⁰³ Where possible, wood was used for fuel, including for hot water. Wood could be cut in sufficient quantity from the woods.

⁶⁰⁴ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 06/07/95, No. UNPF Z-1106.

soldiers increased. Reports and diary fragments will be used to illuminate the state of Dutchbat, the population and the ABiH in the month before the fall.

Attention will also be paid to the thinking in the Dutch political arena regarding the Dutch presence in Bosnia in this period. Remarks that were made there did not always provide encouragement to Dutchbat and the home front in this last difficult period of the stay in Bosnia: there was a gnawing uncertainty on many matters, one of which was relief, as discussed later in this chapter; Dutchbat III should have been relieved early in July, but this was the subject of the wildest rumours, and uncertainty persisted until the last moment. The relief issue therefore also gave rise to considerable speculation within Dutchbat and to action and political pressure from The Hague.

2. Dutchbat's mood

The sources used to form a view of the mood and the daily conditions in the enclave in this period were the diaries of Dutchbat members and others, letters home, personal documents, and newspaper articles, statements or interviews. A degree of caution is called for in using such sources, however: it is not possible to attach any absolute value to them, because 'mood' is a somewhat subjective concept.

Extensive use will be made in this chapter of three of such sources from Dutchbat members: the anaesthetist and medical naval captain Schouten kept a diary; Warrant Officer Piet Hein Both wrote letters home; and Warrant Officer Koreman wrote a chronicle of the situation. Schouten, Both and Koreman were of the older generation, and were part of the thirteenth Airmobile Brigade battalion, which formed the Dutchbat core. All three were in the Potocari compound. A number of remarks should be made on the selection of these writers. Firstly, the perceptions of the events of these three military men is not necessarily representative of the life and the atmosphere at other locations, specifically the Dutchbat compound in Srebrenica and the observation posts (OPs). The mood in these smaller and more homogeneous units also appeared to be better than that in Potocari, which had a greater diversity of personnel. The associated problem, however, is that no diaries are known of among the groups stationed outside Potocari that cover a relatively long period and that can be used to deduce a mood. Nevertheless, the three writers give a picture of the problems that Dutchbat III was faced with.

In addition to these sources, there are also a number of personal documents that provide an impression of the atmosphere surrounding Dutchbat. The book written by Karremans, *Srebrenica - Who Cares?*, is the best known example, as well as *Dutchbat in vredesnaam* (Dutchbat in the name of peace), which was written by various authors. Although these books are also important sources, they cannot be considered representative for Dutchbat in all respects, either. Karremans's book was written only after the event and is consistent with an attempt to give an account and justification; *Dutchbat in vredesnaam* is mainly a compilation of recollections for the members of Dutchbat III themselves, and does not hazard any reflection.

General conditions

Regarding the conditions that Dutchbat had to work under, in the first place there was the undeniable influence of the Bosnian-Serb blockade of supplies to the enclave. There was little that could be done about this on Dutchbat level; it was an issue for the upper UN echelons.

With respect to the fuel situation, the problems for Dutchbat III started after 18 February 1995, after which no more fuel convoys reached Dutchbat. The resultant depletion of the diesel reserves started to have an increasing impact on Dutchbat, and could not continue without an effect on the execution of duties, the living conditions and the mood.

Colonel Brantz, the Chief of Staff at the Sector North East Tuzla headquarters, also warned that Dutchbat's morale was being put under increasing pressure. He considered the main cause to be the increasingly intolerant attitude of the VRS. The quality of execution of Dutchbat's duties deteriorated as a result of carrying out what was known as the *minimize* programme, which was initiated

to limit the consumption of diesel to a minimum. A lack of new fuel meant that this programme had to be made ever more stringent. For example, vehicles could no longer be used for patrolling the enclave. Meanwhile, the attitude of the ABiH in the enclave was becoming progressively more arrogant, according to Brantz; he felt that this was hardly beneficial to Dutchbat morale. The constraints on a proper task execution by Dutchbat were therefore utterly poor. The feeling of powerlessness became stronger by the day, because of the hopeless logistical situation and the unpredictable behaviour of the combatants. This constantly put the Dutch soldiers' powers of perseverance and endurance to the test. Brantz saw this as an unknown phenomenon for the Dutch, who had little idea how they should deal with it.

Dutchbat was wrestling with other problems, according to Brantz's analysis: what was happening with the Muslim population was in conflict with a sense of justice. The morale was put even further to the test by increasing tensions within the battalion itself. The key question was how long Dutchbat could continue to survive with the meagre resources. The minimizing of diesel consumption and the many foot patrols that resulted were a blow to their physical and mental state. A number of other factors were added to this that were by no means a boost to motivation, such as: the lack of opportunity for leave; confusing reports from the Netherlands on relief of the battalion; a statement by Prime Minister Kok that Dutchbat would have to stay longer than expected; the impression that neither UNPROFOR nor the international community were in any hurry to improve the situation that Dutchbat found itself in; tensions; and monotonous food. However, the lack of reliable information made it impossible for Sector North East in Tuzla to form an accurate impression of the mental and physical resilience of the personnel.⁶⁰⁵

In hindsight, there were also signals from the battalion that morale had been affected: 'We were just exhausted, literally and figuratively'.⁶⁰⁶ There was tension in the battalion in the final period of its presence in the enclave; a situation developed in which Dutchbat wondered what was going to happen.⁶⁰⁷

Dutchbat was also increasingly confronted with personnel shortages. In early June, the situation was that, in the weeks still to go, the battalion would have to perform its duties with only the 430 men who were still in the enclave, as opposed to the original 600. Those returning to the enclave after leave became stranded in Zagreb, and returned to the Netherlands because it was unlikely that they would get through; it was pointless to wait any longer for clearance from the Bosnian Serbs for transport to the enclave. On 12 June, General Couzy, through his Operations Deputy, Brigadier General Pollé, informed the battalion Commander, Karremans, that no one else would be able to return to Srebrenica. Karremans was unhappy that those returning from leave and waiting to enter the enclave were being sent back: he felt that it meant a possible means of pressure on the Bosnian Serbs was being abandoned.⁶⁰⁸

This lack of manpower also meant that the work in the enclave became more strenuous. For instance, the work that was carried out by C Company (stationed in the Potocari compound) initially with 143 men, now had to be done with one hundred men. This meant that on average everyone was allocated more patrols and guard duties. Of these one hundred men, 26 had had no leave at all since Dutchbat III started its duties. In other words, when Dutchbat left the enclave at the end of July, they had been there for more than six months without interruption, and would have been told, in some cases up to five times, that their planned leave had been cancelled. This was not without influence, but, according to their Company Commander, Captain Matthijssen, it was hardly noticeable, if at all, in the performance and the effort of the members of his company. According to Matthijssen, there was also

⁶⁰⁵ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Diary Brantz, *passim*.

⁶⁰⁶ Interview J. Otter, 26/05/99.

⁶⁰⁷ Interview E. Koster, 06/10/99.

⁶⁰⁸ SMG 1012. Weeksitrep Royal Netherlands Crisis Staff 01/06- 07/06/95; Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 147-9; Interview Th.J.P.Karremans, 15/12/98.

no question of a collapse of morale; there is no doubt that the conditions had an influence, but everyone just carried on doing their work and put their shoulders to the wheel, the commander said.⁶⁰⁹

From mid April, those due for leave were no longer able to leave the enclave, and those returning from leave were unable to get in. Neither did post continue to arrive in the enclave. There had been no fuel convoys since 18 February. Between sixty and eighty men had never had any leave, and Karremans says that all this did start to 'eat away' at the men. This also carried the risk that Dutchbat would no longer remain impartial; an anti-Serbian attitude started to emerge, which was why Karremans stated in a report that Dutchbat 'was no longer willing and able to consider itself impartial.' There was much grumbling about the rejection of convoys; there was a board in the corridor in the Potocari compound showing which convoys would and would not go ahead. Karremans had the following to say about this: 'You really hear some ripe Dutch vocabulary there in the corridor. You can actually pick up something of the mood from that. The lads were simply sick to death of it. And so was I. Every bit as much. Everyone. Only, you have to temper that to a certain extent.' At a certain point this gave rise to a situation where the battalion no longer believed in the arrival of convoys, and resigned themselves to it. Karremans had the impression that this led to a calmer state of mind. But, according to him, for some Dutchbat members, accepting the situation meant that they did nothing except look forward to the date when they would be relieved.⁶¹⁰

Specific moods

The company's supply situation in this period was extremely critical: food rations were being used up, there was hardly any fresh food, and no more diesel arrived after 18 February. At the same time, there was a persistent lack of clarity regarding how serious the problems were, and how long Dutchbat itself estimated it could hold out. An attempt is made below to provide some insight into the seriousness of Dutchbat's supply position. The following graphs show Dutchbat's statement of the supply position. The vertical axis shows in succession the number of days of fresh food still in stock, how much diesel remained, and how many days rations. The horizontal axis shows the period for which figures are available: 1 May to 10 July 1995. In the course of this chapter references will regularly be made to these graphs, and to the way in which they have to be interpreted.

The graphs in any case make clear that the situation took on dramatic proportions, particularly from mid May. This worked through into the mood within the battalion, which was also subject to the following additional negative influences.

In early June, great pressure was placed on the OP crews. At the beginning of June, the fear arose in Sarajevo that the Bosnian Serbs were about to launch a surprise attack on the observation posts (Ops). For this reason, the crews were informed that in an emergency they would have to be prepared to evacuate the OP in haste within one hour. This meant that they had to be almost constantly packed up and ready to go in case of a hurried departure.⁶¹¹

The effects of minimizing the consumption of diesel also did nothing to improve the mood; because there was no more diesel to run the generators, it was only possible to read in the evenings by candlelight. It also meant that it was possible to shower in warm water only once a week for three minutes, by using a number of wood-fired boilers. This led to internal tensions, which were quicker to arise and were more intense in nature than they otherwise would have been.⁶¹² In other respects too, the conditions that the battalion were in because the supplies had been cut off were far from rosy. Reports of fears of salmonella infections and the consequences of deteriorating hygienic conditions even reached the Dutch press. The state of health was said to deteriorate because, for a considerable

⁶⁰⁹ Interview C.J. Matthijssen, 11/10/99.

⁶¹⁰ Interview Th. J.P. Karremans, 24/09/98.

⁶¹¹ Interview Th. J.P. Karremans, 25/06/98.

⁶¹² SMG /1004/24. Dpty C vbpl (AOOI Tops) and med Capt Folmer to acting SSOGD, Crisis Staff, med LCol Lankhorst [07/07/95]; interview E.C.J.M. Koster, 19/10/99.

time since 16 May, it had been possible to eat only emergency rations, and it had been decided to issue vitamin pills. The staff surgeon on the Crisis Staff of the Dutch Army in The Hague (in military terms known as the Dutch Army Crisis Staff) considered the reports to be essentially correct, but also that an emotional component played a role in the description.⁶¹³ The specific medical problems, for both Dutchbat and the population, will be discussed in the Appendix 'Dutchbat III and the population: medical matters'.

On 25 May, the air strike at Pale and the shells at Tuzla and Srebrenica did not escape Dutchbat's notice either. As a response, voices were heard within Dutchbat such as the following: 'we are fighting for a lost cause here'. There were reports on Dutch radio that Dutchbat had spent the entire night in the bunker. This was incorrect, but it did give rise to the necessary commotion: 'Nice and provocative for the home front. They will be getting nervous in Holland,' Schouten wrote in his diary.⁶¹⁴

De Volkskrant correspondent Bart Rijs recorded at the Dutch-Belgian transport and logistics battalion in Split that many soldiers there were concerned about what the home front might think when they saw TV pictures with chained-up UN personnel who had been taken hostage by the Bosnian Serbs. Rijs observed that many soldiers felt that the UN should depart as quickly as possible from what was known in soldier's slang as 'this goat's country'. The soldiers had the impression that no one appreciated the dangerous work they performed: 'not international politics, not the press and absolutely not the population.'⁶¹⁵ Journalists had no chance to get through to Srebrenica, but it seems rather unlikely that the thinking was more positive there.

The question that prevailed earlier in May among Dutchbat personnel in Srebrenica, was what would happen if the diesel finally ran out. The water treatment system would then be unable to work and there would no longer be any clean water, and there would be only emergency rations as food. 'How long would they let the battalion continue to run like that?' wondered Schouten in his diary.⁶¹⁶ The electricity supply was already minimal, so that they had to sit in semi-darkness in the evenings. On 10 May, Karremans wrote that he went from *bare minimum* (the 'minimize' level) to *survival*.

Later the same day, a convoy reached the battalion with, among other things, 10,000 kilos of meat. However, it was not possible to keep it, because the cooling units of the refrigerators had been turned off in response to the fuel shortage. The meat had been put on the convoy without being requested. Koreman wrote what happened to the meat: 'The idea of giving the meat to the population was well meant, but was impossible to realize. The population - who were actually in need of meat - would still refuse the offer, because, as Muslims, they did not eat pork. We could only wonder whether the staff had actually made the offer to the population (...)' The population was offered 2500 kilos of pork, but, indeed, they would not accept it; it was decided simply to have lavish barbecues and to bring another portion of the meat to the Bosnian-Serb area. Sergeant Major Rave delivered this in person on 11 May to the Bosnian Serbs, by horse and cart that had been hired for the price of one pack of coffee.⁶¹⁷

This luxury problem was rare, however: in the middle of May the toilet paper ran out; diarrhoea occurred regularly; the first infestations of fleas took place; showers could be taken only with cold water. 'How could it go on? This is *subsistence*, not *existence*', Schouten remarked.⁶¹⁸

Drinking water had to be rationed because heavy rain on 28 May had flooded the compound in Potocari, so that the water treatment system was blocked with mud. Drinking water was then distributed around the compound in jerry cans; the amount given was minimal. Only once the diesel

⁶¹³ ANP, 071234 Jun 95; NIOD, Coll. Princen. Information for the General Meeting with Parliament on Thursday 08/06/95.

⁶¹⁴ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 25/05/95 and 26/05/95.

⁶¹⁵ *De Volkskrant*, 29/05/95.

⁶¹⁶ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 13/05/95.

⁶¹⁷ Dijkema, 'Dutchbat in Vredesnaam', p. 178.

⁶¹⁸ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 16/05/95.

supply had been brought back to normal could the water treatment system be used again, and then water treatment would ensure that the drinking water problem was a thing of the past. There was still sufficient chlorine available to disinfect water, however.⁶¹⁹ There was hardly any water left for laundry. Op 5 June Schouten wrote in his diary: 'with a bit of luck, I can find some water to do some washing. The situation will now really get miserable if they cannot get the water pipeline open. Before you realize it, your nails, feet, ears, hair - everything - get dirty because they get covered in a fine layer of clay dust'.⁶²⁰ Meanwhile, the shooting between the combatants in the surroundings increased: 'I wonder when we will have the first dead or wounded.' Gradually the tobacco also ran out, so that the smokers began to suffer, or had to change to locally grown tobacco.⁶²¹

The uncertain situation that they found themselves in encouraged rumours to start: for instance, fuel would be supplied by air within a couple of days. *De Volkskrant* of 31 May reported that the Ukraine wished to take over the manning of the Srebrenica Safe Area: this welcome news arrived in the enclave on the same day. However, the report also mentioned that, as yet, it was no more than a 'tentative prospect of replacement', as Minister Van Mierlo expressed it. Van Mierlo also said that supplying the UN troops in the eastern enclaves had 'top priority' among the nations providing troops. That was putting it too strongly: the UN was powerless as long as hundreds of blue helmets were still held hostage, and that ruled out a risky supply operation by air⁶²² (see also the 'supplies by air' Appendix).

Because of the meeting of the NATO North Atlantic Council in Noordwijk on 30 May, the Dutch press gave extra prominence to reports on Bosnia. This reporting also contributed to the confusion about what was happening on the political front, with the following headlines appearing in one day in the *Algemeen Dagblad* alone: 'NATO wants 'more robust' action in Bosnia'; 'New mandate for the blue helmets' and 'script for retreat ready'.⁶²³ Such reports did not fail to have an effect on the mood of Dutchbat and the home front. Schouten wrote about this in his diary: 'splendid plans are made internationally, but they don't do us much good. For many people it is another reason to speculate [on] a hasty retreat. They always reason the same way: home. Because we can't do anything anyway, the diesel has run out, the food is wrong, too little protein, and so on. (...) A telegram about the food situation was sent with much fuss and panic to the Crisis Staff. I think it would have been more useful to find out the best way to solve the problem. (...) The item was mentioned in the *Brabants Dagblad*. Unfortunately, it was yet another reason for serious concern at home. But it appears to be misunderstood.'⁶²⁴

On 2 June, Schouten reported that there was only enough locally baked bread for another three days: 'this is where the dissatisfaction begins'. Schouten's words were clear enough: 'it is hopeless. The same every day. (...) People are slowly becoming irritable. (...) There are still enough calories, but there will be a lack of protein and vitamins. (...) You are allowed to eat only one meal [ration]. What good is that to these hulks? They are following the wrong policy. (...) There is bickering. It is only a matter of time until someone flips and accidents happen. How much longer? Weeks. Then there will be a mutiny. No water, no light, poor food, poor personal hygiene: there will be victims. Rationing appears to be necessary.'⁶²⁵ Fortunately the TV is on in the evening. A welcome diversion for hours. (...) A blessing, it numbs the brain a little.'⁶²⁶

⁶¹⁹ SMG /1004/24. Dpty C vbpl (AOOI Tops) and med Capt Folmer to acting SSOGD, Crisis Staff, med LCol Lankhorst [07/06/95].

⁶²⁰ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 05/06/95.

⁶²¹ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 29/05/95.

⁶²² *De Volkskrant*, 29/05/95 and 31/05/95.

⁶²³ *Algemeen Dagblad*, 29/05/95.

⁶²⁴ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 07/06/95. Also see the Annez: Dutchbat and the local population: medical issues.

⁶²⁵ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 02/06/95.

⁶²⁶ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 03/06/95.

On 4 June, the day after the VRS captured a Dutchbat observation post (about which there is more information in the following chapter), Schouten wrote: ‘A telephone line is out of order, so it is difficult to make calls. Because some pretty tall stories reach home, private calls are forbidden. Which is a shame, because we cannot reassure the people back home at all.’ On 5 June: ‘A bright spot: herring in tomato sauce on bread this afternoon. (...) We have had enough. It is just a question of constant waiting and living one day at a time. If you knew what the end date was, you could put up with things, but to have to wait maybe for weeks longer is miserable for everyone.’⁶²⁷ Another five days later: ‘The commander has written a serious letter to the Crisis Staff and said that we will be unable to do anything in another fourteen days. I wonder what will happen. (...) It is gradually becoming unpleasant. Politicians talk, and we wait. (...) I wonder whether all the Minister’s great words will come to anything. There is no one to take over from us. Do we have to clear up? And the supplies? Will helicopters arrive next week with fuel? How many deaths will there be? Or will the Serbs allow convoys by road? Wait and see.’⁶²⁸

The waiting was hard. Schouten’s repatriation date to the Netherlands had since passed more than a month ago. ‘All news turns out to be false in the end. The lack of information makes the world shrink to what you can see ahead. And just wait and wait until something happens.’⁶²⁹ And a couple of days later: ‘The food is now just lousy. (...) I hope something will happen, because the reserves are officially exhausted. It is not clear why no further action is being taken.’⁶³⁰

In mid May, the message that a list of valuable equipment would have to be drawn up in relation to a possible evacuation of Dutchbat by NATO, also sowed disquiet in the ranks.⁶³¹ The battalion was in the dark on many matters surrounding possible evacuation plans, in which a temporary NATO presence in Bosnia would give UNPROFOR the opportunity to withdraw. The home front was even more in the dark, as Schouten was also aware: ‘What are people at home to think if they have no contact with us here? Many of them will be in panic.’⁶³²

On the same day that Schouten wrote this, *Het Parool* reported that Minister Voorhoeve was allowing for the possibility that, in the extreme case, Dutchbat would be withdrawn by force from Srebrenica. The Permanent parliamentary Committee for Defence was informed of the evacuation plans in confidence: lives could be at stake in the event of an evacuation. Defence was terrified of unrest if the evacuation plans were to leak out prematurely. It was impressed upon members of Parliament to treat the matter in confidence. *Het Parool* printed the report on the basis of sources within the Ministry of Defence, so that the damage to the morale of Dutchbat and the home front had already been done. This was all the more true, according to the article, because Minister Voorhoeve deemed consultation with Parliament necessary to provide political cover for possible calamities in the event of a withdrawal. The article also stated that the battalion had food supplies until 4 June, but an Army spokesman hastened to add that the evacuation plans should not be linked to the food situation.⁶³³ Otherwise, the newspaper reported that arrangements for relief had still not been made. The Netherlands was dependent on other countries, which was equally true for the relief, for a possible withdrawal operation and for possible resupply by air.⁶³⁴

⁶²⁷ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 04/06/95 and 05/06/95.

⁶²⁸ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 10/06/95.

⁶²⁹ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 15/06/95.

⁶³⁰ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 17/06/95 and 18/06/95.

⁶³¹ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 11/05/95.

⁶³² NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 16/05/95.

⁶³³ *Het Parool*, 16/05/95.

⁶³⁴ *Algemeen Dagblad*, 17/05/95.

Karremans's 'cry of distress'

The 'serious letter' that Schouten referred to was a 'cry of distress' sent by Karremans to the Dutch Army Crisis Staff on 5 June, regarding the state in which Dutchbat found itself. Karremans wrote that the battalion felt cut off from the outside world. Although this was perhaps putting it a little dramatically, the battalion saw itself in a situation similar to the hostages after the shelling of Pale, with the difference that Dutchbat had already been in a hostage situation for a considerable time. The main cause of all this was the lack of supplies and the constant rejection of convoys by the VRS. There had been no supply of fuel since 18 February, which did not mean that there was no fuel left: Karremans pointed out that Dutchbat had only been able to keep going for so long thanks to an extremely low fuel consumption and making use of the UNHCR fuel stock that was stored on the compound (which took place with the consent of General Smith).

Karremans warned, however, that this too would come to an end within one week. After that there were only emergency diesel reserves, which were intended to be used for leaving the enclave in an emergency.

The battalion commander painted a sombre picture of the situation after that time: carrying out the battalion's tasks would then no longer be feasible. A large part of the daily activities of the engineering platoon, the logistic platoons and the Field Dressing Station were already at a standstill. Materiel for reinforcing observation posts, positions and road repair was no longer available. The stock of spare parts ran out, so that essential equipment could no longer be repaired and its usability was at risk. Patrols and support to the population had already largely come to a halt. When the diesel reserves ran out it would no longer be possible to treat any water. The only reserves left then would be packaged drinking water for twelve days. The battalion had no heating, lighting or hot water and it was no longer possible to do the laundry. The personnel had had no fresh food for four weeks, (in fact it had been three weeks) and all the time they were forced to eat rations. This stock would be exhausted in another four weeks, according to Karremans. Meat, dairy products and flour were no longer available. Vitamin pills were issued to compensate for the nutritional deficiencies. Because there was no longer any fuel, the patrols had to be made on foot, which demanded considerable physical effort. The deteriorating hygienic conditions caused an increase in the number of cases of diarrhoea, and the chance of it spreading became greater. Normal items such as toilet paper and cleaning and conditioning agents were no longer available. Daily requisites such as soap, toothpaste, shampoo and shaving foam ran out. All this was detrimental to the performance of the personnel, according to Battalion Commander Karremans.⁶³⁵

The situation was becoming increasingly difficult for the population of the enclave too. UNHCR convoys no longer had access to the enclave, and there was a lack of the most essential vital necessities. The smuggling routes to Zepa had been closed by the VRS. The water pipeline no longer worked. Neither the hospital nor *Médecins Sans Frontières* were able to offer the population adequate medical assistance; nor was there any more medicine. The VRS had hardened its attitude, Karremans wrote. In the absence of measures from the authorities, Karremans suspected that the VRS would attempt to capture the southern part of the enclave. In view of the increasing threat and the expectation that a wholesale attack could take place, many residents along the enclave border left their accommodation out of fear. This was also true of some of the Displaced Persons who lived in the Swedish Shelter Project in the south of the enclave.

The civilian and military authorities had 'urgently' requested Karremans to publicize the situation in the enclave. If no changes were made in the near future, a disaster could not be ruled out. Dutchbat had no chance of doing anything and was no longer able to cope with a situation that was out of control, Karremans said. The situation became more threatening by the day, and Karremans suspected that it would not be long before it escalated. Now that the population had put its fate in

⁶³⁵ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Appendix to letter TK9589 dated 05/06/95 to C-RNLA Crisis Staff.

Dutchbat's hands, Karremans requested his letter to be brought to the attention of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence. He also requested the whole situation to be disclosed to the Dutch Press Agency (ANP).⁶³⁶ This last suggestion was immediately ruled out by the Dutch Army Crisis Staff because, also in the interests of avoiding unrest on the home front, they preferred not to widely publicize the state in which Dutchbat found itself.

There are no indications that the Dutch Army Crisis Staff brought the letter to the attention of the Ministers, as Karremans had requested. Even though it was understandable under the circumstances that Karremans would want to clutch at every straw, the question was what the Dutch government would have been able to do beyond what the UN, UNHCR and the International Red Cross (ICRC) had already tried.

To emphasize the seriousness of the situation, *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) issued a press release in Belgrade, in which the organization indicated that the food supplies in the enclave were becoming 'dangerously low'. The Bosnian Serbs also made it difficult for MSF to work in Srebrenica: they did allow medical goods for MSF through, but MSF was also put under pressure in that the Bosnian Serbs had refused permission for the relief of personnel.⁶³⁷

One day earlier, on 4 June, Karremans had also sent a cry of distress to Sector North East in Tuzla and Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo, informing them that the food situation in the enclave was starting to take on dramatic forms. This letter was less extensive than the one to the Dutch Army Crisis Staff, and did not dwell on the problems which Dutchbat itself was wrestling with, concentrating instead on the state in which the population found itself. Karremans wrote in this letter that the UNHCR warehouse would be empty within a few days. On 25 May, discussions were still being held between the Opstina (the municipal authority of Srebrenica) and the Bosnian Serbs for buying food in Bratunac, but these came to nothing because the Opstina thought the prices were too high.⁶³⁸ On that day, Civil Affairs of Sector North East in Tuzla also notified Sarajevo that there were no more food reserves for the population. The scale of the black market had decreased: what there was, was traded for prices that an ordinary mortal could not afford. For instance, the price of flour in early June trebled within a week. Stories of people who died of starvation were taken with a pinch of salt in Tuzla at the time, because they had no evidence to support it.⁶³⁹

Karremans observed that the population had put its fate in Dutchbat's hands. After the local authorities of Srebrenica had made an appeal to the world community, Karremans made an appeal to the UN command in Sarajevo: both cries of distress were oriented towards achieving better living conditions for the population and the battalion.⁶⁴⁰ In Karremans's view, the ball was now in the court of the upper echelons: it was up to them to create the conditions for Dutchbat to be able to continue the assigned duties.⁶⁴¹

These upper echelons were at hard at work on the matter. Akashi and Ogata (the High Commissioner for Refugees) wrote in a joint letter to Karadzic about the poor conditions for the population in Sarajevo, Bihac, Gorazde, Srebrenica and Zepa: 'whole families are crying out for food (...) we can no longer tolerate the violation of exhaustively negotiated agreements (...) we refuse to accept lame excuses, false allegations and suspicions or references to uncontrolled elements to justify interference with the free movement of humanitarian goods and staff'.⁶⁴²

⁶³⁶ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. CO Dutchbat III to C-RNLA Crisis staff, 05/06/95, No. TK9589 and Appendix.

⁶³⁷ NIOD, Coll. MSF. MSF update from Belgrade, 05/06/95, No. In 240.

⁶³⁸ NIOD, Coll. MSF. Capsat MSF Srebre to MSF Beo, Monthly Report, 09/06/95, No. Out 760.

⁶³⁹ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. HQ SNE G5/Civil Military Operations to G5/Civil Military Operations [Sarajevo], 4 July 1300B 95; NIOD, Coll. UNHCR, Tuzla. Belgrade (UNHCR), Sitrep for Gorazde, Srebrenica, Zepa and Serb areas of Eastern BH, 02 Jun 95 1110Z; UNHCR Srebrenica to UNHCR Belgrade, 01/06/95 14:18.

⁶⁴⁰ NIOD, Coll Karremans. CO Dutchbat to Comdr BH Command thru Comdr HQ SNE, 04/06/95, No. TK9588.

⁶⁴¹ NIOD, Coll Karremans. Appendix to letter TK9598 dated 05/06/99 to C-RNLA Crisis Staff.

⁶⁴² UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 119, Civil Affairs- Sector North-East, 1994-1996. UNPROFOR HQ, Office of Civil Affairs, Weekly Situation Report, No. 120, 19-25 June 1995.

Also on 4 June, Janvier and Mladic spoke to each other in Zvornik (see the previous chapter), and the agenda included the supplies to the enclaves. In this, Mladic made a link between the supplies to the enclaves and the present blockade of the supplies to the Bosnian Serbs from Serbia. As a gesture of goodwill, Mladic was prepared to permit UNPROFOR to be supplied by road from Yugoslavia (which was already the case for UNHCR transports). It was agreed on 6 June that there would be further contact on the matter.⁶⁴³ Janvier and Mladic agreed that, for the eastern enclaves, meetings would be held at established venues regarding the needs for food and fuel for the UNPROFOR units and the need for humanitarian aid for the population, to be supplied by UNHCR.⁶⁴⁴ For Dutchbat, the further course of events was that UNHCR and MSF provided Deputy Battalion Commander Franken with data on their need for food, fuel and medicine for the population.⁶⁴⁵ On 6 June, Franken indeed handed over the list of the population's and UNPROFOR's needs to the VRS liaison officer for Dutchbat, Major Momir Nikolic. Nikolic received the list without comment. Consultation with him on this occasion led to nothing; he had no authority to take decisions.⁶⁴⁶ Ultimately, it was not the local military authority that decided whether convoys were allowed through, but Pale; Nikolic's answer that he had no authority would therefore not have come as a surprise. After all, Nikolic's task was only that of liaison officer. His duty was to communicate requests from the VRS command to (in this case) Dutchbat, and to bring the reply back to his command.⁶⁴⁷

Otherwise, it was usually not clear to local VRS commanders why convoys were or were not allowed through. For instance, the VRS commander of the Yellow Bridge checkpoint (to the north of the enclave border), Jovan Ivic (also known as Jovo), said that he only received a telex from his command containing detailed instructions of what he could and could not allow through his checkpoint.⁶⁴⁸

The seriousness of the situation had apparently convinced Pale: on the day after the discussion with Nikolic, another UNHCR convoy arrived with ten trucks carrying 72 tons of food for the population of the enclave. The VRS authorities had scrapped one truck: the one with teaching materials for the schools. Meanwhile, Dutchbat's supply problems persisted.⁶⁴⁹

In the meantime, the ABiH in Srebrenica appeared to be taking good care of itself. In May, the ABiH separated approximately forty tons of goods from UNHCR aid that had reached the enclave from the aid to the population. This implied a considerable risk: if the Bosnian Serbs were to find out, the aid to the population could be limited even further. It was also noteworthy that the Chief of the Defence Sector in the enclave, Professor Suljo Hasanovic, reported from the enclave to the defence secretariat of the Ministry of Defence of the Tuzla canton that the ABiH had also received some food from Dutchbat. For the same reason, if the Bosnian Serbs were to intercept this message traffic - which was not unlikely - and irrespective of whether this message was true, it could have given the VRS an additional reason for tightening the thumbscrews on Dutchbat.⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴³ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 15/06/95, No. Z-995 (FC's meeting with Mladic - 4 June).

⁶⁴⁴ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol. I Resupply Eastern Encl, 17/04/95 -11/07/95 Comd UNPF-HQ Zagreb to Comd UNPROFOR, 05/06/95.

⁶⁴⁵ NIOD, Coll. MSF.Capsat LO-Team Dutchbat to MSF and UNHCR Srebrenica, UNMOs Srebrenica, 05/06/95, 21:09, No. In 250.

⁶⁴⁶ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol. I Resupply Eastern Encl, 17/04/95 -11/07/95. Fax Office of the Comd HQ UNPROFOR to HQ UNPF Zagreb, 071400BJun 95; SMG, 1001. CRST. HQ Dutchbat to Sector HQ North East, Sitrep and Milinfo period 051700 to 061700B Jun 95; *The Inner Circle*, number 39, 6/07/95.

⁶⁴⁷ Interview Momir Nikolic, 20/10/00.

⁶⁴⁸ Interview Jovan Ivic, alias Jovo Rus, 20/10/00.

⁶⁴⁹ DCBC, 1858. Code Com Coreu to Par Coreu, 21/06/95, BuZa Ref No. Come292/pesci6193.

⁶⁵⁰ ICTY (IT-98-33) D55. Chief of the Defence Sector Prof Suljo Hasanovic to Defence Ministry Tuzla Defence Secretariat, Department Srebrenica Municipality, 05/06/95, No. 03-49-5/95. The list was as follows: 2500 kg of flour, 596 kg of sugar, 1,423 litres of cooking oil, 619 kg of salt, 5,000 kg of beans, 17,020 of cold cuts, 100 kg of powdered milk, 62 kg of juice, 7,780 tins of fish, 1290 kg of cauliflower, 90 kg of kale, 150 kg of carrots, 240 kg of green beans, 171 litres of heating oil and 1 litre of motor oil.

How critical was Dutchbat's supply situation ?

The answer to the question of how critical Dutchbat's supply situation was at various times is complex. So far, the discussion has been limited to how serious the situation was according to Dutchbat itself, which can be deduced from the earlier graphs. The UN organizations in Tuzla, Sarajevo and Zagreb themselves also attempted to form an opinion of the (seriousness of) Dutchbat's supply position. This was not unimportant: their assessment of the seriousness of the situation could determine, for example, whether a drastic operation such as delivering supplies by air was necessary. In this connection, Janvier stated that if there was no improvement in the fuel situation, he would take a decision sometime around 16 June on concentrating Dutchbat, which would mean giving up the OPs.⁶⁵¹

In June these upper echelons of the UN did not yet view Dutchbat's food and water reserves as critical. The staff officer for logistics (in military terms: the Chief G-4) of Sector North East in Tuzla, Lieutenant Colonel Staale Hansen, calculated on 15 June that Dutchbat could survive on rations and water until 28 July.

The picture became more vague on the question of when the diesel reserves would run out. Officially, they had already run out at the beginning of March. The fuel consumption had already been reduced to 400 litres a day, which was the absolute minimum. Otherwise, some fuel arrived again on 20 June.

Before 20 June, different answers were given to the question of when the reserves would be exhausted. According to an assessment by Zagreb on 11 June, the reserves would be exhausted on 15 June, whereas according to Sector North East in Tuzla on 15 June, the diesel would run out on 22 June, but on the same day, Hansen in Tuzla thought that Dutchbat had already 'borrowed' two thousand litres from UNHCR: in his opinion, Dutchbat could 'borrow' another two thousand litres in an emergency. In addition, Hansen pointed out that Dutchbat had an emergency reserve of six thousand litres, and that the vehicles' tanks were half full. Hansen deduced from this that, with strict rationing and by using the last reserves, Dutchbat could survive in the enclave until 12 July. However, Karremans stated on 15 June that the date that the diesel would run out was between 17 June and 21 June.⁶⁵²

Altogether, confusion was caused by the differing dates that were mentioned for the end of the fuel reserves for the following reasons: the predicted date kept moving because, by taking increasingly stringent measures, Dutchbat was able to last a little longer with the existing reserves; fuel was 'borrowed' from UNHCR reserves, which were stored on the Potocari compound (the UNHCR fuel reserves actually continued to be replenished for some time).⁶⁵³ On the other hand, the fact that Dutchbat had drawn fuel from humanitarian reserves was not appreciated by *Médecins Sans Frontières*. The MSF generator could only run for eleven hours a day, 'thanks to Dutchbat who used during 2.5 months the fuel for humanitarian aid without any restriction'.⁶⁵⁴ On 14 March, Dutchbat had drawn 67,850 litres of diesel from UNHCR, and it would appear that Dutchbat later drew another 5000 litres from these reserves.⁶⁵⁵

In an attempt to arrive at an improvement in the perilous supply position, Karremans launched the idea in Sarajevo of resorting to supply by air. That appeared to Karremans to be a simple, feasible and promising solution for ensuring that containers would arrive at the intended place.⁶⁵⁶ The upper echelons had already been wrestling for months with the supply problem, and were exploring all avenues for delivering fuel, especially to the eastern enclaves. This took place outside Dutchbat's field

⁶⁵¹ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 88040, File 4-2, SRSG Meeting, 1995 May-Oct. Senior Staff Meeting, 13/06/95.

⁶⁵² UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 454/77, File UNPROFOR Civil Affairs, Sitrap SNE 95, 16 Feb - 31 May 95. Interoffice Memorandum DFC to FC, 11/06/95, File 3300-SEE (DFC); NIOD, Coll. Brantz. HQ Sector North East Memo Chief G4 to CO, DCO, A/COS, Ch G2/G3, 15/06/95.

⁶⁵³ *The Inner Circle*, Dutchbat III, number 43, 19/06/95; SMG 1005/16. Capsat DCO/S4 Dutchbat to UNHCR Srebrenica, [12/06/95],

⁶⁵⁴ NIOD, Coll. MSF. Capsat MSF Srebre to MSF Beo, Monthly Report, 09/06/95, No. Out 760. MSF said that it still had two months of emergency reserves.

⁶⁵⁵ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. C-1 (NL) UN Infbat Dutchbat 3 to BLS, 17/06/95, No. TK9597.

⁶⁵⁶ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 147.

of view. Because this struggle, which lasted for several months, would seriously interrupt the story line of the period preceding the fall of Srebrenica, it has been decided to move the process of searching for alternatives to land convoys through Bosnian Serbian territory to a separate Appendix, 'supply by air'.

3. The home straight was the heaviest for Dutchbat

Dutchbat started to look forward to relief and made preparations accordingly. Warrant Officer Piet Hein Both's *War Diary* states that on 3 June, the day of the capture of Observation Post Echo (OP-E), many had already packed their kit bags ready for departure, and that they were in the process of clearing up. Around 9 June, a series of debriefing interviews was started with the batallion's psychologist, Lieutenant Colonel Sanders. 'It seemed then as if the mission was over,' was how Both interpreted the mood. In these confidential psychological debriefing interviews, matters such as the following were brought up: satisfaction with the work; the team spirit inside the group and the cooperation outside it; coping emotionally with fellow-soldiers being wounded, and experiences with the local population; the question of whether they felt threatened during activities or in the compound; the shock reactions to firing around the compound or the OPs; the question of whether they had been able to sleep well; the effects of the circumstance that they were away from home for a long time and the question of how the contact with home had proceeded; how the Dutchbat members themselves had coped with being separated from their family; how their wives and children at home had coped; and the support on the home front by family, friends and the unit.⁶⁵⁷

Both also went through this debriefing, and the question was raised as to what purpose Dutchbat's presence had served. He had no answer. They had made no contribution to peace, simply because there was no peace. The feelings in Both's supply platoon would have been the same. The personnel sensed a great lack of understanding among the upper echelons: 'In The Hague, they do not know what is happening here. The way we live: they have no idea.' Dutchbat felt forgotten and trapped; it was a trap with no escape and where you starved. For Both it was an upside-down world where he had to be given a piece of bread by a Muslim woman in the compound. 'How long do they think this can go on?' Psychologist Sanders is reputed to have said: 'This battalion can't take any more. The personnel are exhausted. The supplies are exhausted. We have to be relieved. And very soon.' According to Both, Dutchbat personnel that returned from the OPs said that the battalion must leave as rapidly as possible, because it was the Bosnian Muslims who were provoking the fighting. Otherwise, the population irritated them because their personal possessions were stolen quite frequently.⁶⁵⁸ Many a Dutchbat soldier was irritated in the course of patrols by the shouts of young Muslim men: 'Fuck off, you UN' and other unfriendly utterances.⁶⁵⁹

An event on 3 June showed that dangers were also attached to the mission in Bosnia. On that day, two members of the Dutchbat A company, which was stationed in Simin Han, were severely wounded after their armoured personnel carrier (APC) had been hit by an anti-tank shell, which had been fired by the VRS. The commander and the gunner would be invalids for the rest of their lives: Sergeant Pieter van Wesel lost an eye and part of his skull, and Private Gaby van Wage lost an arm.⁶⁶⁰ This event left a deep impression in Srebrenica too, partly because such incidents could lead to panic on the home front through reports in the media. The families and friends in the Netherlands naturally closely followed the events surrounding Srebrenica, but the only source of information available to the home front when something special happened was the Dutch Army Crisis Staff. But it was precisely in times of disaster that this could be difficult, which would also be apparent after the VRS started to attack the enclave and capture OPs on 6 July, when it led to a tidal wave of telephone calls for

⁶⁵⁷ NIOD, Coll. Koreman. Diary Koreman, 36nd week, p. 28.

⁶⁵⁸ Piet Hein Both/Herman Veenhof, *Srebrenica, War Diary of Piet Hein Both*, p. 87-90.

⁶⁵⁹ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (1).

⁶⁶⁰ See *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 239 and Diary Koreman, 35th week, p. 29.

information to the Dutch Army Crisis Staff.⁶⁶¹ This caused many problems there: there were insufficient telephone lines available, many calls were cut off abruptly, breakdowns were a regular occurrence, and callers often had to wait a long time to be connected. An even greater problem was that it was not possible to separate operational message traffic from telephone calls from the home front. At some times this reached such proportions that operational commanders could no longer reach the Dutch Army Crisis Staff.⁶⁶²

Meanwhile, little changed in the state outlined by Karremans in his 'cry of distress'. There were hopeful messages about the arrival of a convoy of seventy trucks to supply UNPROFOR in the eastern enclaves, which was to take place via Belgrade: the Federal Yugoslav authorities and Mladic had given their approval. The messages did not prove true, however. The convoy was ready on 16 June in Zagreb, but the Bosnian Serbs gave no permission for the planned size; the Bosnian Serbs insisted that the convoy had to be drastically scaled down. The quantity of fuel had to be reduced from 247 m³ to 95 m³. This was reason for Karremans, after his 'cry of distress' of 5 June, to explain the situation that his battalion found itself in again in a letter of 17 June, this time addressed to the Commander in Chief of the Royal Netherlands Army, General Couzy. Karremans pointed out that the battalion could not perform its duties with moral support, sympathy and words like 'good luck'. It was time for action at the highest level; Karremans again outlined the situation. The battalion had been deprived of fresh food, dairy products, meat and sandwich filling for a month. Their last meal was cooked on 9 May, and since then they had lived on rations. After the convoy on 10 May, a final convoy arrived on 16 May, consisting of only one vehicle. For a month after that, no more fresh food would arrive, so that the reserves would have to be depleted further. No diesel had arrived for four months, and the battalion had lived for six weeks on a subsistence level. Post, newspapers, toiletries and tobacco no longer arrived. In an operational sense, the battalion was no longer in a position to carry out its duties. The restrictions were not without influence on the morale and the performance of the personnel, even though it was still relatively high under the circumstances, in Karremans's eyes. The personnel was simply 'tired' of the hopeless situation that it found itself in. Karremans denied that the battalion gave 'a slightly stressed impression': he had concluded from statements from the Dutch Army Crisis Staff that they thought so. Karremans also asked permission to use the emergency diesel reserve and he requested that his problems be brought to the attention of the Minister of Defence and the Chief of the Defence Staff and to have the battalion resupplied later the same week.⁶⁶³ Karremans gave this signal at different times to Sector North East in Tuzla and Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo. The Hague was unable to carry much weight in connection with the problems mentioned in the letter. It was Mladic who continued to adhere to an equal distribution of the humanitarian aid to Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Serbs, and in so doing brought the issue to a focus for UNPROFOR.⁶⁶⁴

There was no prospect of improvement. There was still no permission from the Bosnian Serbs on 19 June for the convoy destined for Dutchbat to depart from Zagreb. Neither did the UN staff in Zagreb know what should happen next. The expectation was that Janvier would not want to force anything, and that it would have to be accepted that Dutchbat could continue to man the OPs, but would otherwise cease to be operational. The fact is that Dutchbat was not the only unit in a bad state: the British and Ukrainians in Gorazde were similarly only manning the OPs while being otherwise non-operational, and the Ukrainians in Zepa had also not seen a fuel supply for sixteen weeks, and were even without food. When a convoy arrived there, it had only 525 kg of ketchup, 1395 kg canned

⁶⁶¹ Interview M.C.J. Felix, 06/04/00.

⁶⁶² Lessons Learned, case No. LL/879/839. The Chief of Operational Staff BLS to distribution list, 22/03/96, No. OPS BLS/3526. (The shortcomings observed were taken into account in designing a new location for the Commander-in Chief RNLA Operational Staff.)

⁶⁶³ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. C-1 (NL) UN Infbat Dutchbat 3 to BLS, 17/06/95, No. TK9597.

⁶⁶⁴ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 20/06/95, No. Z-1025 with attached Janvier/Mladic meeting of 17/06/95.

potatoes, 150 litres of vinegar and a small quantity of highly spiced Malaysian rations. There was no meat, salt, sugar, flour, pasta and vegetables.⁶⁶⁵

Ultimately, Pale gave clearance on 20 June for the Dutchbat convoy from Zagreb to Srebrenica, but for no more than two trucks (one container with frozen food and one container with chilled food) as well as a tanker with 11,000 litres of fuel, as opposed to the requested five containers of food and medical supplies and 84,000 litres of fuel.⁶⁶⁶ The arrival of the convoy was surrounded by disbelief. Schouten wrote in his diary: ‘The convoy appeared to be on its way after all. It is said to consist of 3 to 10 vehicles. No one knows how many. Claims are made on the radio that we will be supplied completely, which is a great lie. We will just continue on the same minimize. (...) We will have to make do with a container, a refrigerated container and 12,000 litres of diesel. So we will just be carrying on with *minimizing*’. Cheese and sausage arrived, but there was no bread and neither was there any flour.⁶⁶⁷

At a check of the convoy on the way to Srebrenica, the VRS opened all the parcels and confiscated a number of them. Most contained school equipment. An event that was illustrative of the VRS interference and its fear that clothing could arrive in the enclave of possible benefit to the Muslim population,⁶⁶⁸ was a negotiation that had to be conducted about one package containing twenty T-shirts, which led to much discussion because the VRS liaison officer’s position was that soldiers always had to wear uniform and so had no need to wear T-shirts. Dutchbat pointed out that it was usual in Western countries to change clothes outside working hours, and that the T-shirts were also to be used for playing sports. This was acceptable to the liaison officer, but only for personal parcels, which did not apply to the package containing the twenty T-shirts. They were confiscated and handed over to the Military Police in Bratunac. All this provoked much anger among the Dutchbat liaison team and also among the UNMOs, because the Dutchbat command had not taken the trouble to clarify this matter for a following convoy.⁶⁶⁹

Neither was there anything to report on the relief in the meantime. On 22 June, Schouten noted what was being said around the battalion: ‘the Minister made a loud and clear statement that we would leave on 1 July. Everything is ready, except we know nothing.’ One day later: ‘Karremans has had enough. As Commander he knows nothing and everyone just keeps saying that we are leaving on 1 July. He will get clarification from The Hague. [...] Then we will be called together in the afternoon. The Hague is unaware of any rotation of Dutchbat (?!!) and everyone in the battalion thinks that the others have already fixed it up.’⁶⁷⁰ (Please note that we return to the difference between relief and rotation in section 5.)

The only other item of information on the issue of the relief and supplies that was known to the battalion was that General Janvier and General Mladic were to have talks on the problems. ‘The picture gradually emerged of the bankruptcy of the UN actions. The Serbs just do as they please, and the only thing we do in return is ‘diplomacy’ and ‘conferences’. That has had no result since 1990.’⁶⁷¹ On 29 June, Schouten wrote: ‘wonderful that Minister Voorhoeve knows that the Ukrainian battalion will arrive on 14 July. We know nothing.’⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁵ BDL. Outgoing Fax David Harland to Philip Corwin, Sector Sarajevo, Weekly Situation Report, 24/06/95.

⁶⁶⁶ ABZ, DAV/ARA/00246. Code Lenstra 72, 13/06/95; DCBC, 2765. Memo Siten to SC-O, G2, G3, DCBC, G1, G4, G6, 15/06/95; CRST. Fax G3 Land Ops HQ UNPF Zagreb to CDS and BLS (by hand), 17/06/95; CRST. UNMO Pale to G3 Convoy Ops/UNMO HQ UNPROFOR Sarajevo, 190930B June 1995, sent with fax G3 Land Ops to RNLA Crisis Staff, 20/06/95.

⁶⁶⁷ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 20/06/95.

⁶⁶⁸ The sports club ‘Guber’ had to appeal to Dutchbat to leave sports shoes behind on its impending departure to be able to play a farewell match. (SMG 1005. Letter Sportship ‘Guber’ to Dutchbat III, Sgt Blom and Adj Dijkema, 21/06/95, No. 01-18/95).

⁶⁶⁹ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Capsat TA to TX 202030B Jun 95, DSR Update 201800B - 212400B Jun 95.

⁶⁷⁰ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 22/06/95 and 23/06/95.

⁶⁷¹ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 27/06/95.

⁶⁷² NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 29/06/95.

On 28 and 29 June, after Dutchbat had consumed an exceptional provisional last hot meal of roast chicken and vegetables, which arrived with a small convoy, the reserves of fresh food were exhausted again. After that the personnel were forced to resort to consuming French rations. On 1 July, less than one week before the VRS attack, the situation was again as unchanged as before. The population and Dutchbat were in nearly the same boat, with the exception that the food situation for the population - which we will return to later in this chapter - was even worse than for Dutchbat. 'I wonder whether this will make the population rise up. They have nothing more to eat. If that happens we will be extremely busy. The cigarette papers have also run out. Taking normal leave into account we have now been here for 6 months, give or take a week. We are almost back to where we started after 1 week: super-minimize and French cans again. Everything is running out. Toiletries, toilet paper, food. How we are going to manage in the near future I just do not know. The resistance will probably decline. Most people's wounds are healing poorly already. And then become dirty. Then unpleasant infections will appear.'⁶⁷³

There was a lighter moment when a small group of 26 people was able to leave the enclave on 2 July. At the same time, this was also a source of dissatisfaction, because others who had also been waiting for relief for some considerable time felt let down and unfairly treated. This matter also had implications in another area, and also after the fall of Srebrenica, and it is therefore covered in the Appendix 'Dutchbat III and the population: medical matters'.

This departure of a number of Dutchbat members from the enclave allowed a little more news about the company's ups and downs to the outside, and also into the open. Newspaper articles stated that many were wasting away because they had had to live for long time on rations. Some were suffering from stress because of being surrounded by the Bosnian Serbs. Others were less troubled by the situation, but were taken aback when the VRS captured OP-E at the beginning of June: things looked ominous then. However, the Spartan living conditions had not broken the morale, according to this informant, who was a medic: 'the atmosphere among the men is fine (...) You put up with the fact that you can only call home for three minutes a month.' He added that, in comparison with the local population, Dutchbat's conditions were relatively good.⁶⁷⁴ A Dutchbat cook said that it had been difficult for him because he had only been able to serve the men food out of a tin, and biscuits. The French emergency rations had no flavour. Everyone had lost weight, but there had been enough biscuits. The shooting around the enclave was something it was possible to get used to, and watching TV was the main daily recreation. He also pointed out that in spite of the lousy conditions, the atmosphere within the battalion had been good.⁶⁷⁵

The Army Commander, General Couzy, attempted to cheer the battalion up by giving an expression of satisfaction, but to little effect. An expression of satisfaction takes the form of a one-off payment; in this case NLG 1500. In the words of the anaesthetist Schouten: 'NLG 1500. To be shared by 750 people, = NLG 2, minus 60% tax leaves an expression of appreciation of 80 cents for me. Fortunately we expect to find a good cause.'

In response to newspaper articles, some parents of Dutchbat members were also worried by the dramatic reports of shortages: the rationale was that the reserves may well have been depleted, but Dutchbat still had enough to eat; the worst that happened was that the soldiers felt a little listless after having to live on rations for weeks. Parents who reasoned in this way actually found nothing to complain about in the support received from the Ministry of Defence: their questions were always answered, even though they were none the wiser afterwards. 'They know nothing more than what you hear from the media.' However, doubts did start to be heard about the UN presence: 'if it gets more out of hand, they (the warring factions) should just sort it out among themselves. They don't want to be put in the harness. It is really bad for those Muslims, I do realize that. But I am not inclined to

⁶⁷³ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 01/07/95.

⁶⁷⁴ *Brabants Nieuwsblad*, 05/07/95.

⁶⁷⁵ *Het Parool*, 04/07/95.

sacrifice my son for it', a mother said.⁶⁷⁶ A matter on which there were significant feelings of dissatisfaction on the home front was the lack of information and sympathy from the side of the Ministry of Defence.⁶⁷⁷

In early July, Couzy therefore attempted to calm the mood on the home front by means of a personal letter, in which he wrote - not suspecting how right his words would be - that: 'it is inevitable that in the coming period you will all go through difficult and uncertain times'. He called for understanding of the fact that the Ministry of Defence was also occasionally confronted with uncertainty. The Minister and senior Defence officials were working day and night to bring about the relief.⁶⁷⁸ However, a report appeared in the press later that same day that the Bosnian Serbs were still blocking the relief of Dutchbat by the Ukrainians. The Bosnian Serbs were said to want to detain the Dutch so as to put pressure on the UN and NATO, according to *Het Parool*.⁶⁷⁹

A degree of interaction between the feelings on the home front and the mood among the personnel was unmistakable: personnel in the enclave could have concerns about what was happening with their private affairs in the Netherlands. This could vary from a hospitalization, or a death in the family, to the birth of a child. Because the Bosnian Serbs did not always permit freedom of movement - temporary - repatriation was not always successful in such cases.⁶⁸⁰ The home front had more of a tendency to see the black side of Dutchbat's situation than Dutchbat itself. This, nourished by the uncertainty of the timing of the relief and the return home, could not remain without effect on the home front and the personnel in the enclave.

Neither did public debates in the press improve the situation. The reporting on the former Yugoslavia and Dutchbat could be followed by both Dutchbat and the home front; Dutchbat received newspaper articles from The Hague by fax. Further, the Dutch world service radio, RTL news and the UN situation reports formed Dutchbat's information resource. The reporting from the Netherlands often had a negative effect, because the public debate magnified the uncertainty in Srebrenica, which had consequences for morale. An example of this was the Dutch world service radio broadcasts. With respect to the shelling that preceded the VRS attack on 6 July, when Dutchbat was confined for a long period to the bunkers, there was a broadcast in which a mother said that she found everything so distressing and was so afraid. That resounded around the bunker and was repeated every hour; 'the lad in question had no life in the bunker. (...) That was not very clever.'⁶⁸¹

In spite of the situation that Dutchbat found itself in, Karremans felt that the morale of his battalion at the end of June was still fairly high. He wrote as much on 29 June in a letter to Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo. Except that, according to him, the battalion could no longer consider itself impartial, because of the restrictions that the Bosnian Serbs were imposing on the battalion. As long ago as 26 April, Dutchbat had felt itself to be a hostage of the VRS, and Karremans considered it high time for a powerful protest to be made to the Republika Srpska. He finally requested Sarajevo to forward his letter to the Force Commander.⁶⁸²

Not only did senior officials of the Ministry of Defence wrestle with a lack of information, but so too did Dutchbat. The battalion did not know what was going on with the VRS, and was completely unaware that choking off the supplies had been a deliberate strategic decision. Dutchbat was also little aware of the concerns within the UN headquarters in Sarajevo and Zagreb. The UN situation reports were scant and much of what was going on in the former Yugoslavia had to be gleaned mainly from the Dutch media. Karremans learned of the air strikes on Pale on 25 and 26 May followed by attacks on

⁶⁷⁶ *Brabants Nieuwsblad*, 04/07/95.

⁶⁷⁷ NIOD, Coll. Schouten. Diary Schouten, 01/06/95.

⁶⁷⁸ *Telegraaf*, 05/07/95.

⁶⁷⁹ *Het Parool*, 05/07/95.

⁶⁸⁰ Diary Koreman, 36nd week, p. 29.

⁶⁸¹ Interview J. Otter, 26/05/99.

⁶⁸² NIOD, Coll. Karremans. CO 1(NL) Infbn to Comdr B-H Command thru Comdr Sector North East, 29/06/95, No. TK95105.

OPs at Gorazde through the press cuttings fax of the Ministry of Defence.⁶⁸³ This was not exceptional; the Commander of the Norwegian battalion in Tuzla, Colonel G. Arlefalk, also stated that his main source of information was CNN. The UN information was scant and the information that reached him via national channels was equally inadequate.⁶⁸⁴

Karremans's letter to Sarajevo of 29 June was the second 'cry of distress' to reach the UN chain of command within one month, after the first one on 4 June. Karremans did have a point, as seen from where he stood: the situation in all three of the eastern enclaves had been poor for some considerable time. At the end of June, the UN units in Zepa and Gorazde again had fuel reserves at their disposal for 52 and 39 days consumption, respectively, while Dutchbat's reserves had yet to be replenished.⁶⁸⁵ According to Sector North East in Tuzla, on 3 July Dutchbat still had its own reserves of 900 litres of fuel, just enough to get through the weekend, and rations for eleven days.⁶⁸⁶ This version differed somewhat from that of Dutchbat itself. That was also connected with the fact that Dutchbat was rather incommunicative about its own logistics situation, when it was requested by the Civil Military Operations Cell of Sector North East in Tuzla. 'This is all the information I was able to squeeze out of them', was how the official concerned sized up his contact person, Deputy Battalion Commander Franken.

The result of the lack of fuel and primary vital needs, and the fact that for more than two months no one had been able to get into or out of the enclaves, was that at the end of June, General Janvier considered the UN units in Srebrenica and Zepa to be 'semi-operational'. Janvier reported to New York that this situation was 'bound to sap morale as soldiers increasingly asked: 'Why are we here when we are prevented from doing our jobs effectively?''⁶⁸⁷ The fact that Janvier now considered Dutchbat to be 'semi-operational' did not actually lead to an amendment of the terms of reference. Dutchbat to be 'semi-operational' did not actually lead to an amendment of the terms of reference.

4. Bosnia in the Netherlands domestic political arena - June 1995

In an interview with the Commander of the Royal Netherlands Army, General Couzy, on 2 June for the *Algemeen Dagblad*, he referred condescendingly to the UN's 'muddling-through scenario'. He felt that the institution of Safe Areas was an example of failing UN policies. UN soldiers were sent there with no clear objectives and Rules of Engagement: politicians tried to keep everyone happy. The troops did their best to guarantee the safety of the population, but if the Bosnian Serbs were to start shelling, UN soldiers were not allowed to return fire. Couzy called that 'strange but true'. He had once advised Minister Ter Beek not to agree to deployment, and 'it gives me no pleasure to be proved right after the event.' Couzy characterized the political arena as one where politicians would adopt tough resolutions, but then failed to respond when additional troops had to be deployed.⁶⁸⁸ The attitude that this interview attested to did not escape many in politics, not even an external observer such as the British Ambassador in The Hague, Sir David Miers. According to him, Couzy had the 'reputation of being outspoken', and furthermore Couzy 'found always a way so that his opinion was known'. This gave Dutch politicians a problem, but his performance was appreciated by those who worked for him, according to this characterization.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸³ Interview Th.J.P. Karremans, 25/06/98.

⁶⁸⁴ Interview G. Arlefalk, 18/05/00.

⁶⁸⁵ CRST. Chief Joint Logistics Operations Centre to G3 Land Ops info DFC, COS, Logistics Report 03001 July 95 - 032359 July 95, 040700B July 95, Serial OPS/1094/95. When the resupply of Zepa and Gorazde took place is unclear. The quantities stated are from 30 June. On 3 July, Zepa and Gorazde again had 51 and 22 days of rations, respectively, at their disposal.

⁶⁸⁶ DJZ. Outgoing Fax HQ Sector N.E. G5/Civil Military Operations to G5/Civil Military Operations, 4 July 1300B 95.

⁶⁸⁷ Confidential information (29).

⁶⁸⁸ *Algemeen Dagblad*, 02/06/95.

⁶⁸⁹ Interview Sir David Miers, 01/08/01.

In a response to these statements, Minister Voorhoeve informed Couzy that he was required to consult with him before publicly expressing his views. At an earlier stage, the doubts that Couzy had expressed about sending reinforcements to Bosnia had already irritated Prime Minister Kok.⁶⁹⁰ There had been other occasions on which Couzy had got into the news in a similar way, and in so doing he eroded the primacy of the politicians, was how the situation was analysed in Parliament on the day of the interview in the *Algemeen Dagblad*. Couzy's remarks were also ruled out of order in the Ministerial Council, and they came at the wrong time from the wrong mouth.⁶⁹¹ What was especially painful was that Couzy ventilated his views at the precise moment that the Netherlands had decided to deploy a Royal Netherlands Marines Corps mortar company and a Dutch Army counter mortar radar unit to Bosnia as a contribution to the Rapid Reaction Force. Couzy had called it the height of insanity 'to send soldiers to protect soldiers'. 'Take harder action or get out', was Couzy's motto.⁶⁹²

Criticism on the Dutch government's policy also came from a politically friendly side. At a meeting of the VVD party council on 17 June, the VVD party leader Frits Bolkestein demanded that the 'muddling-through scenario' must be brought to an end. Bolkestein wanted the Dutch contribution to UNPROFOR to terminate as rapidly as possible. He wanted a clear choice between a long-term presence and a complete withdrawal in the short term, although he qualified his statements by saying that the Netherlands should not withdraw unilaterally. On the domestic political front, this position was deemed to be rather unhelpful for the mood within Dutchbat and on the home front. In general, Parliament was constantly seeking the broadest possible support with respect to the deployment of Dutch troops to Bosnia, and not political gain. It was considered inappropriate to conduct opposition on this point.

The government was therefore unhappy with Bolkestein's words. From China, Minister Van Mierlo called Bolkestein's statements 'hardly likely to motivate the people who have to do the work'. Voorhoeve and he had done everything 'to reverse this slightly shiftless attitude of recent months'. It had started to become tense, and then, according to Van Mierlo, discussion on the matter should stop for a while.⁶⁹³ From Haiti, where he was visiting marines participating in a peace mission, Voorhoeve stated that the Netherlands would have to maintain its presence until a peace agreement had been achieved. Countries should not withdraw because their patience had run out. The Dutch soldiers in Bosnia played a constructive role, moderated the violence through their presence and had therefore saved thousands of lives. Under the prevailing difficult circumstances they had a right to support.⁶⁹⁴ Prime Minister Kok told the NIOD that by adopting this position, the VVD leader 'was engaging in another typical Bolkestein action, which was his trademark. As the minister responsible I felt very much exposed. Bolkestein put into words something that many people thought at the time. At the same time, however, he knew that the government - including his own Minister of Defence - had no resources to satisfy the feeling that he was expressing.'⁶⁹⁵

Support for Dutchbat had also been discussed in the Ministerial Council a short time before. The question then was whether making marines available for the Rapid Reaction Force for Srebrenica could possibly bring consolation. The mood for this in the Ministerial Council changed rapidly: the drift on 29 May was still that Srebrenica was difficult to defend, and that therefore additional troops would not provide the desired relief. With this, discussion on the idea came to an end.⁶⁹⁶ A couple of days later it became apparent in the Ministerial Council that, in VVD circles especially, there was resistance to this deployment of marines: the thinking in this party was that it must first become clear

⁶⁹⁰ *NRC Handelsblad*, 13/06/95.

⁶⁹¹ Objectivized summary of the 02/06/95 Ministerial Council meeting for the NIOD investigation 02/06/95.

⁶⁹² *Algemeen Dagblad*, 02/06/95.

⁶⁹³ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Introduction Frits Bolkestein Public Meeting of the VVD party council, Jaarbeurs Congress Centre Utrecht, Saturday 17/06/95; *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volksrant*, 19/06/95.

⁶⁹⁴ *Het Parool*, 19/06/95.

⁶⁹⁵ Interview Wim Kok, 08/06/00.

⁶⁹⁶ Objectivized summary of the 29/05/95 Ministerial Council meeting for the NIOD investigation.

what the substantial issues were, and this deployment must lead to a strengthening of UNPROFOR's position.⁶⁹⁷ The following day in Paris the Rapid Reaction Force was actually founded, including Dutch participation (see Chapter 1), which enabled the Netherlands to remain involved in further decision-making on the composition and deployment of the Rapid Reaction Force.

The parliamentary factions also responded with disapproval to Bolkestein's words. Wallage (PvdA) thought that members of the government coalition should not express personal opinions that undermined the position of the soldiers. CDA parliamentary party chairman Heerma thought that Bolkestein's statements had been a repetition of the recent debate on the deployment of marines to Bosnia for the Rapid Reaction Force.⁶⁹⁸ Bolkestein broke with the aim of not conducting opposition on this point with what was seen as opportunistic statements on withdrawal from Bosnia, in the judgement of the opposition CDA parliamentary group.⁶⁹⁹

Meanwhile, Jan-Dirk Blaauw, the VVD defence spokesman, attempted to qualify the words of his political leader. The discussion was confusing, Blaauw said. The knot had just been cut to send marines to Bosnia, and now was not the time to start a simultaneous discussion on terminating the tasks in Bosnia. The only thing that the VVD had wanted to set on the political agenda was the question of whether, after three years of Bosnia, the time was not ripe for another country to take over the tasks.⁷⁰⁰ This fitted in with what Blaauw himself wanted: as long ago as May he had argued in Parliament for setting a time limit on a Dutch presence in Srebrenica. He had proposed that the Netherlands should offer no more ground forces after Dutchbat III.⁷⁰¹

The Netherlands therefore adhered to a presence with combat units in Bosnia, a noble but otherwise unnecessary gesture towards the UN: UNPROFOR actually had a surplus of battalions as a result of restructuring and the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force. The situation had changed from the time of the offer of Dutchbat I in 1993: at that time this was a gift from heaven, which the UN was eagerly awaiting.

The Dutch presence in Bosnia also no longer had the great support of domestic public opinion, which there had been earlier. This could be deduced from surveys periodically carried out by the Society & Armed Forces Foundation: the support among the population for Dutch participation in this UN peace operation continued to crumble. The figures appeared to underline the powerlessness of UNPROFOR, all the more so because the survey was conducted in June, shortly after pictures of chained-up UN personnel had travelled around the world. With respect to the Dutch military presence in Bosnia, the opinion was as follows:

	December 1993	December 1994	June 1995
Agree	68 %	54 %	40 %
Disagree	14 %	26 %	26 %
No opinion	18 %	20 %	34 %

In the space of half a year, the support of the population for the Dutch participation in UNPROFOR had declined from 54 to 40 per cent, and the doubt was increasing palpably. The survey also looked into the UN's political-military approach: in June 1995, only twenty per cent of the respondents thought it was sensible. In response to these figures, Minister Voorhoeve said that he understood the disquiet of many people. The fact was that UN soldiers had to do their work under difficult conditions, while a political solution was not within reach. He added that what the Blue Helmets had achieved, in terms of limiting the number of victims in the conflict, was sometimes underestimated.⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁷ Objectivized summary of the 02/06/95 Ministerial Council meeting for the NIOD investigation.

⁶⁹⁸ NRC *Handelsblad* and *de Volksrant*, 19/06/95.

⁶⁹⁹ NIOD, Coll. CDA. CDA parliamentary party, Memo Retrospective 94-95 // Key objectives 95-95, 15/09/95.

⁷⁰⁰ Paul Koopmans, 'VVD vindt het onderhand welletjes' (VVD thinks enough is enough) in *Haagsche Courant*, 20/06/95,

⁷⁰¹ TK, 1995-1996, 22 181, No. 101 (10/05/95).

⁷⁰² *Trouw*, NRC *Handelsblad*, 05/07/95.

The fall of Srebrenica on 11 July influenced these figures even further. A telephone survey on the evening of 11 July revealed that 57% of the Dutch population wanted Dutch troops to leave Bosnia. Only the deployment of the Rapid Reaction Force and the air strikes in September 1995 gave the impression that the international community had drawn a line in the sand. Confidence then returned to its old level.⁷⁰³

Few in the Netherlands could make any sense of the situation in Bosnia in mid 1995. As an *NRC Handelsblad* editorial aptly stated on the eve of the VRS attack on Srebrenica, the subject of Bosnia was almost impossible to surpass in 'hopelessness, despair, awfulness and complexity'. It was 'frustration-without-end'. Nevertheless, the newspaper also pointed out that in a conflict where the parties do not want peace, it is a considerable accomplishment for a peacekeeping force to achieve a reduction in the number of victims. However, the question was justified as to what business a peacekeeping force had there, and whether the risks run by the peacekeepers were in proportion with the contribution they were able to make to maintaining the peace. The newspaper concluded, however, that there was no alternative to muddling-through.⁷⁰⁴

The end to this 'muddling-through scenario' was not far off, however, but would not be before the UN mission and Dutchbat had been through an extremely deep depression. Firstly, though, the subject of the relief of Dutchbat continued to stir feelings considerably.

5. The relief of Dutchbat III

The relief of Dutchbat was a complex, and above all, uncertain matter. The Netherlands had promised troops for the Safe Area until 1 July, but in mid May it was clear that not one country showed any enthusiasm for going to the eastern enclaves. Attempts by the Netherlands to create interest among the member states of the Western European Union and NATO, as well as Poland and the Czech Republic, for taking over the task in Srebrenica all came to nothing. A complicating factor was that it was not only the Dutch that wanted to be relieved in Srebrenica, but also the British in Gorazde, another enclave in East Bosnia. The United Kingdom had announced that it was unwilling for its contingent in Gorazde to be relieved by other British troops, and not a single other country had offered to take the task over from them.

That the relief of Dutchbat could possibly become a major problem was already evident in late March 1995 during a visit by Dutch Parliamentarians to Zagreb. Visiting Member of Parliament Gerrit Valk asked Akashi how UNPROFOR would respond to a request from Voorhoeve to replace the Dutch contingent in Srebrenica. Akashi answered that he understood Voorhoeve's question completely. Janvier and he had paid 'a lot of attention' to the problem of Dutchbat's replacement, but both thought that it would be difficult to find a replacement. There was no battalion on hand in Bosnia, and both Akashi and Janvier rejected the solution for Srebrenica of sending in a battalion from the Islamic countries, or one that was composed of several nationalities, so that the Dutch presence could have been reduced. They saw that as rather impractical and militarily ineffective.⁷⁰⁵

Ultimately only the Ukraine appeared to be prepared to go to Srebrenica. There happened to be Ukrainian units already stationed in Zepa and Gorazde. But the arrival of a Ukrainian battalion was surrounded by uncertainty for a long time: it was unclear whether they actually would come, and, if so, when. This begged the question of whether the relief of Dutchbat III would have to wait for the Ukrainian battalion, or that a newly formed Dutchbat IV would have to bridge the intervening period.

⁷⁰³ J.S. van der Meulen, 'Expectations of Peacekeeping: Dutch Public Opinion on Missions in the Former Yugoslavia' in J.L. Soeter and J.H. Rovers, eds, *NL Arms*, p. 175.

⁷⁰⁴ *NRC Handelsblad*, 04/07/95.

⁷⁰⁵ NIOD, Coll. Valk. Correspondence with Gerrit Valk, 31/05/00; UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 88041, File 4-4 Notes on Meetings 95 Feb-Jul. Note for the File, 'Meeting Between SRS Mr. Akashi and a Visiting Dutch parliamentary Delegation Led by Mr. G. Valk', 28/03/95.

For Dutchbat itself, the subject of relief was understandably an important point. As early as the beginning of April, before this subject really became an issue, Karremans had been in the clench with Chief of Staff Nicolai of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo to bring forward the Medal Parade that UNPROFOR had planned for 28 July, so that the final Dutchbat remnant could leave the enclave on 20 or 22 July.⁷⁰⁶ But whatever was planned, the relief of Dutchbat III remained an uncertain matter right up to the time of the Bosnian-Serb attack of 6 July and even after that. The relief of the Dutchbat company in Simin Han, outside the enclave, did proceed according to plan, however.

Many factors had an influence on the relief. A reorganization of UN troops in Croatia was planned for early May 1995. That appeared to offer opportunities for the relief of Dutchbat by transferring a unit from Croatia to Bosnia. Minister Voorhoeve was already wondering in early March if it should not be considered whether Poland would be prepared to contribute to the UNPROFOR presence in Srebrenica. Personally, Voorhoeve had in mind a Dutch-Polish responsibility (fifty-fifty). He proposed raising the matter in his coming visit to Boutros-Ghali, as well as the possibility of stationing units from moderate Islamic countries in Srebrenica.⁷⁰⁷

Salient points of a Ukrainian battalion

The transfer of units from Croatia to Bosnia was accompanied by many ifs and buts, however. Not only was it necessary for the troop-contributing nation to give its consent, but the battalion concerned also had to be acceptable to the warring factions involved. Furthermore, the battalion in question should be suitable for a logistically independent deployment. Various battalions were involved in the redeployment in Croatia, including from the Czech Republic and Argentina. However, they would continue to form part of the UN operation in Croatia. Two battalions from Jordan would be available, but it appeared unlikely that a Jordanian battalion would be acceptable to the VRS for deployment in Srebrenica, because an Arab country would be considered to be possibly too pro-Muslim and therefore too anti-Serbian. Only one possibility remained for transferring units from Croatia to Bosnia: two Ukrainian battalions that were already there.

The Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the UN in New York proposed to move one of the two Ukrainian battalions to Gorazde, where a Ukrainian battalion already happened to be. However, that proposal was flatly rejected by the Ukrainian government in Kiev.⁷⁰⁸ There was surprise and irritation in Kiev in response to the UN secretariat's announcement that the Ukrainian battalions were to be withdrawn from Croatia. Kiev saw itself confronted with a *fait accompli*, and believed that the Russians were behind it, the Ukrainian government recently having criticized the Russian action in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The UN then put forward the argument that the Ukrainian battalion in Croatia consisted of only four hundred men: the other battalions that were involved in the regrouping consisted of the usual nine hundred men. Kiev found the withdrawal of this battalion unacceptable, and in March had even proposed strengthening the battalion to the required nine hundred. Consultation then followed between the UN and the Ukraine on arranging for this battalion, with its limited strength, to nonetheless fulfil a more meaningful task in Bosnia. A factor that played a significant role for the Ukrainian government was that the task in the former Yugoslavia was one of the few instruments for helping the Ukraine to aspire to an international image: the task fulfilled by the Ukrainians until then had not been an unqualified success because of the limited experience in acting with other countries. In order to give the Ukraine more experience in collaborating with other countries in UN operations, Minister Voorhoeve had even offered them a collaboration programme with the Netherlands,⁷⁰⁹ and these good Dutch relations with the Ukraine were later to bear fruit.

⁷⁰⁶ NIOD, Coll. Nicolai. Diary Nicolai, 03/04/95.

⁷⁰⁷ DCBC, No. 399. Memo Minister to DAB and CDS, 06/03/95.

⁷⁰⁸ ABZ, DEU/ARA/03356. Code Biegman 390, 05/05/95.

⁷⁰⁹ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05277. Code Serry 088, 15/05/95.

There was another argument in the discussion between the UN and the Ukraine: in their activities in Croatia the Ukrainians had gained a poor reputation because of corruption and black market trading. This argument was apparently not to be allowed to play a role in the discussion, but was nevertheless well known: the Dutch UN ambassador, Biegman, reported on the matter to The Hague. To avoid continuing to offend the Ukrainians in the discussion on what would have to happen with the battalion concerned, Kofi Annan made a concession to the Ukraine by requesting the country, as an alternative to expanding the Ukrainian battalion, to supply a helicopter squadron.⁷¹⁰

When this discussion on the transfer of units from Croatia became an issue, half way through May, the Dutch government also saw the sense of an involvement. Minister Van Mierlo also alerted the Dutch representative at the UN that it should not be automatically assumed from the reorganization in Croatia that the troops could then be withdrawn completely: it was in fact not out of the question that reinforcement of UNPROFOR in Bosnia was necessary. Van Mierlo's idea was that as units became free in Croatia they could be deployed in Bosnia. In that case it would indeed appear to involve the small Ukrainian battalion. Another opportunity that presented itself was to transfer a Kenyan battalion from Croatia to Srebrenica or Gorazde, but because that battalion lacked the credibility, discipline, experience and equipment for duties there, this idea was not pursued.

The UN ambassador, Biegman, was therefore instructed by the Dutch government to urge the UN secretariat to keep the possibility of transferring the Ukrainian battalion to Srebrenica open. Military circles within the UN secretariat further indicated that the transfer of the Ukrainian battalion was now being viewed more positively. It therefore seemed to the Netherlands to be just the right card to play to bring about the relief of Dutchbat. Furthermore, Biegman learned at the same time from the Netherlands that the Netherlands was belatedly planning to make its own arrangements for the relief of Dutchbat, if necessary.⁷¹¹

A few days later, Biegman discussed the relief of Dutchbat with Kofi Annan. Annan said that the possibility put forward by Van Mierlo of transferring the company concerned from Croatia to Bosnia had already been offered to the Ukraine. An additional advantage for UNPROFOR was that it fitted in with a planned reorganization of UNPROFOR: currently, two sectors (Sector North East for Srebrenica and Sector Sarajevo for Zepa and Gorazde) concerned themselves with the three eastern enclaves. This was to be replaced by a separate headquarters for the three eastern enclaves, in a newly formed sector that would have to be manned by the Ukraine.

Another idea of how UNPROFOR should change its policy on the eastern enclaves did not survive. This was related to a plan that had General Smith's approval. He wanted to locate only smaller units or only UNMOs in the enclaves, in order to track the movements of the combatants. These units or UNMOs were to act as UNPROFOR's 'eyes and ears', and, if the need should arise, a decision could then be made on an UNPROFOR response. In this scenario, a strengthened company for each of the three eastern enclaves would suffice. This idea did not take root, however, for the same reason that the ideas of Janvier and Boutros-Ghali on the withdrawal of UNPROFOR from the eastern enclaves did not succeed in the Security Council (see Chapter 1): a reduction of the presence in the eastern enclaves was simply not feasible politically.⁷¹²

Now that there were signs that the transfer of the Ukrainian company to Srebrenica may be likely, UN Ambassador Biegman proposed that the Dutch ambassador in Kiev, R.H. Serry, should now initiate discussions between the Netherlands and the Ukraine on the modalities of a handover of Dutchbat's duties to the Ukrainian battalion. And, Biegman added: it would be advisable for the Netherlands to refrain from acting as a 'complainant' in Kiev, because, should the Netherlands indicate that it wanted to leave Srebrenica 'at all costs', it could give the Ukrainians food for thought.

⁷¹⁰ ABZ, DPV/ARA/02110. Code Biegman 428, 16/05/95.

⁷¹¹ ABZ, DPV/ARA/00581. Code Van Mierlo 139, 18/05/95.

⁷¹² DCBC, 560. Fax UNPROFOR/COS to DCBC, RNLA Crisis Staff attn CDS, BLS, 141200B Jun 95, No. 225/95.

Van Mierlo also said that he tried to quash the excessively sombre stories on Srebrenica, because it could hamper attempts to motivate the Ukrainians towards a relief operation. That proved to be a somewhat naive idea, because the Ukrainians were naturally well aware of the problems that the presence in an enclave entailed through their presence in Zepa and Gorazde. With hindsight, Van Mierlo also said that he could see the irony of his idea. He pointed out that the interest of the Ukrainians appeared to be that they were seeking a place where they could manifest themselves, also towards the Russians. They would also welcome the UN payment for participation in a peace operation.⁷¹³

The relief, however, was by no means cut and dried. Voorhoeve announced on 29 May in the Ministerial Council that he was in discussion with the Ukraine on the relief of Dutchbat in July. He added that it was extremely uncertain whether the country wanted it, partly in view of the recent deteriorating situation in Bosnia and Srebrenica.⁷¹⁴ Not that this actually appeared to be the real problem: the Ukrainian representative at the UN, Anatoli Zlenko, said to Undersecretary-General Kofi Annan that his government agreed in principle with the transfer of a battalion to Bosnia, but his preference would be for Gorazde. He said that it was his understanding that this was also Janvier's preference. Kofi Annan pointed out, however, that should the Ukrainians want their own command in Bosnia, the UN would expect the Ukraine to account for all of Srebrenica, Zepa and Gorazde.⁷¹⁵ Janvier responded in cautiously positive terms to the Ukrainian offer, and accepted the formation of an own command, but in view of all the uncertainty that was in the air, he currently did not want to enter into any commitments.⁷¹⁶

There were other reasons for uncertainty about an actual relief by the Ukraine: the conflict had flared up again in Croatia too. This offensive, which was started by Croatia, brought the plans for redeploying the UN units in Croatia almost to a standstill. Furthermore, a formal statement on the Ukrainian willingness to transfer a battalion to Bosnia was still awaited. Finally, there was another complication in the person of the Force Commander: Janvier considered the relief of Dutchbat by the battalion that was currently in Croatia to be unacceptable. The earlier-mentioned reputation of that battalion and the circumstance that there were enough troops in Croatia was probably the reason for the Force Commander's attitude. He would agree with an entirely new Ukrainian unit, which was to replace the battalion in Croatia, that would subsequently be transferred to Bosnia.⁷¹⁷

Biegman was otherwise no great supporter of departure from Srebrenica if it was to mean that any new Dutch battalion (Dutchbat IV) would be deployed elsewhere in Bosnia: it would be no safer there. In areas where it was quiet, there were already battalions stationed from the Islamic countries between Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats, and they could not be found a place anywhere else. There was therefore no doubt that the Netherlands would be deployed to another front line between Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Muslims. Biegman also had in mind that former Force Commander De Lapresle, when asked by Biegman, had said he suspected that the Bosnian Serbs would not overrun the enclave, because the political price that they would have to pay would not be outweighed by the potential strategic gain. History would reveal that this assessment of the price of capturing the enclave may well have been correct, but that De Lapresle was mistaken in his assessment that the chance of this happening was only slight.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹³ ABZ, DPV/ARA/00581. Code Biegman 455, 22/05/95; interview H.A.F.M.O. van Mierlo 10/2/00.

⁷¹⁴ Diary Voorhoeve, p. 83.

⁷¹⁵ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 31/05/95, No. 1828.

⁷¹⁶ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 07/06/95, No. UNPF-HQ Z-954.

⁷¹⁷ Bstas. Memorandum CDS to the Minister, 06/06/95, No. S/95/061/2330, 'Concise report of the meeting of CDS with C-UNPF, Gen Janvier on Monday 05 June in Zagreb'. Code Biegman 450; see reference in document DCBC, 563.

⁷¹⁸ Bstas. Memorandum CDS to the Minister, 06/06/95, No. S/95/061/2330, 'Concise report of the meeting of CDS with C-UNPF, Gen Janvier on Monday 05 June in Zagreb'; Code Biegman 450; see reference in document DCBC, 563.

Ukrainians, or Dutchbat IV after all?

The Dutch government also reflected on the fallback option of deploying a Dutchbat IV battalion, but they had learned a lesson after having offered a battalion that had ended up in Srebrenica through a series of coincidences (see Chapter 10 in Part II). Therefore, before resorting to deploying Dutchbat IV, the government wished to attach two clear conditions. The first was that Dutchbat IV would be offered for half a year, after which all options, from an enlargement to a reduction of the Dutch presence in Bosnia, would be open. The second condition was that this time the deployment would have to be to Central Bosnia, and therefore, contrary to what Biegman had suggested, not to Srebrenica.⁷¹⁹ Voorhoeve therefore requested the options for stationing a Dutchbat IV battalion in Central Bosnia to be investigated. The Defence Staff and the Military Intelligence Service set to work and investigated the security situation with respect to three options:

- the Maglaj pocket, bordering on the Posavina corridor that linked the eastern and western parts of the Republika Srpska;
- the sector of the British battalion in the vicinity of Vitez;
- at Livno.

The opinion that was sent to Voorhoeve was that the security risks in these three places did not differ substantially from places elsewhere in Bosnia.⁷²⁰ General Smith stated meanwhile that his preference was deploying Dutchbat IV in the Maglaj pocket; this was for the time being only taken for granted.⁷²¹ In other respects, the security aspect was not the major reason that the Netherlands wished to leave Srebrenica: it had more to do with the fact that an effective execution of duties had become impossible because resupply had broken down.

The media kept a close track of the relief of Dutchbat III. At the end of May, Willibrord Nieuwenhuizen reported in *NRC Handelsblad* that Prime Minister Kok recalled that limits had been set on the deployment of Dutchbat, which must be respected. Kok would urge Minister Voorhoeve to redouble his efforts to identify relief for Dutchbat. On an international level, the newspaper reported that from diplomatic circles in New York - which remained vague - there were noises that the UN was slacking in finding relief. But the Netherlands itself had contributed to this attitude according to the source: in the past the government had responded to every request from the UN to supply observers or troops, and now too, preparations were being made to send a new battalion, which was known as the 'Limburgse Jagers' (Limburg Chasseurs), to Srebrenica to relieve Dutchbat.⁷²² In so doing, the Netherlands was giving a signal that it did not wish to confront the UN with a *fait accompli*, which was in contrast to the British in Gorazde, who had stated emphatically that they would make no relief arrangements themselves. For Srebrenica, the question of whether the UN would or would not be confronted by a *fait accompli* was actually academic: unilateral Dutch withdrawal was impossible for a number of reasons, because leaving the enclave would require military support; it was politically undesirable for the Netherlands to back out unilaterally from UN commitments;⁷²³ and the population and the ABiH would not have allowed Dutchbat to leave in the absence of adequate replacement.

Voorhoeve needed little encouragement from the Prime Minister in his search for a solution and relief: he discussed the subject on 9 June in Brussels with his Ukrainian opposite number, Shmarov. However, Shmarov would go no further, even after a briefing from General Pollé (the Commander of the Dutch Army Crisis Staff) and former Dutchbat I Commander Vermeulen, than to say that he

⁷¹⁹ DAB. Memorandum DAB to the Minister, 28/06/95, No. D95/346.

⁷²⁰ BSG 95 III. Memoranda CDS to the Minister, 23/06/95 and 3/07/95, nos. S/95/061/2585 and 2739.

⁷²¹ DCBC No. 2142. Defence Staff/Operations, Notes for CDS, 30/06/95; CRST. Internal Memorandum Operations Directorate of the Royal Netherlands Army, from G3, l-col Felix to Royal Netherlands Army Crisis Staff, 04/07/95, No. CRST/2632.

⁷²² *NRC Handelsblad*, 23/05/95.

⁷²³ *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 23/05/95.

would investigate the possibility of relief by the Ukraine. Voorhoeve had indicated that there were no major problems with the safety of the soldiers in Srebrenica, but that the greatest problem was the resupply. He aimed at 1 July, if necessary in phases. The Dutch could then transfer the tasks step-by-step and familiarize the Ukrainian battalion, which would avoid allowing the Bosnian Serbs to seize the relief as an opportunity to take over OPs. The Ukrainian battalion stationed in Croatia was to be provided with fresh Ukrainian personnel on 26 June, so fulfilling Janvier's requirement. Shmarov mentioned that after that, however, the battalion would still need some time to acclimatize in the former Yugoslavia. This made relief as of 1 July impossible, Shmarov said. The Ukrainian also wanted Dutch officers to lead the hand-over. Above all, however, Shmarov wanted to see a formal decision from the UN, but the problem was that little had yet been heard from the UN, although Annan had offered the relocation of the battalion to the Ukraine. Voorhoeve therefore also mentioned that the UN, as well as Janvier and the Bosnian government, would consent to the relief.

Therefore some progress was booked, but a few practical problems remained to be overcome. It was accordingly agreed that a Dutch military attaché would be recognized in Kiev in the near future. It was also agreed that a Dutch delegation under the leadership of General Pollé would visit Kiev on 21 June to prepare the agreement. Minister Shmarov did not want to receive a delegation as to confirm of an agreement between the Netherlands and Kiev before 21 June, however, because discussions would only then be coming to an end in Zagreb on the future of the Ukrainian battalions: the Ukrainian Deputy Chief of General Staff, Major General G. Pankratov, accordingly paid a visit to Zagreb. Furthermore, by that time the UN would possibly have reached a formal decision.

Voorhoeve said to Shmarov that if necessary he was prepared to come to Kiev himself to conclude the meeting. Voorhoeve also requested the Bosnian UN ambassador Sacirbey to be careful not to talk disparagingly about the Ukrainian units in public.⁷²⁴

The discussion between Voorhoeve and Shmarov proceeded well, and the Dutch embassy in Kiev had positive expectations regarding the relief. In spite of that, the arrival of a Ukrainian battalion in Srebrenica had still not been secured. This had mainly to do with the unclear situation in Bosnia, and the increasing tensions around Sarajevo at the time. This meant that there was still a breeding ground for Ukrainian doubts.

In the Netherlands, the Chief of Defence Staff, Van den Breemen, and the Director of General Policy Affairs, De Winter, therefore pondered on additional measures in anticipation of Ukrainian doubts: securing the relief was necessary for domestic political reasons, they stated. The question then was how to alleviate the doubts in Kiev: if Kiev was reluctant for military-technical and financial reasons, a possible way out would be to hand over Dutchbat equipment and infrastructure and for Dutchbat to supervise the hand-over. It would even be possible for the Netherlands to donate money to mitigate additional expenses, which was an indication that the Netherlands was gradually getting fed up with the relief issue. If the Ukrainian doubts were on a political level, then there would be little the Netherlands would be able to do about it. In that case, Van den Breemen and De Winter suggested, Minister Voorhoeve could use his friendly relations with the American Secretary of Defense, Perry. He could express appreciation for the Ukrainian plan to man the eastern enclaves, and for the Ukrainian willingness to share responsibility for peace and safety in Europe. Such pressure was thought to have a good chance of success, because the Americans provided the Ukraine with political and financial support; the relations between the two countries were good.⁷²⁵

Whereas one part of the Ministry of Defence was deliberating on measures to persuade Kiev with equipment or financial resources, noises could be heard from another part of the Ministry to be particularly cautious in this regard and not to set to work too hastily. The Director General for Economics and Finance, E.H. Wellenstein, urged restraint towards the Ukraine in making such

⁷²⁴ ABZ, DPV/ARA/02109. Code Veenendaal NATO 886, 09/06/95; DAB. Memorandum DAB to the Minister, 14/06/95, No. D95/306.

⁷²⁵ DARIC B-16-039. Memorandum DAB to the Minister, 14/06/95, No. D95/302.

concessions. He thought that Voorhoeve's impending mission to Kiev should take account of this: donating or loaning equipment to the Ukraine meant the destruction of capital or a reduced payment from the UN. Wellenstein would have preferred to transfer ownership of Dutch equipment to the UN, because the Netherlands would then receive its residual value. Wellenstein made no comment on the bureaucratic consequences and the amount of time that would be involved.⁷²⁶

Speed was of the essence in completing arrangements for the planned relief as of 1 July. To alleviate the Ukrainian objection that there was no formal UN decision, Van Mierlo instructed Biegman to urge the UN secretariat to record its consent to the relief as rapidly as possible in a formal decision. Reference could be made to Janvier's statement to the Dutch Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen, during a visit to Zagreb. Janvier had said that he had no objection to relief, provided arrangements were made for fresh personnel.⁷²⁷

In Zagreb too in mid June, documents were awaited on the decision to be taken in New York on further plans for the deployment of troops. The relief of Dutchbat was not actually high on the priority list in Zagreb. The wish expressed by Minister Voorhoeve to relieve Dutchbat III as of 1 July was deemed by Colonel De Jonge, who was on Janvier's staff, to be unrealistic and infeasible. Van den Breemen had suggested visiting Janvier again, and then to insist more firmly on the relief of Dutchbat III. De Jonge's estimation was that it would achieve little: Janvier's priority was not the Dutch concerns about relief but the release of the hostages (which also took place on 18 June), the issue of the Weapon Collection Points in Sarajevo, Freedom of Movement for UNPROFOR, and supplies to Sarajevo and the eastern enclaves. De Jonge did make a link between these priorities and the relief: all these priorities of Zagreb actually contained a possibility of a deterioration in relations with the Bosnian Serbs, and could therefore reduce the probability of relief. De Jonge also pointed out that a regrouping of the battalions in Bosnia was imminent.⁷²⁸

Meanwhile, representatives of Defence and Foreign Affairs were in the clinch with the Ukrainian government, but Kiev's primary condition had still not been met: formal approval by the UN. Furthermore, Kiev now introduced (16 June) additional requirements. If a sector command was to be created for the eastern enclaves, as UNPROFOR wanted, Kiev would like to see it placed under a NATO general, to prevent it all becoming an entirely Ukrainian matter. For the same reason, Kiev would prefer to see a British company remain in Gorazde (the British actually wanted to leave Gorazde: they did not consider their succession to be a British responsibility). Furthermore, the relief of Dutchbat III must not lead to relocation of the Ukrainian unit from Sarajevo, because it was important to the logistical support. Nevertheless, Kiev still considered 1 July to be feasible as the start of a relief operation that would take from three to six weeks. Voorhoeve would have to try to iron out the creases during a planned visit to the UN secretariat in New York on 19 June.⁷²⁹

Even before Voorhoeve could start on this, the Dutch delegation that was in Kiev to negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ukraine had already been sending signals that, on further reflection, 1 July was not feasible for the relief. According to this message from the Dutch ambassador in Kiev, the point of departure might well still be that the Dutch mandate would end on 1 July, but the relief should be set at 'as soon as possible'. After consultation with the Ukrainian Chief of the General Staff, Pankratov, who was staying in Zagreb, this had to be revised again, however: the period must be made dependent on the completion of the formal decision-making within the UN, and the question of what would happen to the equipment that the Ukrainian battalion in Croatia was using. A timetable was established for completing the relief in thirty days: to this end, the Dutch UN infrastructure in Srebrenica would be handed over in its entirety to the Ukraine; handing over equipment from Dutchbat depended on the wishes of a Ukrainian reconnaissance group to be sent to Srebrenica; training on

⁷²⁶ DGEF doss. F95/77. Memorandum DGEF to the Minister, 16/06/95, No. F 9500179.

⁷²⁷ ABZ, DPV/ARA/02109. Code Van Mierlo 165, 13/06/95.

⁷²⁸ CRST. Fax G3 Land Ops HQ UNPF Zagreb to CDS (by hand) and Chief of Staff Crisis Staff BLS, 14/06/95.

⁷²⁹ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Code Wesseling 110, 16/06/95.

Dutch equipment could start in the meantime in Zagreb, and if necessary should also be continued by Dutch instructors after Dutchbat's departure from Srebrenica.⁷³⁰

On the same day that this message arrived, Voorhoeve paid his visit to Kofi Annan in New York. Annan informed him that a formal request had just been issued to the Ukraine to deploy Ukrainian units in Srebrenica, Zepa and Gorazde, and to take over the command. Voorhoeve pointed out that that was against Kiev's wishes. Annan had no further view on the date on which the relief could take place, but Voorhoeve could already inform Parliament, because rapid agreement could be expected. Annan said that he hoped that the combatants would not throw a spanner in the works. His preference was therefore for direct relief by the Ukraine, and not by another Dutch battalion in the form of Dutchbat IV. Voorhoeve took the opportunity to say that this Dutchbat IV was available for other duties in Bosnia, but then preferably not in an enclave, because all the difficulties encountered there had undermined the broad support that there had once been in the Netherlands for participation in UNPROFOR. Annan was unwilling to make any promises, however, because he had no knowledge of Janvier's plans for regrouping.⁷³¹

Confusion subsequently arose in New York because a Dutch inquiry to the Political Officer of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations had revealed that there was no information on a letter that had been sent to the Ukrainian government, as Annan had said. From the UN side, it was added that even if such a letter had been sent, it was not common practice to inform other governments. Neither, apparently, was anything known about a letter at the Ukrainian mission. There indeed appeared to be no letter; it still had to be drafted, and that would only happen in the course of 21 June, after which it still had to be approved and delivered to its destination. In the letter, although the UN accepted the relief by the Ukraine, the bad news that it contained was that the Force Commander was still unable to give a precise date. Ambassador Biegman then saved the situation concerning the letter that Annan had mentioned to Voorhoeve: he suggested that the Netherlands needed no letter, because the Ukraine had been requested by the UN to relieve Dutchbat, and that the Ukraine had responded positively. The Netherlands could make detailed arrangements with the Ukraine.⁷³²

Voorhoeve had also concluded from his discussion with Annan that the Netherlands could proceed at full speed in making arrangements with the Ukraine. Voorhoeve would not go himself to Kiev: he allowed the matters to be dealt with by the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff, Lieutenant General M. Schouten. On 21 June, Schouten and his colleague Pankratov then finally signed a 'protocol of progress consultation' in Kiev. The draft of the protocol was sent back and forth a few times between the negotiating team in Kiev and The Hague. On his way to Kiev, Schouten was implored by the Director General of Economics and Finance, Wellenstein, to make no financial agreements: it was first necessary to have some insight into the Ukrainian needs. The protocol moved this problem back until after the arrival of the Ukrainian reconnaissance team in Srebrenica: the decision would be made later. Minister Voorhoeve instructed Schouten to take special care to be encouraging to the Ukrainians, because the media had treated the old Ukrainian battalion in Croatia in a rather negative way. Voorhoeve also followed the recommendation of the Chief of Defence Staff and Director of General Policy Affairs by asking his American counterpart Perry to give a word of encouragement to Minister Shmarov, which Perry was prepared to do: an American unit had practiced with the new battalion and it was excellently capable of carrying out peace keeping duties, according to the welcome American assessment.⁷³³

⁷³⁰ DCBC No. 2394. Code Wesseling 111, 19/06/95.

⁷³¹ ABZ, DPV/ARA/02110. Code Biegman 548, 19/06/95.

⁷³² DCBC nos. 2760 and 2761. Fax Deputy Milad to Kiev Emb and Min of Def/DS/DCBC, 201607 LT Jun 95 and 210848 LT Jun 95.

⁷³³ DCBC No. 564. Fax PDV (H.P.M. Kreemers) to DCBC Head of duty squad, [19/06/95]; and DCBC No. 2153. Handwritten fax Kreemers to DCBC for Lieutenant General M. Schouten [20/06/95]; DGEF doss. F95/77. Memorandum DGEF to PCDS, 20 June 1995, No. F 95001837; DCBC No. 5666. Fax Kiev Emb, Col Veldkamp to Gen Pollé, 191645 Jun

The importance of receiving such a formal promise from Kiev was all the more apparent from the words of the Ukrainian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Khandogy, who said to Schouten prior to the signing of the protocol that the Ukrainian thinking on areas of deployment other than Srebrenica had not yet stopped: developments in Croatia could still lead to maintaining the battalion there. This appeared to be wishful thinking in the hope of rehabilitating the Ukrainian battalion that had a poor reputation because of black marketeering and other practices: the Croatian authorities could well harbour objections to a continued stay of that battalion in Croatia.

In Kiev on the day of signing this protocol, they were still awaiting the formal UN request: it was clear that the Netherlands would benefit from the fastest possible decision-making in New York. The only way that the Dutch Defence Staff saw for this was to instruct the Dutch UN ambassador, Biegman, to insist on delivering the formal UN request as rapidly as possible to the Ukrainian mission, which took place in the letter drafted on 21 June, sent on 21 June, and that arrived in Kiev on 24 June. With this, the most significant condition set by the Ukrainian government appeared to be fulfilled. The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs subsequently confirmed that the UN had ordered preparatory measures to be taken for the relief of Dutchbat by Ukrainians, such as sending a reconnaissance team to Srebrenica. When this group was to depart remained unclear: Kiev seemed to assume mid July.⁷³⁴

The relief gets bogged down

The time for the planned relief of Dutchbat, 1 July, was getting closer in the meantime. The Dutch Army Crisis Staff in The Hague started by issuing instructions for a 'winding-up programme'. Note that in this section the term 'relief' is sometimes replaced by the term 'rotation'. In the terminology of the Dutch Army, the term 'rotation' is used when one battalion is replaced by another, successive battalion (for example, Dutchbat I by Dutchbat II). If there is no such succession, the term used is 'relief', for example when a Canadian battalion is replaced by a Dutch battalion. The term 'rotation' will be used here in accordance with the Dutch Army usage.

For personnel that were not part of the Dutchbat III organization (the supporting units), a date had already been established on which they were to report back to their units.⁷³⁵ The ABiH (the 2nd Corps in Tuzla) was also informed of the sequence of events of the relief, but not yet of precise dates.⁷³⁶ According to plan, the first Dutchbat members were to be repatriated on 6 July. The coordination of this relief plan with the upper political echelons appeared to leave much to be desired in the meantime: as late as 25 June Karremans heard Prime Minister Kok say on the radio that Dutchbat would stay until August. Karremans thought it was typical that he had to find out through the media that the battalion would only be relieved half way through August. Inquiries revealed that the Dutch Army Crisis Staff had not been informed. Karremans pointed the finger of blame for this incorrect reporting to the Defence Information Service.⁷³⁷ The question is whether this was justified: the *Reformatorsch Dagblad* of 24 June appeared to have been expertly informed on the relief, and reported that, after a phased relief, the last man would be back home at the end of July.⁷³⁸

There was still no real clarity for the primary interested party, Dutchbat III. On 4 June, Dutchbat had received a message that the Ukrainian government had decided not to send a battalion for relief to Srebrenica, and that Dutchbat should take account of a delay in the relief schedule.

95; ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Protocol of Progress Consultation between the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff of the Netherlands and the Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Ukraine, 21/06/95.

⁷³⁴ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Code Wesseling 115, 21/06/95. DCBC No. 2437. Fax DCBC/SCOCIS to N. Biegman, 221145 Z Jun 95, fax No. 534; ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Code Biegman 561, 22/06/95.

⁷³⁵CRST. Fax G3 Plans Royal Netherlands Army Crisis Staff to C-11 Lumblbrig suppl. to C-Dutchbat, 231450B Jun 95, No. CRST/2580.

⁷³⁶NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Memorandum Meeting 2 Corps ABiH, 23/06/95.

⁷³⁷Interview Karremans, 26/06/98; Karremans, *Srebrenica: Who Cares?*, p. 156.

⁷³⁸R. Pasterkamp, '*Als blauwe ratten in de val: Laatste loodjes voor het Nederlandse bataljon in Bosnië*' (Like blue rats in a trap: Dutch battalion ties up loose ends in Bosnia) in *Reformatorsch Dagblad*, 24/06/95,

Karremans was told that, in principle, relief would be by Dutchbat IV (which was to be formed from the earlier-mentioned 42nd Armoured Infantry Battalion, the Limburgse Jagers).⁷³⁹ Karremans heard that the Limburgse Jagers were holding their home front days, which are information meetings for the relations of the soldiers who were to be deployed. Karremans drew the following conclusion with respect to the Limburgse Jagers: 'that means they are coming'. At the same time the protocol for the relief by a Ukrainian battalion was signed in Kiev; Karremans concluded: 'they are coming too'. Karremans writes: 'For me it was as if the light had been turned out: who will be relieving us?'. It was clear to him, however, that the political decision-making process was not yet complete, and that the UN still had to give its permission, which, as outlined above, was to take another few days. It goes without saying, that if the relief was unclear even for Karremans, it was much more so for the battalion.⁷⁴⁰

In the meantime, the Dutch Army Crisis Staff were considering a wide range of options, including a continued Dutch stay in the Srebrenica enclave. Inspired by the deterioration of the situation in Bosnia, they were looking for ways to act more robustly: discussions on the associated opportunities were conducted on all levels, which was covered in Chapter 1 of this part. One possibility for acting more robustly was to reorganize the Dutch battalion that was still to be deployed, Dutchbat IV, and to equip it with Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) with a 25 mm gun; This would make Dutchbat IV into a mechanized infantry battalion. Further, the Dutch Army Crisis Staff attempted to look forward to October 1996: account was taken up to and including a Dutchbat VI. To reduce vulnerability, the withdrawal of a number of Dutch soldiers was a final option: in view of the enormous effort that would be involved in deploying mechanized infantry battalions, this was a welcome alternative. On balance, the experience of both the Canadian battalion and Dutchbat had shown that guarding the enclave could best be achieved by the manning of observation posts (OPs), which would be possible with two companies and the existing Dutchbat strength of 430 men. Karremans did not agree, however, in view of the problems Dutchbat III had encountered with this strength in its work and in the situation.

The Dutch Army Crisis Staff were also entertaining the idea that if relief by a Ukrainian battalion were to take place in August, the handover of the duties to the Ukrainian battalion could also be carried out by Dutchbat III. It was no surprise that Karremans rejected the idea: because the handover to another country would take more time (the protocol signed in Kiev allowed for thirty days), and relief in August would mean that leave could not be taken until in September, which would rule out a holiday with the families. 'I would like someone to come here and explain that, in particular to those who have not been on leave here as a consequence of the situation,' Karremans responded.⁷⁴¹

Karremans's admonition did not appear to get through completely to the Dutch Army Crisis Staff. As is evident from the minutes of a meeting half way through June on the possible forthcoming deployment of Dutchbat IV, the assumption was still that a Ukrainian battalion would relieve Dutchbat III before 1 September. In that case, Dutchbat IV would not relieve Dutchbat III, but instead Dutchbat III would remain two months longer in the enclave. The other options devised by the Dutch Army Crisis Staff were rejected: Deputy Army Commander, General Van Baal, would hear nothing of any adjustment in the strength or the equipment: the point of departure remained task execution with the organic resources.⁷⁴² This point of departure was reconfirmed after consultation between the Commander in Chief of the Royal Netherlands Army, Couzy, and the Chief of Defence Staff, Van den Breemen. Because of the political consensus that Dutchbat IV should not be quartered again in Srebrenica, the subject of the feasibility of the three investigated alternatives in Central Bosnia was also raised: the most obvious new duties for Dutchbat IV would appear to be in either Livno, or in the surroundings of the Maglaj pocket, and would involve setting up checkpoints and manning several

⁷³⁹Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 147-9; interview Th.J.P. Karremans, 15/12/98.

⁷⁴⁰Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 151.

⁷⁴¹CRST. Internal Memorandum DOKL of G3, lcol Felix to Royal Netherlands Army Crisis Staff, 6/06/95, No. CRST/2483; NIOD, Coll. Karremans. C-1 (Netherlands) UN Infbat to C-RNIA-Crisis Staff, 06/06/95, No. TK9590.

⁷⁴²CRST. Staff 1 Army Corps, Section G3 to Distribution list, 14/06/95. AKL Crisis Staff No. CRST/2548.

OPs. As equipment for both options, the APC with a .50 machine gun would suffice, with which Dutchbat was also equipped. Being equipped as armoured infantry meant that if Dutchbat III were to be relieved by Dutchbat IV, Dutchbat IV would have to return to the Netherlands to be fitted out there as an armoured infantry battalion, and then to be deployed (to Livno or Maglaj). Such an armoured infantry battalion with two companies was in any case only deployable for six months, and that was not worth the effort.⁷⁴³ It was therefore determined from all the above that it was not an option. In August 1995, the decision was taken to fit out armoured infantry combat vehicles of the companies still to be deployed with a 25 mm gun. The argument used at the time was that the vulnerability had to be reduced, and that, in view of the increasingly hostile actions, it was necessary in the interests of self-defence to have heavier resources available.⁷⁴⁴ Shortly after this decision, however, General Nicolai asked Zagreb to inform the Dutch government that there was no new task for Dutchbat and that all preparations could be halted.⁷⁴⁵

In the meantime, the relief continued to cause problems until the end of June. Minister Voorhoeve was able to announce in Parliament only three days before the planned date of relief, on 28 June, that the UN had agreed with the relief of Dutchbat III. When it was to start was not yet known, he told Parliament: a number of technical details still had to be sorted out.

There was close contact between The Hague and the Dutch members of the UN staffs in Sarajevo and Zagreb on the rotation and relief of Dutchbat. From Zagreb, Colonel De Jonge urged the Defence Staff to make a reservation in the relief of Dutchbat III by the Ukrainian battalion, because it remained to be seen whether the ABiH army Commander would agree to that battalion in view of its Orthodox character. De Jonge also warned that the Ukrainian battalion was expected to be available no earlier than mid July for transfer from Croatia to Bosnia. The relief would in any case have to be complete before the end of August, because the UN was then expecting a Croatian offensive.⁷⁴⁶

However, the 2nd Corps of the ABiH already informed its unit in Srebrenica, the 28th Division, that Colonel Brantz of Sector North East in Tuzla had announced that the commander of Dutchbat IV would be paying his respects to the staff of the 2nd Corps on 5 July. It was also announced that Brantz would arrange for the new Dutchbat IV to enter the enclave. Brantz claimed - according to a Bosnian report - to have gained experience in 1994 and 1995 in arranging relief.⁷⁴⁷

The rotation of Dutchbat III was immediately frustrated, however. A Dutch reconnaissance team planned to enter the enclave on 28 June. The Bosnian Serbs refused this group entry to Srebrenica, however.⁷⁴⁸ Therefore, General Couzy was to call Karremans on 1 July with the announcement that General Mladic had thrown a spanner in the works, and that no clearance had been given for the rotation. Neither could the rotation of the first group, which was planned for 6 July, take place. The ultimate decision on admission was with the Bosnian Serbs, and, for the rest, both alternatives, relief by Dutchbat IV (the 42nd Armoured Infantry Battalion Limburgse Jagers), or the Ukrainian battalion, were still open. A discussion subsequently flared up between Dutchbat and the Dutch Army Crisis Staff on the question of whether the rotation was to take place in three or four rounds. Karremans sighed: 'This is slowly driving me crazy'.⁷⁴⁹

The effects on Dutchbat III's personnel and home front of a matter of such importance to the Army as the care and security of personnel, and on such a sensitive point as relief, was anybody's guess. In spite of all the uncertainty surrounding the relief, the preparation for the rotation continued as if nothing was wrong. A start was made on packing the kit bags, and the Dutchbat unit that was planned

⁷⁴³DCBC No. 565. Memorandum PCDS to CDS, 19/06/95, No. S/95/061/2514.

⁷⁴⁴ TK, session 1995-1196, 22, No. 111. (03/08/95).

⁷⁴⁵NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. Fax Comd HQ UNPROFOR to HQ UNPF Zagreb, 141100Aug95.

⁷⁴⁶ DCBC No. 2150. Fax G3 Land Ops HQ UNPF to SCOCIS Defence Staff info COS HQ UNPROFOR, 27/06/95.

⁷⁴⁷ ABiH Tuzla. Komanda 2. Korpusa Komandi 28.d KoV, 29/06/95, Str.pov.broj. 02/1-676/2.

⁷⁴⁸ DCBC, 2756 and 2755. Gen Nicolai to DS/SCOCIS and DOKL/SCO, 27/06/95 (the memo was signed by LCol A. de Ruiter) and *ibid.* as a supplement to the memo of 27/06/95, 28/06/95.

⁷⁴⁹Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 157.

to leave the enclave on 10 July handed them in as early as 1 July. After the kit bags had been loaded onto trucks on this day, those involved heard on the RTL news that Dutchbat IV did not yet have the permission of the Bosnian Serbs to depart for the enclave. With this, the rotation schedule was up in the air again. This caused great disappointment, which was only compensated by the fact that on 2 July a limited number of people (ten for rotation and sixteen for leave) could depart with the convoy containing all the packed kit bags. To be on the safe side, buses for the main rotation remained in the enclave. A palliative measure was that the earlier planned date for the start of the major rotations, 10 July, was brought forward on paper and was now again set at 6 July.

The home front received a detailed letter stating the arrival time of the aircraft on 7 July carrying those who were to leave the enclave with the first rotation on 6 July. For this letter, the Dutch Army Crisis Staff assumed what was called a 'positive plan', although there were the necessary disclaimers. In the event of no clearance from the Bosnian Serbs, it would mean two days delay, but considerable delay was also possible. Late in the evening of 5 July, the message arrived that the clearance for the following day's rotation had indeed been rejected by the VRS. To rub more salt into the wound, the RTL news on that day showed the arrival in Soesterberg of the fortunate fellow soldiers who were able to leave Srebrenica on 2 July.⁷⁵⁰

Further complications surrounding the relief: the reorganization of UNPROFOR in Bosnia

The relief was further complicated because UNPROFOR, after transferring the Ukrainians from Croatia to Bosnia, could also expect a game of musical chairs within Bosnia. It was decided as early as May to carry out the mandate with fewer troops, and Resolution 998 of 16 June had also spoken of the regrouping of UNPROFOR. The arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force likewise entailed the necessity of a reorganization. A further complication was formed by the reorganization in the eastern enclaves, which meant that a Dutch and a British battalion became available for deployment elsewhere in Bosnia. Janvier wanted to transfer an Argentinian battalion from Croatia to Bosnia, but there was no work for an Argentinian battalion in Bosnia: it would be difficult enough to find a task for a new Dutchbat and a new Britbat. The Dutch government had formally confirmed that it considered it desirable to maintain a battalion in Bosnia, and the British government had also said that it was prepared to maintain its strength in Bosnia, provided the UN was to deploy the British - like the Dutch - in Central Bosnia. In addition, the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force represented enormous pressure on the available logistics resources, and that better accommodation than tents would have to be found before the winter.⁷⁵¹

As far as the relief of Dutchbat III was concerned, the planned reorganization meant that it could not take place in a hurry. The fact was that if a Ukrainian battalion were to take over Dutchbat III's duties, a situation would arise in which no new deployment area would be established for Dutchbat IV. This would mean that the Netherlands would have to 'fight' for a place, because the total number of battalions in Bosnia was to be reduced by three. For this reason, General Nicolai and Lieutenant Colonel De Ruiter from Sarajevo expressed the fear that the Netherlands would have to compete with other Western countries, which would not enhance the probability of a problem-free new deployment area for Dutchbat IV. This was already difficult because a certain balance also had to be maintained between Western and non-Western countries. If Dutchbat III were to transfer its duties prematurely to the Ukraine, then it would be doubtful if the UN would still make an appeal to the Netherlands, but the Dutch government provisionally adhered to the position that this would have to happen. A possible outcome was that agreements with Canada or England would have to be made on a Dutch deployment area, but it could not be stated in advance whether that was certain.

⁷⁵⁰ NIOD Coll. Diary Koreman, 40th week, p. 3-11; CRST. Head G1 the Royal Netherlands Crisis Staff (LCol W.P.J. Patist) to the families of the returning military personnel of Dutchbat-3 UNPROFOR and scheduled for return in 'Round 1', 29/06/95, No. CRST/2571/A.

⁷⁵¹ DCBC, 2148. Letter COS UNPROFOR to Force Commander UNPF, 25/06/95, Ref Plans 1300.

The key question remained as to how much time was involved in the arrival of the Ukrainian battalion: experience showed that it took three weeks to relieve a battalion, but consultation with the Bosnian government in Sarajevo and with the Bosnian Serbs in Pale had not yet been conducted at the end of June. Because the United Kingdom had also announced that it wanted to leave Gorazde, with the Ukraine as the only candidate for relief, it fell to the Bosnian government to explain the various aspects. Sacirbey may well have said to Voorhoeve that he would consent to the arrival of the Ukrainians in Srebrenica, but this did not convince Nicolai. Sacirbey had actually said so to Voorhoeve at the beginning of June: the impression arose then that the arrival of Ukrainian troops would not be disagreeable to the Bosnian Muslims, because they would pay less strict attention to enforcing the demilitarization agreement.⁷⁵² But even if the Bosnian government were to agree, according to Nicolai in Sarajevo the question remained as to whether the ABiH would cooperate, in view of the poor relations with the Ukrainian troops.

All things considered, it appeared to Nicolai to be inadvisable to allow the relief by the Ukraine to start in early July, at least in so far as it was actually feasible for the Ukraine. The Netherlands would then have a reasonable chance of missing out on new terms of reference in Bosnia. A longer stay of Dutchbat III in Srebrenica was also a non-option. The only path open appeared to be the following: the relief of Dutchbat III by Dutchbat IV. A rapid hand-over of Dutchbat III's duties to Dutchbat IV appeared doubtful, Nicolai thought: it would still take some time to reach the relevant decisions. UNPROFOR's study on its regrouping in Bosnia would be complete at the end of June: it would then have to go to Zagreb, and if agreement was reached on it there, the Security Council in New York would still have to pronounce judgement on it. Among other reasons, because Dutchbat's resupply was still stalled, it appeared to be inadvisable to bring in more troops to the enclave in addition to the 430 of Dutchbat III who were there at that time. Therefore only 430 men of Dutchbat IV could enter the enclave, which again raised the problem that the complete Dutchbat IV battalion consisted of more than 430 people, so that the Netherlands was faced with a difficult choice of which Dutchbat IV units to leave at home.⁷⁵³

Also, because of the problems that Dutchbat III was wrestling with, neither was the Army Staff in The Hague interested under these circumstances in having Dutchbat III relieved by the Ukrainian battalion: the feeling was that it could not be sold to the home front and the soldiers of Dutchbat III. The Department for Individual Support and the Defence Social Service considered a longer stay in Srebrenica irresponsible. If the promised period of deployment of six months was exceeded, the organization's credibility would suffer, and this would have a considerable impact on the follow-up care. Here again, therefore, the conclusion was to deploy a Dutchbat IV battalion.

In addition, General Couzy wanted relief to be carried out by the complete Dutchbat IV, partly as a way of limiting the security risks. Couzy thought that it would send the wrong signal to outsiders and that it was furthermore bad for team building for a part of Dutchbat IV to have to start the deployment with a period of leave; Dutchbat IV must stay together. Complete units should be able to hand over duties to each other. Furthermore, there was equipment for more than 600 men in the enclave, which, after the hand-over from Dutchbat III, would have to be transferred by Dutchbat IV to the deployment location elsewhere in Bosnia. Equipment for 600 men should not be moved by 430 men, Couzy felt.⁷⁵⁴

Couzy's scenario conflicted with Minister Voorhoeve's assumption of bringing no more personnel into the enclave than strictly necessary, which was also what Nicolai had advised from Sarajevo. Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen pointed out that the supply situation in Srebrenica was already a problem, and that the Bosnian Serbs would certainly not allow UNPROFOR to increase its strength in the enclave. In other respects, Couzy and Van den Breemen were in agreement in their assessment that an extended stay of Dutchbat III was undesirable: the battalion must be relieved as rapidly as possible, which

⁷⁵² DCBC, 2821. Code Van Mierlo 73, 06/06/95.

⁷⁵³ DCBC, 2756 and 2755. Gen Nicolai to DS/SCOCIS and DOKL/SCO, 27/06/95 (the memo was signed by LCol J.A.C. de Ruiter) and *ibid.* as a supplement to the memo of 27/06/95, 28/06/95.

⁷⁵⁴ DCBC, 2151 and 2145. Fax LCol Felix [RNLA Crisis Staff] to (Comdr Metselaar [DCBC], 27/06/95 and 28/06/95, No. CRST/2610.

would mean relief by Dutchbat IV, although Voorhoeve's preference was for relief by the Ukrainian battalion.

Another scenario that the Defence Staff was considering was that relief would not be permitted for some considerable time. The choice then would be whether Dutchbat III should stay or withdraw. If the UN could not carry out relief, a unilateral withdrawal of the Dutch contribution would come closer. Although General Smith, General Nicolai and UN Undersecretary-General Kofi Annan had made positive remarks regarding a continued presence of a Dutch battalion in Bosnia, the Defence Staff acknowledged that no other purpose could be found after Dutchbat IV's stay in Srebrenica. Van den Breemen wanted to discuss this problem with Janvier.⁷⁵⁵

Meanwhile, on 30 June there was still absolutely no certainty about the relief of Dutchbat. In the Ukraine the completion of the political decision-making was still not in sight, and Kiev still appeared not to be content with the prospect of the country being the only one to have to occupy the eastern enclaves.⁷⁵⁶ This was at least the opinion of the Dutch UN delegation in New York. In the meantime, a message had been received from Kiev on 28 June that the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had agreed to the move to Srebrenica, and that parliamentary approval was not required. The commander of the old Ukrainian battalion concerned (known as the 60th) was ordered to make arrangements for the transfer. An advance party was on standby in Croatia from 5 July to travel to Srebrenica, although the Chief of the General Staff, General Pankratov, expected that this would not happen before mid July. The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also requested support from the Netherlands, although it was not a condition for the relief: the Ukraine wanted to achieve a sustained involvement of other countries in the enclaves, even if it was only in the form of supply units. If Gorazde, Srebrenica and Zepa were to be placed under a separate Ukrainian sector, then Kiev would still also like to see a NATO General at the head of this sector.⁷⁵⁷

The Ukrainian government continued not to determine a position because of the formation of a new cabinet: some confusion surrounded this matter, because the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kiev had announced on 28 June that it consented to a Ukrainian battalion in Srebrenica. New York was also in agreement, and adopted the position that relief must take place as rapidly as possible. The Netherlands put pressure on the Ukraine via the American Secretary of State, Perry: it was known that Minister Shmarov would return in a newly formed cabinet. Perry indeed spoke with Shmarov about the relief, who said that he was committed to going to Srebrenica, but at the same time was greatly concerned that the Ukraine was now alone in occupying the eastern enclaves. He in turn appealed to Perry for help in avoiding this situation, but this did not appear to be a hard condition for Shmarov either.⁷⁵⁸

Van den Breemen visited Janvier on 30 June to be given insight on the situation in Bosnia, and to learn the state of affairs with respect to the relief of Dutchbat III. The picture painted by Janvier was extremely sombre: Mladic would not make any promises on the rotation or relief of Dutchbat. He had said that he would study relief by the Ukrainian battalion, but his position was that under the current circumstances for the time being there could, for the time being be no rotation. Mladic adopted an uncompromising and hostile attitude towards the UN: he would not yield and he was convinced that he could win a conflict with the UN. Mladic was counting on the fact that the major countries would not want to risk a war over Bosnia.

⁷⁵⁵ DCBC, 574. Memorandum CDS/SCOCIS to the Minister, 29/06/95 No. S/95/061/2674.

⁷⁵⁶ ABZ, DPV/ARA/02109. Code Biegman 575, 29/06/95.

⁷⁵⁷ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Code Wesseling 120, 29/06/95. See also DCBC, 2436. Fax Hilderink to Kolsteren, 031600 LT Jul 95, No. 551.

⁷⁵⁸ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Codes Horbach 590, 05/07/95; ABZ, DPV/ARA/02109. Jacobovits 436 and 439, 07/07/95 and 10/07/95; DCBC, 682. Biegman 599, 10/07/95; DCBC, 2140. Fax Kiev embassy to Minister of Defence, 07/07/95; DCBC, 2089 [= 2220]. Code Cables Annan to Akashi, 06 and 07/07/95, Nos. 2220 and 2251. DCBC, 528. Day reports DCBC 07/07/95.

Janvier thought that Mladic considered the presence of UN units in Srebrenica, Zepa and Gorazde to be a way of putting pressure on the UN: however, it would be Mladic himself who abandoned this source of pressure by attacking the enclaves. Mladic had further declared that he would attack the UN units if the Rapid Reaction Force were to be deployed. Therefore, the Rapid Reaction Force could not be deployed before a solution was found for the enclaves. Janvier wanted to raise this matter again with the Security Council.

Janvier also expressed the preference that Dutchbat III should be relieved directly by the Ukrainian battalion. But the approval of the parties involved and the rotation itself could take another month, the Force Commander thought. This hardly offered an attractive prospect, and Van den Breemen was also keen not only for Voorhoeve to work in favour of the relief, but for Van Mierlo also to use his influence on Bildt and his Ukrainian counterparts to raise the matter of the relief with the Bosnian-Serb regime in Pale.⁷⁵⁹

The result of Van den Breemen's visit was that Janvier again brought the replacement of Dutchbat III to the attention of New York. Janvier expressed no preference for a replacement by Ukrainian or by Dutch troops. He merely pointed out that a Ukrainian reconnaissance team should depart on 5 July. He wondered whether the Bosnian delegate at the UN had already been informed, and whether New York would agree with transferring the Ukrainian battalion. Janvier further said that he had already requested Mladic on 28 June to cooperate in the departure of Dutchbat with all its vehicles, but also that Mladic did not wish to respond. As the next step, Janvier pointed to the necessity of approaching the governments of Croatia, Bosnia and the authorities in Pale.⁷⁶⁰ The Dutch pressure on New York to reach decisions quickly had therefore borne little fruit.

On 3 July, the Bosnian Serbs still would not allow a quartermaster unit of the Limburgse Jagers (part of Dutchbat IV) into the enclave. This meant that a start could not be made on the relief, and it no longer seemed likely that Dutchbat III would have left the enclave on 11 July:⁷⁶¹ the planned date for Dutchbat to be able to leave the enclave changed often, as will be clear from the above. Voorhoeve had already publicly announced that there was still no certainty about a precise date of the relief of Dutchbat; this had to wait for the Bosnian Serbs.⁷⁶²

Only on 6 July did the promise from the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the Ukrainian move to Srebrenica reach the Secretary-General of the UN, Boutros-Ghali. General Kolsteren made the suggestion to The Hague from Zagreb to remind Kofi Annan via the Dutch Military Advisor to the UN, General Van Kappen, of his promise to Voorhoeve, as Kolsteren had interpreted it: according to Kolsteren, Annan had promised, immediately after approval from Kiev, to instruct Janvier to transfer the Ukrainian battalion from Croatia to Srebrenica. It was not necessary to remind Annan of this alleged promise: UN Ambassador Biegman hoped that a reconnaissance team of the Ukrainian battalion would soon be able to depart to Srebrenica, although, as was the case with the Dutchbat IV reconnaissance team, nothing could yet be said about the possibility of actually arriving there.⁷⁶³

As far as the Ukrainian battalion was concerned, there was another obstacle to overcome: the Ukraine had now consented to a Ukrainian battalion in Srebrenica, but there was still no permission from the Bosnian government and the Bosnian-Serb authorities for the presence of that battalion in Srebrenica. This was a task for Janvier, but he would first have to take up the matter of the departure of the

⁷⁵⁹ BStas. Memorandum SCOCIS to Minister, 03/07/95, unnumbered. Secret, Personal, Minutes of the meeting of the Chief of Defence Staff and the Force Commander UNPF in Zagreb on 30/06/95. See for unclassified draft: DCBC, 576.

⁷⁶⁰ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, Srebrenica 3300-SRE Vol. I, 01/07-16/11/95. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 02/07/97, No. Z-1085, UN Restricted.

⁷⁶¹ *De Volkskrant*, 03/07/95.

⁷⁶² *De Volkskrant*, 30/06/95.

⁷⁶³ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Codes Horbach 590, 05/07/95; ABZ, DPV/ARA/02109. Jacobovits 436 and 439, 07/07/95 and 10/07/95; DCBC, 682. Biegman 599, 10/07/95; DCBC, 2140. Fax Kiev embassy to Minister of Defence, 07/07/95; DCBC No. 2089 [= 2222]. Code Cables Annan to Akashi, 06 and 07/07/95, Nos. 2220 and 2251. DCBC, 528. Day reports DCBC 07/11/95.

Ukrainian battalion from Croatia with the Croatian government. Only then could he approach the Bosnian government and the Bosnian-Serb regime. The Federal Yugoslav government would probably also have to be requested for permission to allow the relief to take place via Serbian territory, which was the quickest way. In any case, the Defence Staff was of the opinion that the Netherlands would have to put pressure on the UN, so that the Netherlands would be given priority in UNPROFOR's redeployment plans.⁷⁶⁴

That proved to be no longer necessary, however: Janvier wanted the transfer of the Ukrainian battalion from Croatia to Bosnia to take place as rapidly as possible, but for practical reasons it could only happen 'during a lull in the hostilities in Bosnia'. However, these hostilities would actually throw another spanner in the works, because from 6 July the VRS was making a start on the operations against Srebrenica. The Bosnian Serbs still refused in the meantime to allow the first Dutchbat IV echelon destined for Srebrenica through to Srebrenica; the quartermaster unit of the Limburgse Jagers was stopped at the bridge over the Drina at Zvornik. On 6 July, a start should have been made with their vehicles on the rotation of Dutchbat III.⁷⁶⁵

This definitely upset the plans. After having been kept in uncertainty about the timing of the relief for some considerable time, the Dutch were looking forward to a series of departures on 6, 9, 13 and 16 July. Matters were to turn out differently.

A retrospective on the relief

The relief of Dutchbat III meant moving a long way in a short time. There was simply no interest in a move to the eastern enclaves on the part of the troop-contributing countries. Therefore, the Netherlands was forced to review with hindsight the uniqueness of the isolated adventure that they had embarked upon so full of hope and confidence.

The Ukraine was the only country that could be persuaded to show an interest in taking over the duties in Srebrenica. The country said A, and to the relief of the policy makers in the Hague, eventually also said B, after doubt had been raised in Kiev on whether it was advisable to be the only country to take on duties in the eastern enclaves, among other questions. This led to a Ukrainian call for the internationalization of the presence in the enclaves, in which the Netherlands (and before them Canada) had preceded the Ukraine, but this call fell on deaf ears, however.

In the search for relief in making related agreements with the Ukraine, the Ministry of Defence was at the fore: Foreign Affairs appeared on this point to be playing more of a facilitating than a leading role. In Dutchbat I's offer to the UN in 1993, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was still as keen as mustard: when it came to the relief of Dutchbat III, Defence stood largely alone, however. The difference with one and a half years earlier was great: then, Minister Ter Beek was not even granted the privilege of offering Dutchbat I to Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali (see Part I).

This time, the new offer of Dutchbat IV could be made by the Minister of Defence; Actually, Voorhoeve appeared almost to stand alone. Voorhoeve's position as minister certainly played a role in this: Relations now were such that as long as Voorhoeve did not bang his fist on the table or otherwise raise the alarm, his problem would be seen as a problem of Defence, who would therefore also have to come up with the solution. Voorhoeve was seen as more of a worrier than his predecessor, Ter Beek, and his concerns were therefore sometimes taken with a pinch of salt by his fellow ministers.⁷⁶⁶ That even Prime Minister Kok publicly urged Voorhoeve to make haste in finding relief for Dutchbat, was actually a message that could just as appropriately have been sent to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

It may be doubted whether the offer of replacement by Dutchbat IV in the search for a replacement for Dutchbat III was advisable from the point of view of exerting pressure for pulling

⁷⁶⁴ DCBC, 2434. Draft Memorandum DCBC, undated, unnumbered, sent with Fax No. 562Sec, 062255B Jul 95 to Col Smeets.

⁷⁶⁵ SMG 1004/79. Fax Dutchbat 3-4 Rotation Team to Sitcen BLS, 051300B Jul 95.

⁷⁶⁶ Interview J.P.M.H. Merckelbach, 25/05/00.

Dutchbat III out. There is no doubt that it could be seen as a noble gesture intended to avoid embarrassing the UN and to ensure that Dutchbat III would be relieved, but the manoeuvre took the pressure off New York itself to arrange for the replacement of Dutchbat. New York was not particularly active in seeking opportunities for Dutchbat's replacement, and it eventually showed little haste in reaching agreements with the Ukraine.

The circumstances were also not favourable for the Netherlands. Janvier had set the condition that the Ukrainian battalion, which he would probably rather be rid of, must first be provided with fresh personnel: this battalion was dogged with a poor reputation through reports of corruption and black market dealings.

Furthermore, UNPROFOR's reorganization plans, both in Croatia and in Bosnia, upset matters for the Netherlands. This led to delays in decision-making. The question of whether the Bosnian government had formally wished to consent to relief by the Ukraine was still unanswered at the time of the fall of Srebrenica, and therefore remains hypothetical: Dutchbat was the loser.

There is little point in speculating on whether the Netherlands could have been spared a trauma if the relief had been timely. There are no reasons to believe that the ups and downs of the relief played any role for the warring factions, in the sense that they exploited it, or that it played a role in the timing of the Bosnian-Serb attack. The VRS did emphatically keep the Republika Srpska closed for the Dutchbat IV reconnaissance team: by which time the decision to start the attack on the enclave had already been taken.

All this time, Dutchbat III and the home front were kept in gnawing uncertainty. To make matters even worse, all this took place shortly before the holiday period. For understandable reasons, the circumstances in which Dutchbat III found itself made rapid relief desirable. In this sense, from the point of view of personal welfare, it was understandable that The Hague suggested Dutchbat IV as a temporary replacement, even though it reduced the probability of a continued presence of a Dutch battalion elsewhere in Bosnia, in a reduced UNPROFOR.

6. The morale of ABiH and the population

After three years of war and two years of 'imprisonment' in a Safe Area, the situation also became increasingly bad for the population of Srebrenica, including those who had fled to the enclave. The fact that the population could not contact their families outside the enclave made the isolation increasingly more difficult to bear.

Not only Dutchbat, but also the population, were victims of the interruption of the resupply. The longer the Bosnian Serbs continued their strategy, which was intended to cause intolerable living conditions in the enclave, the more the belief of the residents in the future of the enclave crumbled. A humanitarian disaster was imminent now that the Bosnian Serbs were only allowing UNHCR convoys through piecemeal. An increasing number of people therefore wanted to flee the enclave. There were bound to be consequences for the morale of the population and the ABiH.

The morale of the ABiH declined rapidly after May 1995. The possibility of a change in the UNPROFOR mandate was in the air in the spring of 1995, but finally did not materialize (see Chapter 1 of this part). This also led to a hardening of the ABiH's attitude towards Dutchbat.

It had not escaped the notice of the ABiH General Staff that in mid May, Boutros-Ghali and Janvier were considering proposals that could entail the withdrawal of UNPROFOR from the eastern enclaves. Even before Janvier presented his regrouping proposals to the Security Council, from Tuzla Naser Oric already informed the 28th Division of the ABiH in Srebrenica of the possibility that Dutchbat could leave Srebrenica: he sent an order to obstruct it. The civil administration of the enclave, the Opstina, was to be informed of this order. It also had to be made clear to the population that Srebrenica and Zepa had not been sold, but that the struggle would continue. Oric made the Brigade Commander in the southwestern part of the enclave, Zulfo Tursunovic, personally responsible for the execution of this order, which further underlined their special links.

Another point of concern for the ABiH was that intelligence indicated that the Drina Corps of the VRS was to approach the population with pamphlets urging them to surrender. As soon as this

happened, it would become necessary to explain to the population that the struggle would be continued. The most severe measures must be used against cowards and faint hearts, irrespective of whether they were soldiers or citizens, according to Oric.⁷⁶⁷

The latter was easier said than done. ABiH deserters who had subsequently left Srebrenica formed a considerable problem, and were of influence on the morale of both the ABiH and of the population. After the start of spring, a steady flow of groups of people, including ABiH soldiers, started from the enclave. It is a fact that there had been problems surrounding departure from the enclave, and also from Zepa, to Tuzla, Kladanj and Serbia since 1992: in the preceding three years approximately 5000 people had left and not returned. Measures were taken to obstruct the departure of the population, but it is not completely clear what these measures were, except that they did not have the desired effect.⁷⁶⁸ The flight from the enclave encountered opposition from the Bosnian government, partly for fear that it would be mainly men who would leave. This would have an unfavourable psychological effect on those who remained. For this reason, the Commander of the 28th Division, Ramiz Becirovic, was able to justify a more radical measure: a complete ban on departure from the enclave.⁷⁶⁹

An order to this effect was issued on 27 May. The 28th Division then issued an order that banned every movement of individuals and groups, and in particular of soldiers, between Srebrenica and Zepa. This order was difficult to maintain in the presence of an increasing shortage of food, however. Word spread around the enclave in June that the best solution was to leave for Tuzla, and a large proportion of the population did in fact want to leave. The ABiH had little control over this flight from the enclave, but did see it as extremely harmful for the survival of the enclave. Therefore ABiH men were obliged to report incidents of people wishing to leave the enclave, as soon as they became aware of them: all ABiH units were ordered to exchange information with *Stanica Javne Bezbjednosti* (SJB), the service for public safety, and to cooperate in the matter. However, this offered no solution: preparations were made for departure in small groups, which was difficult to oppose. There was a great degree of solidarity among the population, and they provided the ABiH no information on escape plans. Despite all the measures, groups indeed succeeded in leaving. This included many soldiers, who left with their weapons and ammunition. Zulfo Tursunovic was even sent to Zepa: with the authority he possessed, he had to disarm the many who had left for Zepa with the intention of continuing to Kladanj, and to return them to Srebrenica.⁷⁷⁰

Also, the eighteen ABiH helicopter flights supplying military equipment from Tuzla to Zepa had an influence on this: the return flights from Zepa offered individuals the chance to leave. This mainly involved family members of people in Tuzla, who were prepared to pay the helicopter pilots. In Tuzla everyone attempted to curry favour with the pilots, and provided them with the names of people to be picked up:⁷⁷¹ Someone who had family members with money could leave by helicopter.⁷⁷² This problem was solved for the ABiH by the VRS: the Bosnian Serbs shot down a helicopter at the beginning of June in the vicinity of Zepa, killing twelve people, including three doctors destined for service with the 28th Division. According to information from the surgeon Ilijaz Pilav, who was in Zepa when the helicopter crashed, 37 people had some kind of permission to fly with a return flight. The flights stopped after this incident.⁷⁷³

There were reports in early June that a group of eighty people was on the way from Srebrenica to Zepa, including one of the local doctors. The hospital manager was extremely concerned about him,

⁷⁶⁷ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa to Komandi 28 n/r Tursunovic Zulfo, 19/05/95, br. 02/1-S1.

⁷⁶⁸ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 2. Korpusa Odjeljenje za moral, 16/06/95, br. 04-99/95.

⁷⁶⁹ Interview Ibrahim Becirovic, 05/08/97.

⁷⁷⁰ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa, 21/06/95, br. 01-132/95.

⁷⁷¹ Interview Hasan Nuhanovic, 05 and 06/08/97.

⁷⁷² Interview Hasa Selmanagic, 07/08/97.

⁷⁷³ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa ARBiH, 05/06/95, br. 04-89/95; ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to GSS ARBiH KM Kakanj; Komanda 2. Korpusa ARBiH, 04/06/95, br. 01-74/95.

because others cherished similar plans.⁷⁷⁴ Because of the poor living conditions in the enclave, an increasing number of people started to flee. The food situation for the population temporarily improved somewhat after a convoy arrived again on 7 June⁷⁷⁵ with 72 tons of food, which was good for five days consumption.⁷⁷⁶

The command of the 28th Division of the ABiH feared chaos as a result of the departure of so many from the enclave: more severe repressive measures were necessary to deter people from fleeing. Practice actually showed that these measures were not strict enough: groups of soldiers who arrived in Tuzla from Srebrenica in May were not punished or sent back. Instead they were reassigned to other ABiH units. Furthermore, commanders in the enclave would turn a blind eye to departure and would do little to prevent it. Later measures against deserters involved sixty days detention, but because this was seen as a light punishment, the situation continued to encourage desertion. At the end of June, thirty ABiH soldiers in the enclave were being punished for their escape plans.⁷⁷⁷

To stop the exodus of ABiH soldiers from the enclave, and because the collaboration with the SJB was not proceeding satisfactorily, a company of Military Police was formed in Srebrenica and attached to the 282nd ABiH brigade of Ibro Dudic, who was stationed in the south, on the route to Zepa. This hunting down of ABiH soldiers then had a bad influence on ABiH morale:⁷⁷⁸ some resigned from the ABiH before fleeing. These were often people who had a stock of food and who were able to pay a few hundreds of marks for guides. A poorer person would hardly be in a position to flee.⁷⁷⁹

Hunger was a primary motive to flee, irrespective of the social status and responsibilities held by the person involved in the army or in the Opstina. This meant that the control over the flight of the population became increasingly lost.⁷⁸⁰ Shortly before the start of the VRS attack on 6 July, the ABiH General Staff in Kakanj was told by the command of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH in Tuzla that the situation in Srebrenica was threatening to have catastrophic consequences, because food was running out. If food convoys did not arrive soon, it would no longer be possible to get the situation back under control. The 2nd Corps appealed to the General Staff to raise the alarm with the authorities in Sarajevo to send help to Srebrenica either by air or by road as rapidly as possible.⁷⁸¹

The ABiH had earlier also expressed the fear that, in the event of further delays to UNHCR convoys, major social problems would arise that would also reduce the state of readiness of the ABiH in the enclave. As in 1993, groups of ABiH soldiers felt forced to search for food and cattle in VRS territory. The command of the 28th Division in Srebrenica was aware that such enterprises carried out on individual initiative were full of risk, not only for those searching for food but also for the entire population, because of possible reprisals by the VRS. Even so, according to the officer in charge, the morale of the ABiH was still satisfactory in early June.⁷⁸²

The question remains as to whether this was true. There was a general air of dissatisfaction in the ABiH in June because the army was no longer in a position to pay the wages.⁷⁸³ Whether this also affected the 28th Division is not known. Reports on the positive aspects of their morale of the division

⁷⁷⁴ CRST. Telex Tuzla UNHCR 08 jun95 0657Z; NIOD, Coll. MSF. Capsat MSF Srebre to MSF Beo, 14/06/95 15:41, No. Out 801.

⁷⁷⁵ NIOD, Coll. UNHCR Tuzla. UNHCR Srebrenica to UNHCR Belgrade, 08/06/95 14:32.

⁷⁷⁶ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol. I Resupply Eastern Encl, 17/04/95 -11/07/95. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 08/06/95.

⁷⁷⁷ ICTY (IT-98-33) D66/a, D61/a. ABiH Command of 28th Division (Asst Commander for Morale Captain Nijaz Masic) to the Command of 2nd Corps Morale Department, 30/06/95, No. 04-113/95; ABiH 285 IBibr, 23/06/95, No. 08-21-208/95.

⁷⁷⁸ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 2. Korpusa Odjeljenje bezbjednosti, 15/06/95, br. 13-05-86.

⁷⁷⁹ ICTY (IT-98-33) D66/a, D61/a. ABiH Command of 28th Division (Asst Commander for Morale Captain Nijaz Masic) to the Command of 2nd Corps Morale Department, 30/06/95, No. 04-113/95; ABiH 285 IBibr, 23/06/95, No. 08-21-208/95.

⁷⁸⁰ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 2. Korpusa Odjeljenje za moral, 16/06/95, br. 04-99/95.

⁷⁸¹ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa to GSS ARBiH KM Kakanj, 04/07/95, Str.pov.br. 02/2-13-490.

⁷⁸² NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa, 02/06/95, br. 04-84/95. GSS ARBiH

⁷⁸³ *Dani*, Special edition, 09/98.

appeared to be often repeated platitudes in the ABiH reports. For instance, one and the same report stated that morale was high, and that in the first weeks of June, 22 members of the 28th Division had departed from the enclave.⁷⁸⁴ At the end of June the 28th Division expected a new exodus from Srebrenica to Tuzla. This led to a ban by the 2nd Corps on travelling to Tuzla, the formation of another platoon of Military Police to intercept escapees, and diligent activity by the security service to attempt to prevent escapes.⁷⁸⁵

Escape from the enclave was not without risk; there were many examples of ABiH soldiers and citizens failing to achieve their escape objectives: at the beginning of June there was a rumour that out of a group of escapees, eight people had arrived in Tuzla, but that ten people were missing;⁷⁸⁶ the 2nd Corps announced that a group of fifteen deserted ABiH soldiers in the area of Snagovo had been dispersed by the VRS, and that no one had either returned to Srebrenica or arrived in Tuzla; around 21-22 June, the VRS had likewise beleaguered a group in the area of Han Pogled, twenty of which had returned to Srebrenica, where two were imprisoned and one killed; on 22 June, a group of twenty persons left from Zepa to Kladanj, and were overpowered not far from Kladanj, after which only one wounded person managed to arrive back at Srebrenica, and the fate of the others was uncertain.⁷⁸⁷

As well as desertion, the ABiH was also weighed down by a lack of food, clothing, equipment and footwear. Although 700 uniforms arrived in the enclave by helicopter in early June, it was still a considerable problem to distribute them among 6200 soldiers. As a consequence, the uniforms remained in the stores for some time, because to distribute them would create divisions and therefore also have a bad influence on morale. It took until mid June before the uniforms could finally be distributed; 10% of the personnel could be given new uniforms.⁷⁸⁸

The Capture of Observation Post Echo (OP-E) by the VRS on 3 June, which we will return to in the next chapter, created a shock wave in the enclave. This capture was a reason for the 28th Division of the ABiH to submit a list of supplies from the 2nd Corps in Tuzla to increase the effectiveness of the 28th Division. The following items stood out on a formidable shopping list: 3000 rifles, 7000 uniforms, 7000 pairs of shoes and, if possible, ammunition. Quantities of ammunition were not specified: Red Arrow anti-tank rockets, ammunition for 82 mm mortars, hand grenades, 12.7 mm machine guns, 20/3 and 20/4 anti-aircraft guns, 105 mm howitzers, 120 mm mortars (which were out of stock in the enclave), ammunition for the T-55 tanks (7 shells remained) and 50 RPG short range anti-tank weapons. This list also formed a sample sheet of the available weapons to be found with the ABiH units or in the Weapon Collection Point under Dutchbat supervision. For communication purposes, nine 100-watt transmitters were desired, as well as 120 Motorolas, a large number of telephones, batteries and many kilometres of telephone cable.⁷⁸⁹

The ABiH's distrust of Dutchbat

The capture of OP-E by the VRS also contributed to the distrust felt by the ABiH towards Dutchbat. It reinforced the fear of what the immediate future would bring, even if only because there had been no

⁷⁸⁴ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 28. Dvizije to Komandi 2. Korpusa Odsjek Bezbjenodsti, 24/06/95, br. 13-05-95.

⁷⁸⁵ ABiH Tuzla. Komanda 28. Divizije Odsjek bezbjednosti to Komandi 2. Korpusa, Odjeljenje bezbjednosti, 30/06/95, Str. pov. br. 04-114/95.

⁷⁸⁶ CRST. Telex Tuzla UNHCR 08 Jun95 0657Z; NIOD, Coll.MSF. Capsat MSF Srebre to MSF Beo, 14/06/95 15:41, No. Out 801.

⁷⁸⁷ ICTY (IT-98-33) D66/a, D61/a. ABiH Command of 28th Division (Asst Commander for Morale Captain Nijaz Masic) to the Command of 2nd Corps Morale Department, 30/06/95, No. 04-113/95; ABiH 285 IBibr, 23/06/95, No. 08-21-208/95.

⁷⁸⁸ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa ARBiH, 05/06/95, br. 04-89/95.

⁷⁸⁹ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to GSS ARBiH KM Kakanj; Komanda 2. Korpusa ARBiH, 04/06/95, br. 01-74/95.

firm response from the UN to the Serbian action.⁷⁹⁰ The 28th Division asserted that Dutchbat may have promised at every meeting that the battalion would defend the enclave should the need arise, but doubt existed about this within the ABiH after what had happened. At the same time, the ABiH realized that Dutchbat was 'possibly' also under pressure from the VRS, and that this did not make life easier for the battalion. The ABiH also doubted whether Dutchbat informed its own command properly about the situation in the enclave.⁷⁹¹

Dutchbat followed the movements of the ABiH, and stood guard at places where the ABiH came so as to drive them away. Many ABiH soldiers found this objectionable, and the command of the 28th Division was afraid that it would be a cause of conflicts.⁷⁹² A certain lack of trust between the ABiH and Dutchbat was also evident from the constant accusations that Dutchbat was hard at work collecting intelligence on ABiH units, their state of readiness, and their military objects, and that such data reached the VRS. The ABiH security organs therefore received orders to oppose the activities of Dutchbat and UNMOs in that direction.⁷⁹³ It was a constant concern of the local ABiH that information had been leaked by Dutchbat to the VRS: Dutchbat's encounters with the VRS also aroused suspicion within the division. A senior ABiH intelligence officer actually said that the ABiH was not afraid that UNPROFOR passed on information to the VRS, and that there was no evidence at all that UNPROFOR spied for the VRS.⁷⁹⁴ The opposite was evident from the available ABiH documentation, to the effect that interpreters from Dutchbat and the UNMOs regularly passed on information on UN activities to the 28th Division, who then forwarded it to the 2nd Corps in Tuzla.

Neither did peace reign among the population in the enclave. Polarization within the SDA, as the leading political party, did the internal relationships in the enclave no good. Earlier, Naser Oric had actually discouraged the development of political parties in the enclave, in particular the SDA, however his departure from Srebrenica in April 1995 made room for political activity again.⁷⁹⁵ The newspaper *Ljiljan* reported on 14 June 1995 that there were military and political conflicts in the enclave, which originated in Tuzla: a 'Tuzla-Drina Canton Assembly's Committee for help to Srebrenica' was set up in Tuzla. Relations within that committee were strongly politicized: the governor of the Tuzla canton of the ruling SDA, Izet Hadzic, stood diametrically opposed to the opposition mayor of Tuzla, Salim Beslagic. They were to have repercussions on the enclave and cause discord in the enclave between the town of Srebrenica, Potocari and Sucevka.⁷⁹⁶

After the murder of Hamed Salihovic, the former SJB chief and one of the leaders of the SDA in Srebrenica, not only the internal security situation, but also the political climate within the SDA deteriorated. Different wings of the party fought with each other, and, because of the lack of a quorum, no meetings of the party could be held. Hakija Meholic (the Chief of Police) and Resid Efendic (head of the criminal service) resigned. 'This is only to the benefit of the VRS,' remarked Nijaz Masic, the officer in charge of morale of the 28th Division; he sensed important negative developments here.⁷⁹⁷ The 28th Division also reported on relations within the enclave: 'helped by the government, it is leading us to a certain death without the VRS having to fire a bullet.'⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹⁰ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to GSS ARBiH KM Kakanj; Komanda 2. Korpusa ARBiH, 04/06/95, br. 01-74/95.

⁷⁹¹ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa ARBiH Odjeljenje morala, 09/06/95, br. 04-93/95.

⁷⁹² NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa ARBiH, 05/06/95, br. 04-89/95.

⁷⁹³ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 285 ILbr, 31/05/95, br. 01-65/95.

⁷⁹⁴ Confidential interview (5).

⁷⁹⁵ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 119, Civil Affairs SNE, Weekly Report, 1995. ABZ, UNPROFOR. Fax Biser to Corwin, 30/06/95, Civil Affairs Sector NE, Report for Week Ending 29/06/95.

⁷⁹⁶ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 25/77, File 1.1.57, SNE 4 April - 23 August 1995. Fax Biser to Corwin, 21/06/95, unnumbered. A translation was attached from *Ljiljan* of 14/06/95.

⁷⁹⁷ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa ARBiH Odjeljenje morala, 09/06/95, br. 04-93/95.

⁷⁹⁸ NIOD Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa ARBiH Odjeljenje za moral, 20/06/95, br. 04-101/95.

As well as political ups and downs, thoughtless rumours also made their negative influence felt on the population. For instance, there was the rumour that the presidium in Sarajevo had replaced Naser Oric, as Commander of the 28th Division, by Ramiz Becirovic; and so Srebrenica and Zepa were said to be written off. The report had not yet been made public, but it was correct: Becirovic was indeed formally appointed Deputy Commander of the 28th Division on 30 May, which also made him de facto commander, because Oric did not return to the enclave.

The fact that Naser Oric remained in Tuzla with twenty of the best officers and did not return to Srebrenica also had a particularly negative influence on the morale of the ABiH and the population.⁷⁹⁹ The only report from Tuzla was that Oric would return to Srebrenica as soon as circumstances permitted.⁸⁰⁰ The VRS rubbed salt in the wound by constantly insisting on a meeting with Oric: the ABiH saw that as a provocation by the VRS, because it was known that Oric was in Tuzla. Part of the VRS propaganda was also a song that was broadcast on the radio each day, to the effect that as long as Naser was in the Majeвица hills, no convoys would arrive.⁸⁰¹

7. VRS propaganda in the enclave

As the ABiH attempted to prevent the flight of the population from Srebrenica, the VRS was actually attempting to encourage their flight from the enclave. The VRS engaged the Bosnian-Serb media for propaganda purposes and for spreading disinformation. Radio Bratunac especially was active in this,⁸⁰² but so were other Serbian and Bosnian-Serb stations, such as Radio Bijeljina, Radio Loznjica, Radio Bajina Basta, Radio Milici, Radio Sokolac and Radio Visegrad. These stations were also an important window on the outside world for the population of Srebrenica. With respect to printed media, only *Srpska rec*, a newspaper printed in Bratunac, reached the enclave, although it is not clear how.⁸⁰³

The VRS used its radio propaganda between 10 and 20 June to announce the opening of a corridor, among other things. This would give the population of Srebrenica and Zepa the opportunity to leave for Kladanj. The messages caused a great deal of panic among the Muslim population, because no one knew if there was any truth in it.⁸⁰⁴ In practice there appeared to be no such corridor: on the contrary, the VRS laid ambushes on possible escape routes and detained individuals who could divulge the secrets of the situation in Srebrenica and Zepa.

It was also said on the radio that no more convoys would be allowed through. This led to a meeting on 10 June between the 28th Division of the ABiH and the Opština, after which orders for a complete state of readiness were issued. This form of psychological warfare made a strong contribution to the fear of a further decline in morale and an uncontrolled flight. This fear would become realistic if UNHCR convoys indeed did not come, because the food reserves were running out.

Another VRS propaganda report that had a great demotivating effect on the population of Srebrenica reached the enclave via radio Pale on 14 June. It was announced that the attacks that the ABiH had carried out on the VRS from Sarajevo would be avenged in East-Bosnia. This message had a great effect: it created panic among the population, which also affected the morale of the ABiH.⁸⁰⁵

⁷⁹⁹ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa, 05/06/95, br. 01-78/95. ABiH Tuzla. ABiH 28. Divizije Odsjek Bezbjednosti to Komanda 2. Korpusa ARBiH Odjeljenje za Bezbjednosti, 15/06/95, br. 13-05-86.

⁸⁰⁰ NIOD Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa to Komandi 28 n/r Tursunovic Zulfo, 19/05/95, br. 02/1-S1.

⁸⁰¹ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa ARBiH Odjeljenje morala, 09/06/95, br. 04-93/95. Two weeks after Oric had left the enclave, VRS Colonel Beara, the General Staff security officer, requested a meeting with Oric. The ABiH announced then that Oric did not wish to meet Beara, which created an odd impression because Oric was never afraid to attend such meetings. Interview Emir Suljagic, 23/11/97.

⁸⁰² ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 2. Korpusa Odjeljenje bezbjednosti, 15/06/95, br. 13-05-86.

⁸⁰³ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa ARBiH Odjeljenje za moral, 20/06/95, br. 04-101/95.

⁸⁰⁴ NIOD, Coll. UNHCR Tuzla. UNHCR Srebrenica to UNHCR Belgrade, 05/06/95 20:56.

⁸⁰⁵ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 2. Korpusa Odjeljenje za moral, 16/06/95, br. 04-99/95.

With respect to the opening of a corridor for the population, UNMO Major Joseph Kingori stated in 1997 that he had been invited in early June by VRS Major Nikolic to a meeting in Hotel Fontana in Bratunac, which was also attended by VRS Colonel Vukovic, as well as another higher ranking VRS officer. The VRS delegation had taken this opportunity to state through Vukovic that the entire population would have to leave the enclave. In addition, Vukovic is said to have threatened that if this did not happen, he would have the population killed. However, if the population were to leave, they would be offered safe passage to Tuzla.

Kingori understandably said that the meeting had left him with the feeling that something was in the air if no use were to be made of the corridor. He also assumed that the Bosnian Serbs had passed on the same message to the UN headquarters, but no indications can be found for this in the UNPROFOR archives. The message clearly did not reach this destination.

During his testimony in April 2000 to the Yugoslavia Tribunal, Kingori said that Vukovic had attempted to find out what the response of the UN would be if the VRS were trying to capture the enclave and to transport the population elsewhere. Kingori deduced from this that the intention was to get the message through to the population that the Bosnian Serbs might be going to capture the enclave, and that the population would be able to leave the enclave. The related question that remained unanswered was whether the population would be able to leave the enclave voluntarily, or would be forced to leave the enclave via a corridor to be formed after the fighting started.⁸⁰⁶

What is surprising is that Kingori had apparently not reported back what was discussed so that it could reach Dutchbat. Neither was this subject raised at the debriefing of the UNMOs, including Kingori, after the fall of Srebrenica.⁸⁰⁷ Nothing was stated on the discussion in the Dutchbat situation reports and neither did Karremans make any mention of it to the upper echelon. The explanation could be that UNMOs and Dutchbat formed separate circuits; more in general, it could not be ruled out that UNMOs had meetings with the VRS that Dutchbat was not aware of.

There are no further indications of plans for opening a corridor for the population. None of the members of the Opstina made any mention of it in interviews with the NIOD. At the time of the fall, there was nothing that pointed to the possible opening of a corridor or to related discussions.

The question remains as to why the VRS officers allowed a UN observer to act as messenger, rather than making the offer on a higher level: they would be aware that consultation would take place with the Bosnian government on the matter. The question arises as to whether there really was a plan for a corridor, or that such messages only played a role in the psychological warfare. There was actually nothing unique about messages on the opening of a corridor. The Dutchbat section that was tasked with civil-military contacts (in military terms: section 5) fairly regularly heard the offer from VRS officer Nikolic to allow the population to leave, and even to arrange buses for the purpose. On each occasion, this section passed the messages on to the command of the Opstina, but they never showed any interest.⁸⁰⁸

There had been other rumours about the opening of a corridor before the end of June. Starting such rumours formed part of the psychological warfare conducted by the VRS, and seemed to be mainly an example of local propaganda and intimidation. It did not lead to political activity on higher levels. The Bosnian Serbs realized all too well that the Bosnian authorities did not want the population to leave the enclave under any circumstances. As ABiH army Commander Rasim Delic expressed it: there were calls every day to abandon the enclave. He did admit that these calls led to the departure of individuals to Tuzla.⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰⁶ Testimony of Joseph Kingori at the trial of Krstic, 31/03/00 and 3/04/00. Reference was also made during the trial to statements made earlier in 1997 by Kingori. The defence considered Kingori's statements to be inconsistent

⁸⁰⁷ Only in a document entitled 'UNMO Debrief (Srebrenica 28/29 Jun 95)', was any mention made that the VRS had offered to evacuate everyone to Belgrade or another destination, with the exception of war criminals. There are no further details (NIOD Coll. Segers).

⁸⁰⁸ Telephone conversation B. Rave, 11/06/01.

⁸⁰⁹ Interview Rasim Delic, 21/04/98.

VRS General Zivanovic, the Commander of the Drina Corps, addressed the residents of the enclave through Radio Belgrade on a number of occasions, using words such as: 'we will come, we will take revenge, we will kill you'. Zivanovic, like Karadzic and Mladic, was a welcome guest on the 'Argument Vise' programme of Radio Belgrade. Mladic himself also spoke on the radio and announced that it would only be a matter of days before he captured the enclave. Broadcasts of this type took place once every two or three months, at a time when the residents had started to relax again.⁸¹⁰

On the other hand, Dutchbat interpreters, who also had the task of listening to Bosnian and Serbian radio, thought that a great deal of propaganda came through these stations, but that Srebrenica hardly played any role in them. Most of the messages were about food shortages and shelling.⁸¹¹ Actually it was not only the Bosnian-Serb propaganda that had an influence; it could be heard on the radio in Srebrenica too that Akashi had stated at the beginning of June that the Safe Areas could not be defended (see Chapter 3). It goes without saying that neither did this add to the population's confidence in UNPROFOR.⁸¹²

Because of the propaganda and the fear for what the future might bring, the wildest rumours circulated in the enclave. As soon as the rumour started that a VRS offensive was imminent, everyone wanted to leave the enclave. According to the most optimistic rumours, the enclave could be defended for thirty days by the ABiH; after that there was little else the population could do besides flee into the woods and try to reach Tuzla. The most pessimistic rumour was that the ABiH could hold out for only one day and that the VRS would then inflict a bloodbath.

The most common rumour was that the Bosnian president, Izetbegovic, had 'sold' the population of Srebrenica as a way of saving Sarajevo, but he did not dare to admit it. The same rumour was also reported by the newspaper *Ljiljan* on 14 June 1995: Srebrenica had been sacrificed, but Izetbegovic had sent a message to Naser Oric in which he is alleged to have said that Srebrenica would not be exchanged.⁸¹³ The remarkable thing about this rumour - which is still heard today - is that it was already circulating before the fall of Srebrenica.

There were more negative remarks in a report on the morale of the 28th Division of the ABiH: politicians were only concerned with becoming as rich as possible; there was no future for Srebrenica; there were no prospects for the enclave and the population could not see that a factory would ever again be opened there; it was nothing more than a punishment for the population to be in the enclave. The morale in the ABiH units was poor: everyone wanted to go to Tuzla, but only a few would dare to admit it. Only the moderately successful actions outside the enclave borders at the end of June, and in particular the raid deep in Bosnian-Serbian territory, raised the morale of the 28th Division back to a higher level (see the following chapter). Neither were there any words of appreciation for UNPROFOR: the UN could just leave, because they weren't doing anyone any good. The population, who were subject to compulsory service in the army, had a fairly negative opinion of the 28th Division, according to this report: the officers were said to be illiterate and not competent for their duties, and no one paid attention to the families of soldiers who had died.⁸¹⁴

In summary, the psychological state of the population in the enclave was difficult for outsiders to understand, but enough was clear to see that it was disastrous. The population spoke only of leaving the enclave, according to a statement made by the Minister for UN Affairs, Hasan Muratovic, to the

⁸¹⁰ Interview Hatidza Hren, 18/06/98.

⁸¹¹ Interview Omer Subasic, 19 and 20/10/97.

⁸¹² Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98 with supplements from 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

⁸¹³ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 25/77, File 1.1.57, SNE 4 April - 23 August 1995. Fax Biser to Corwin, 2/06/95, unnumbered. A translation was attached from *Ljiljan* of 14/06/95.

⁸¹⁴ ICTY (IT-98-33) D66/a, D61/a. ABiH Command of 28th Division (Asst Commander for Morale Captain Nijaz Masic) to the Command of 2nd Corps Morale Department, 30/06/95, No. 04-113/95; ABiH 285 IBibr, 23/06/95, No. 08-21-208/95.

NIOD. There were many internal problems: they were crammed together and were forced to lead the life they led.⁸¹⁵

Even an ABiH leader such as Zulfo Tursumovic, who had previously not lost a single square metre of territory, had trouble keeping spirits up in the spring. Every spring the people in Srebrenica spoke of leaving the enclave, but in 1995 this was stronger than ever. The people never spoke of anything else: they made maps and discussed routes to Tuzla. On the other hand the population had hardly any shoes to be able to make such a journey, the interpreter Hasan Nuhanovic thought.⁸¹⁶

8. The absence of Naser Oric

The departure of Muslim leader Naser Oric from the enclave in April 1995, and his absence from that place at the time of the VRS attack in July, was a much discussed matter at the time, which was surrounded by rumours, and still is. His absence was of great influence on the morale of both the ABiH and the population, because in previous years he had been the great man in the Bosnian Muslims' struggle against the Bosnian Serbs (see Part II).

There are different explanations for his absence during the attack, which originated especially after the attack on the enclave. These explanations are rather inconsistent and partly contradict each other, but this would mainly seem to be a consequence of ignorance. In an enclave cut off from the outside world, whole and half truths simply captured the attention of the population, and after the fall too, they continued to play a role in the search for possible answers to the question of why Srebrenica had been lost. For this reason, we will first present a collage of the different opinions and rumours below, and will then consider which statements appear plausible.

For some Muslims, Oric was something of a mythical figure, who was admired and reviled: someone not only with a large number of admirers, but also enemies. For the one, Oric was a bold fighter, a prominent military leader and a saviour. For others he was not so much the great military leader, but more of a mafioso and womanizer, which meant that he lost respect. Yet others in certain circles of the Muslim population suspected him of committing war crimes, in particular in the period 1992-1993, and many believed that Oric could be among the accused in the Yugoslavia Tribunal. Nevertheless, his presence and leadership qualities commanded respect and gave the population confidence: Oric was essential for morale, in the assessment of his Deputy, Ramiz Becirovic.⁸¹⁷

Why did Oric leave Srebrenica?

The fact that Oric did not return after his departure in April 1995 and was therefore absent during the fall of Srebrenica has led to speculation to the present day as to the motives. However, it is not easy to give a precise explanation. Oric himself was silent on the matter, and the ABiH Commanders were cautious in their statements, but they nevertheless did give a clear indication of the underlying reasons.

Several members of the municipal executive of Srebrenica, the Opstina, confirmed that Oric as a Commander of the 28th Division of the ABiH had received an order from the 2nd Corps in Tuzla in April to leave Srebrenica. He was to be a member of a delegation that was to discuss the situation in Srebrenica at the request of the Bosnian government. The Opstina said that it was informed of Oric's departure, but was not consulted beforehand. The Commander of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH, Sead Delic, denied that Oric had been invited, however. According to him, Oric joined the delegation at his own initiative.⁸¹⁸ To this end, Oric travelled by land to Zepa and from there by helicopter to Tuzla, which used to be a usual route.

⁸¹⁵ Interview Hasan Muratovic, 30/01/98.

⁸¹⁶ Interview Hasan Nuhanovic, 05 and 06/08/97.

⁸¹⁷ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 02 and 05/02/98; 18/04/98.

⁸¹⁸ *Dani*, 17/03/00, interview of Vildana Selimbegovic with General Sead Delic.

Opinions also diverge on the question of whether the delegation was intended to return to Srebrenica. Some members of the Opstina said that it had been established in advance that this would not be the case, and in their view, the delegation's task was to function as an extension of the Opstina in both Tuzla and Sarajevo, to develop a better understanding there of the situation in Srebrenica. According to the War President of the Opstina (the chairman of the municipal executive), Osman Suljic, the expectation, however, was that the delegation definitely should return, and with instructions on how to proceed. He said that it was also expected of Oric that he would return.⁸¹⁹

Another explanation was offered by the former Srebrenica-based doctor, Nedred Mujkanovic. According to him, a conference was organized in April under the leadership of President Izetbegovic. This conference dealt with the ABiH offensive at Sarajevo, and the question of whether the VRS would respond by attacking the eastern enclaves. Izetbegovic wanted to know the state of affairs in Srebrenica, and Mujkanovic and the Deputy Commander of the 28th Division, Becirovic, were summoned to explain. Mujkanovic was already in Tuzla, and Becirovic had to come from Srebrenica. According to Mujkanovic, Oric also wanted to come along for this conference in April from Srebrenica to Tuzla.⁸²⁰ According to the journalist and author Chuck Sudetic, Oric told Izetbegovic at this conference that the ABiH could defend Srebrenica, provided they could take over the heavier weapons (mortars and anti-tank weapons) that Dutchbat had in their possession.⁸²¹

Becirovic was therefore summoned to Tuzla. According to him, this was intended for him to receive instructions on how the 28th Division should prepare militarily, based on the political situation and the thinking of the international community. He said he did not learn much.

After the conference, Becirovic returned to Srebrenica, and Oric did not. It was always the intention that Becirovic would return to the enclave.⁸²² Brigade Commander Ejup Golic likewise returned to Srebrenica. Golic had been summoned to Tuzla for a much different reason: he was suspected of a number of murders in the enclave. The decision to put him on trial or send him back to the enclave had been delegated by ABiH Commander Rasim Delic to the Commander of the 2nd Corps in Tuzla, Sead Delic. Sead Delic opted to send Golic back, because his crimes would not lapse with time and he could therefore be tried at a later time. Later, after the fall of Srebrenica, he distinguished himself in the fighting surrounding the breakout from the enclave.⁸²³

The question was raised as to whether the UN had aimed for Oric's departure. Sudetic asserts that Akashi insisted on Oric's removal. Akashi viewed the commanders in Srebrenica as criminals and gang leaders. According to him, Oric was becoming an increasingly destabilizing factor. According to Akashi, the problem was not so much Oric the man as the circumstances that prevailed in the enclave.⁸²⁴ That was just the question: a staff officer of the 2nd Corps said that Oric had half obeyed orders throughout the war, and then only if it suited him.⁸²⁵

Otherwise, ABiH Army Commander Rasim Delic categorically denied that the UN had had a hand in his departure: 'Oric came to Tuzla with the others to present his view on what was going on in the enclave.' When asked, Delic did say that Oric came 'on his own initiative', and, he added later: 'perhaps that it coincided with an international desire'.⁸²⁶

The Commander of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH, General Sead Delic, confirmed, however, that Oric may have left the enclave at his own initiative, but that at the same time it was also true that his unit had considerable problems. The reasons for this were the large psychological problems

⁸¹⁹ Interviews Osman Suljic, 04/03/98, Dzermaludin Becirovic and Sefket Hafizovic, 21/10/97.

⁸²⁰ Interview Nedred Mujkanovic, 10/03/99.

⁸²¹ Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, p. 257.

⁸²² Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 02 and 05/02/98.

⁸²³ *Dani*, 17/03/00, interview of Vildana Selimbegovic with General Sead Delic.

⁸²⁴ Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, p. 257; interview Chuck Sudetic, 31/03/98. Sudetic writes that Zulfo Tursunovic and Ejup Golic had also been ordered to leave Srebrenica and that they also did leave the enclave, which was therefore not entirely true: Tursunovic remained in Tuzla, and Golic returned to Srebrenica.

⁸²⁵ Confidential interview (5).

⁸²⁶ Interview Rasim Delic, 21/04/98.

experienced by the population, which made the situation intolerable. Delic put that down to factors such as hunger, the siege by the VRS, prostitution and the use of drugs. Furthermore, ten to fifteen murders were committed, and in addition, the municipal authority did not function, and it took no initiative. The situation had therefore become intolerable. Oric simply had to leave Srebrenica, Delic thought. As a more subjective factor, the ABiH had hoped for improved contacts with the VRS after Oric's departure. According to Delic, there was also information that indicated that Oric's unit had been infiltrated by the VRS, and that this was also true of the municipal executive. Sead Delic also said that UNPROFOR had exerted no pressure to make Oric leave. It was Oric's own decision to leave Srebrenica. There were no documents, instructions or orders for Oric to leave. He went on his own initiative.⁸²⁷ As such, this not only coincided with the desire of the international community, but also with that of the command of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH.

There were other indications that Oric's departure had to do with internal ABiH reasons. The UN Civil Affairs Officer in Tuzla, Ken Biser, suspected that the premeditated intention of the ABiH was not to allow Oric to return to the enclave. Oric's activities during the war and a possible indictment by the Yugoslavia Tribunal could embarrass government circles in Sarajevo.⁸²⁸ Also, the Bosnian journalist Mehmed Pargan heard the rumour that the ABiH wanted to get rid of Oric, because he was not seen as a good officer and they wanted to replace him by their own man: the ABiH command was oriented towards the SDA, whereas Oric opposed that party.

It was pointed out from various sides that Oric's departure also had to do with his relations with the Opstina. According to the journalist Pargan, the inner circle of the Srebrenica municipal executive proposed allowing him to leave.⁸²⁹ Oric's successor, Ramiz Becirovic, denied similar tensions between Opstina and the ABiH. According to him, there used to be no conflict between Opstina and ABiH, and after Oric's departure there was no real change in the relationship between the soldiers and the Opstina. According to Becirovic, neither Becirovic nor Oric had ever quarrelled with the Opstina.⁸³⁰ This was again contradicted by the assertion of Army Commander Rasim Delic, who said that he had received intelligence reports that indicated that Naser Oric had poor relations with the civil and military authorities.⁸³¹ Finally, many people thought that Oric went to Tuzla to organize an attack on Konjevic Polje and the Sapna Thumb, which would bring a corridor between Srebrenica and Tuzla within reach.⁸³²

Why did Oric not return to Srebrenica?

Whatever the reasons for Oric's departure from the enclave, it caused fear among the population, also because the trip was not without danger.⁸³³ It fuelled rumours that the fall of the enclave was on the way. For instance, the journalist Isnam Taljic understood from the reports that he received from Srebrenica that Oric's absence was bad for the morale of the residents.⁸³⁴ This mainly had a demoralizing effect because no one ever gave a clear explanation for his departure from the enclave.⁸³⁵

When Oric left the enclave, the situation was still stable. The fact that he was outside the enclave later contributed to low morale and the ultimate tragedy, also in the opinion of Minister Hasan Muratovic.⁸³⁶ The non-return of Oric meant in any case a hard blow to the morale of the remaining

⁸²⁷ Interview Sead Delic, 10/03/99.

⁸²⁸ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 119, Civil Affairs SNE, Weekly Report, 1995. Fax Biser to Corwin, 30/06/95, Civil Affairs Sector NE, Report for Week Ending 29 June 1995.

⁸²⁹ Interview Mehmed Pargan, 15 and 16/06/98.

⁸³⁰ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 02 and 05/02/98; 18/04/98.

⁸³¹ Interview Rasim Delic, 21/04/98.

⁸³² Interview Hasan Nuhanovic, 05 and 06/08/97.

⁸³³ Interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98.

⁸³⁴ Interview Isnam Taljic, 18/05/99.

⁸³⁵ Interview Hasan Nuhanovic, 05 and 06/08/97.

⁸³⁶ Interview Hasan Muratovic, 30/01/98.

soldiers, and also the population saw it as a major blunder. The VRS did not fail to pass this on to the ABiH via the 'trench communication channels'. Bosnian Serbs in the front line said that Srebrenica would be traded with Iljidza and Vogosca, suburbs of Sarajevo. They declared that Oric had left the enclave on the basis of a deal between Izetbegovic and Karadzic.⁸³⁷

After that, stories also circulated on the Bosnian side about Oric's supposed return. According to ABiH Commander Rasim Delic, it was originally the intention that Oric would return on the helicopter which was later shot down near Zepa. However, Oric had requested Delic to be allowed to return a couple of days later, because officers who had been on a training course in Central Bosnia would also be returning then, by helicopter. Stories were circulating that the VRS had good intelligence sources within the Bosnian government, and therefore knew of the flight to Srebrenica with, in all probability, Oric on board. That would explain why the helicopter was shot down. However, it appeared unlikely to Delic that the helicopter had been shot down by the VRS because Oric was assumed to be on board.⁸³⁸ The helicopter was shot down for no other reason than that the earlier flights had drawn attention, and the VRS had taken appropriate measures, according to Rasim Delic.⁸³⁹

After the helicopter concerned had been shot down, the ABiH ceased flying to Zepa, also because flying by night was risky. According to Oric's successor Ramiz Becirovic too, Oric was willing to return to Srebrenica by helicopter only via Zepa, but that was no longer possible. He wanted an armoured helicopter to take him back, but this was not available in the ABiH arsenal.⁸⁴⁰ Minister Hasan Muratovic also thought that Oric had asked for an armoured helicopter: according to Muratovic, this was after Oric had been ordered to return.⁸⁴¹

According to the doctor Nedred Mujkanovic, Oric simply did not want to return, because he could see that the enclave could not be held.⁸⁴² Others were of the opinion that Oric would not want to return because he observed that nothing was being done for the enclave. Some thought it strange, if it was true that he himself did not want to return, that no steps were taken against Oric to force him back to Srebrenica.⁸⁴³ Selim Beslagic, the mayor of Tuzla and not a member of the ruling SDA, thought that Oric had been ordered by ABiH headquarters in Tuzla to go to Srebrenica on foot, but the political (SDA) leaders of the Tuzla canton had forbidden his return.⁸⁴⁴ Also, according to the journalist Sefko Hodzic, the delegation, once it was in Tuzla, did not want to go back to the enclave. They did not have to wait for a helicopter: if they had wanted, they could have returned to the enclave on foot. Couriers did that too. Hodzic mentioned that Oric had been ordered to return to the enclave, but he refused to obey.⁸⁴⁵ Hakija Meholic, the Chief of Police in Srebrenica, thought that the officers who were trained in Central Bosnia would have wanted to return through the woods, but Oric would have opposed this and would even have threatened murder.

A number of people involved thought that there was a connection between the exchange of Srebrenica for a number of suburbs of Sarajevo. According to Meholic, politicians protected Oric after the event because he would have known of such a deal, which would also be the reason why he had been pulled from Srebrenica.⁸⁴⁶ In this scenario, Oric would have been aware in good time that the Bosnian government did not wish to retain the enclave, and therefore he would not want to return. Others even thought that Oric was deliberately pulled out by the Bosnian government to weaken the enclave's defence.⁸⁴⁷

⁸³⁷ Interview Damir Skaler, 31/10/98.

⁸³⁸ Interview Mustafa Muharemagic, 20/10/97.

⁸³⁹ Interview Rasim Delic, 21/04/98.

⁸⁴⁰ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 02 and 05/02/98.

⁸⁴¹ Interview Hasan Muratovic, 30/01/98.

⁸⁴² Interview Nedred Mujkanovic, 10/03/99.

⁸⁴³ Interview Hasan Hadzic, 21/10/97.

⁸⁴⁴ Interview Selim Beslagic, 06/08/97.

⁸⁴⁵ Interview Sefko Hodzic, 24/05/99.

⁸⁴⁶ Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98, with supplements of 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

⁸⁴⁷ Interview Mustafa Muharemagic, 20/10/97.

Yet another vision was expressed by the journalist Mehmed Pargan: Oric wanted an order from 2nd Corps Commander Sead Delic for him to return to Srebrenica. Neither Sead Delic nor ABiH Commander Rasim Delic wanted to take the responsibility for sending Oric back, however. Oric had already wanted to return in early May, with or without orders. Oric is even said to have boarded a helicopter to Zepa, but left the helicopter at a stopover in Zivinice: this was the helicopter that was shot down at Zepa.⁸⁴⁸ Another explanation was that Oric, who was not particularly amenable to reason and rather paranoid, must have smelled a rat. Oric himself is said to have explained that he missed the flight because he was drunk.⁸⁴⁹

Oric's own opinion - conclusion

In the contact with the NIOD, Oric himself did not really want to go into this matter. He said that he was extremely critical of the 2nd Corps. If, as Corps Commander Sead Delic asserted, he had ordered Oric to return to Srebrenica in the months prior to the fall, the command of the 2nd Corps could pick him up even now for disobeying an order, Oric said.⁸⁵⁰ Oric made a false assumption here: Sead Delic said that he had considered ordering him to return by foot, but did not do so. Delic still had before him the spectre of the group of one hundred men who had departed on foot from Tuzla to Srebrenica in the winter of 1993, and seventy of whom were killed (which was known as the Ruzine Vode incident).⁸⁵¹

The above selection of opinions and half truths gives some insight into the rumours being circulated, and led in any case to the conclusion that the non-return of Oric had a negative influence on the morale in the enclave. A completely different question is whether he actually could have made a difference against the superior strength of the VRS, which had gathered around the enclave in July, and whether he could have mounted an effective defence. The answer to this question is by definition speculative, but there are arguments for expressing doubt: defence was simply not his speciality. It is also questionable whether Oric, under the poor humanitarian circumstances prevailing shortly before the fall, could rely on the same authority as at first, and whether he was in a position to halt the decline in morale, as described in the above sections.

At that time, Oric departed from the enclave, an attack on the Safe Area was not yet to be expected, and was not much more than a theoretical possibility. Based on what was said from the ABiH side in interviews, it was Oric's initiative to leave the enclave. It can be deduced from a statement by Rasim Delic that it was originally the intention to make Oric return: Oric had requested some delay to be able to return by helicopter together with the officers who had undergone training in Central Bosnia. After the helicopter had been shot down at Zepa, the possibility of returning in this fashion evaporated, and Oric did not want to return by land.

It cannot be ruled out that Oric's ABiH superiors had started to view his presence as an increasingly negative factor in the relations in the enclave. The non-return of Oric was convenient for them, and fitted in with a policy of normalization and professionalization that had been set in motion within the ABiH, and where there was ever less room for War Lords of the first hour. Oric kept life in the enclave in an iron grip, and many things happened that would not stand the light of day. The population rapidly forgot this, however, when the worst came to the worst, and they believed that Oric could again be the saviour that he had been earlier in 1993.

However, Oric was not completely sidelined. Now and again, he issued instructions from Tuzla to Ramiz Becirovic on how to proceed. The question of whether it had been the intention that Oric should continue to command the 28th Division from Tuzla, received a terse answer from ABiH leader

⁸⁴⁸ Interview Muhamed Durakovic and Vahid Hodzic, 20/04/98 and Mehmed Pargan, 15 and 16/06/98.

⁸⁴⁹ Interview Emir Suljagic, 23/10/97.

⁸⁵⁰ Interview Naser Oric, 23/10/00.

⁸⁵¹ *Dani*, 17/03/00, interview of Vildana Selimbegovic with General Sead Delic.

Rasim Delic, however: 'no'.⁸⁵² Whether Oric gave his orders on the authority of the 2nd Corps, or that a blind eye was turned to his involvement, remains unclear. From the time of his departure from Srebrenica, Oric was in any case not a permanent link in the message traffic between the 28th Division and the 2nd Corps. After the fall of Srebrenica until the 28th Division was disbanded, for a short period he was given back command of the remainder of the division.

The most plausible explanation is that Oric left the enclave on his own initiative. As early as February 1995 Oric said to the visiting Force Commander, General De Lapresle, that he feared that, behind his back, Srebrenica was the subject of negotiation between President Izetbegovic and the Bosnian-Serb regime in Pale. Oric therefore wanted to go to Sarajevo to urge the retention of Srebrenica, and to convince himself that there were no plans for an exchange of territory.⁸⁵³

It is plausible that the original intention of ABiH and Oric himself was that he would return. Oric himself delayed his planned departure by helicopter for a few days, with the assent of Army Commander Rasim Delic. After the helicopter had been shot down at Zepa, no more flights left, and the ABiH command finally decided not to make him return; it is possible that this was also convenient for the army leadership, because it was a way of indirectly bringing an end to the stranglehold that Oric had on the enclave.

9. The humanitarian situation in Srebrenica

The humanitarian situation in the eastern enclaves remained poor, and humanitarian aid had become a political football. Almost half of the population of Srebrenica would be without food after mid June. Whereas in the past soup kitchens had been opened during critical periods to provide food for the four thousand most vulnerable among the population, it was no longer possible to keep the kitchens open because of the lack of ingredients. Dutchbat had three local employees replaced because they stole food from the Potocari compound. The Opstina attributed that offence to the critical food situation in the enclave.⁸⁵⁴

The lack of UNHCR convoys had a major negative influence on the morale of the population, and diminished the state of readiness of the ABiH. Rumours that the VRS were to block convoys for the enclave, so as to subsequently force the ABiH to surrender, also had a negative impact. Rumours of this type went from person to person, and if the message came through that a convoy had been stopped on the way, it only fuelled new rumours.⁸⁵⁵

The Deputy Mayor of Srebrenica, Hamdija Fejzic, requested Karremans to send a letter about the situation to UNPROFOR in Tuzla and Sarajevo. Karremans did this on 17 June: he passed on the information that the municipal executive (the Opstina) expected the first people to die of starvation within ten days. At the same time he sent the emotional appeal from the Deputy Mayor to the world: Srebrenica, which had already been the largest concentration camp in the world for three years, was a town of hunger: the exhausted and hungry eyes of its citizens were looking to the powerful of the earth for help. The people were dying a slow death before the eyes of Europe. While in the rest of the world the children played, those in Srebrenica looked death in the eyes. In the last five and a half months, only half a kilo of baby food and two kilos of powdered milk per child had been distributed. UNHCR had been able to carry out only 65% of the planned convoys, and to provide only 30% of the planned

⁸⁵²Interview Rasim Delic, 16/04/98.

⁸⁵³ Correspondence of General Bertrand De Lapresle with NIOD, 09/11/01.

⁸⁵⁴ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. UNMO HQ Sector BH-NE to UNMO HQ BH Comd, 21/06/95, Fax No. 7123.

⁸⁵⁵ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa ARBiH Odjeljenje za moral, 20/06/95, br. 04-101/95.

quantity.⁸⁵⁶ As *Médecins Sans Frontières* were informed, the letters from the Opstina and from Karremans ended up at the International Red Cross in Geneva at the highest level.⁸⁵⁷

However, this was no guarantee of a change. Attempts to change the attitude of the Bosnian Serbs proceeded in a difficult and uncoordinated way: each level was occupied with this problem.

In General Smith's opinion the most important effort in re-establishing the Freedom of Movement was on the level of the UN and the member states. Smith again set out what the combatants had in mind with their restrictions: the Bosnian Serbs wanted to control and punish UNPROFOR; to show that the Republika Srpska was a state; to impose sanctions on UNPROFOR and the population with the objective of having the sanctions that were imposed on them partly lifted; to punish and control the population in the enclaves; and finally: to be given a larger slice of the humanitarian cake itself. The Bosnian Muslims for their part also imposed restrictions on UNPROFOR's Freedom of Movement, with the objective of controlling UNPROFOR, and to be able to carry out operations without UNPROFOR's knowledge.

Smith also wanted it to see it laid down at the highest level that Freedom of Movement existed, and that it was not bound to conditions - such as the ability to search convoys. After that it could be made clear to the VRS that, within the existing Rules of Engagement, UNPROFOR was prepared to fight for the protection of its convoys, and also to call in Close Air Support. If the efforts of the UN or member states did not result in this, the enclaves would continue to be hostages.⁸⁵⁸

Smith also called in the help of the British military authorities to get Bildt and other negotiators on the track that he desired, all the more because he had seen a telegram from Paris which stated: 'negotiate requirements day by day'. Smith considered that they were past the stage of such lengthy negotiations. He set the following mode of operation central: 'we all aim at achieving the same method as well as object. Unless we do this we will be picked off in detail by the BSA [VRS]'.⁸⁵⁹

General Nicolai wrote in his diary in Sarajevo about the uncoordinated international involvement:

'We are currently in a phase where many are intervening in an uncoordinated way in many parts of the same cake. Great names such as Boutros-Ghali, Chirac, Bildt, Akashi, Janvier, De Lapresle as military advisor to Bildt, and on a lower level CAC [Civil Affairs in Tuzla] and UNHCR concern themselves with Milosevic, Mladic, Karadzic and Koljevic on the subject of hostages, convoys and Freedom of Movement. Certainly the last mentioned subject is an example of a 'container concept' where, as usual, the methods and the approach diverge. The effect is that everyone has the feeling that they are leaving with a 'yes' [after contacts with the Bosnian Serbs]. The ranks on the other side remain closed, however. In effect, the actual answer is only half or less, and then as commander on the ground you have to be satisfied with the so-called result achieved.

As a consequence you have to work to convince the higher levels in your own ranks that Mladic really hasn't kept his word. In brief: let one negotiating team do its work and stop a lot of very important 'nitwits' being given the chance to

⁸⁵⁶ CRST. Deputy Municipal Mayor Fejzic Hamdija, 16/06/95, No. 02-824/95, sent by CO-1(NL) UN Infbn to HQ UNPROFOR Sarajevo thru HQ BH Sector NE, 18/06/95, No. TK9598.

⁸⁵⁷ NIOD, Coll. MSF. Brussel Capsat MSF Srebre to MSF Beo, 20/06/95 10:20 nr. Out 826.

⁸⁵⁸ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Letter Lt Gen R.A. Smith to HQ UNPF, 20/06/95, UN Confi.

⁸⁵⁹ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Fax The Office of the Commander of UNPROFOR to Joint Commander and DOPS, 202000B Jun95.

interfere in matters and procedures without being properly informed by people who are involved on a day-to-day basis.⁸⁶⁰

On the other hand, not all the reports on the humanitarian situation in Srebrenica were as sombre. *Médecins Sans Frontières* carried out an investigation into the ratio of children's weights to their heights. Almost all children appeared to be above 85% of the norm.⁸⁶¹ Furthermore, in mid June a representative of the World Food Program described the humanitarian situation in the eastern enclaves as provisionally still stable.⁸⁶²

Colonel Brantz heard otherwise from the 2nd Corps of the ABiH in Tuzla, however, specifically that on 16 June the reserves were only enough to survive for three or four days. It was time for the UN to do something, it was warned, otherwise panic could break out among the population. In turn, this could lead to a flight from the enclave, which the ABiH would resist by all possible means. The danger of fleeing was also pointed out again to Brantz: Bosnian-Serb television had already shown pictures of five imprisoned Displaced Persons from Srebrenica. His discussion partners from the ABiH asked Brantz to use his influence with the Dutch government to put pressure on the UN to relieve the situation in the enclave.⁸⁶³

Similar worried signals came from the UNHCR. For instance, the local UNHCR representative in Srebrenica, Almir Ramic, warned that the warehouse was nearly empty and that people were begging for food. Another noteworthy message came from Ramic. This related to the American Special Forces Major Guy Sands Pingot, who worked for Civil Affairs in Sector North East in Tuzla. He was said to be already in contact with an otherwise unidentified Joint Task Force, and only a request from Dutchbat would be necessary to initiate air drops. Almir Ramic himself was sceptical about this. In the light of the problems of flying in Bosnian air space, it is indeed hardly likely that the only thing necessary was a request from Dutchbat, which after all was low in the hierarchy.

Neither was this subject raised in a discussion between representatives of Sector North East and the 2nd Corps of the ABiH. Corps Commander Sead Delic did write two days later to Sector Commander Haukland in an 'officer to officer' letter that he must do his best to bring about an improvement in conditions: 'you are in [a] position to resolve it by using parachutes for food and medicine delivery'. Delic requested Haukland to put pressure on his superiors. Otherwise, he expected a 'suicidal search for food' which could lead to residents dying or ending up in concentration camps. At the same time, Haukland pointed out in a letter of protest to the ABiH command in Sarajevo that this was one side of the coin; he complained about ABiH's limitation of UNPROFOR's freedom of movement and the curfew, and the hostility experienced from ABiH soldiers. For this reason he was no longer able to perform his operational and humanitarian duties satisfactorily.⁸⁶⁴ Haukland's anger could be explained: the ABiH (the 1st Corps in Visoko) blocked the flow of humanitarian goods to the Tuzla region, where 250,000 people were dependent on aid. Governor Izet Hadzic was not up in arms about this, although he did have concerns about the humanitarian situation in Srebrenica.⁸⁶⁵

The situation for the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)

Alongside the conflict on the humanitarian front, the Bosnian Serbs also obstructed the UN and the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) regarding the relief of personnel. It was mentioned above that members of Dutchbat who had taken leave could not return to the enclave, and that the Dutchbat

⁸⁶⁰ NIOD, Coll. Nicolai. Diary Nicolai, 21/06/95.

⁸⁶¹ NIOD, Coll. MSF. Capsat MSF Srebre to MSF Beo, 13/06/95, 15:43.

⁸⁶² ABZ, DAV/ARA/00246. Code Lenstra 74, 13/06/95.

⁸⁶³ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Meeting 2 Corps ABiH, 16/06/95.

⁸⁶⁴ CRST. UNHCR Srebrenica to UNHCR Belgrade, 17/06/95 20:45 NIOD Coll. Brantz. Memorandum Meeting 2 Corps ABiH, 17/06/95; 2nd Corps HQ to UNPROFOR Sector NE HQ, 19/06/95; NIOD Coll. Brantz. Comd Sector North East to BiH Army through HQ UNPROFOR 19/06/95.

⁸⁶⁵ ABZ, UNPROFOR. Fax Ken Biser to Philip Corwin, 23/06/95, Report for week Ending 23/06/95.

surgical team was forced to stay longer in the enclave because it could not be relieved. Neither could UN Civil Police staff in Gorazde and Srebrenica be relieved: three UN staff members in Gorazde had been waiting for two months for permission to leave, and two Dutch UN Civil Police in Srebrenica for two weeks. They did not have to be relieved. The Civil Police concerned had been insisting on their withdrawal for some considerable time, because the nature of their police work was mainly humanitarian.⁸⁶⁶ It was possible for the foreign staff of two other NGOs to leave the enclave on 15 June: the MPDL (Movimiento por la Paz, el Desarme y la Libertad, a Spanish NGO with a social programme for children and young people) and the Swedish Rescue Service Agency. This meant that *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) was the only remaining nongovernmental organization with foreign personnel in the enclave.⁸⁶⁷ It had not been possible to relieve MSF personnel for two months. This was also the case in Gorazde with personnel of the International Red Cross.

It appeared here as if there was an element of punishment from the VRS because governments no longer wanted to maintain contacts with Pale, and because they had not condemned the ABiH offensive around Sarajevo. The Vice President of the Republika Srpska, who was also an expert on Shakespeare, Professor Nikola Koljevic described the ABiH offensive at Sarajevo as ‘terrible’ and ‘the last battle’ for the Bosnian Serbs, and as a question of ‘to be or not to be’. The military situation meant that access to the enclaves had become nearly impossible, because groups of from twenty to thirty ABiH soldiers were operating everywhere in the Republika Srpska. The ABiH blocked the accesses to Srebrenica and Gorazde with mines, Koljevic said. Two UNHCR trucks were even said to have been blown up.

All this seems grossly exaggerated, and furthermore the situation with respect to supplies and personal rotation was not substantially different from before commencement of the ABiH offensive around Sarajevo. Koljevic also pointed out that convoy clearances that were issued by the state commission for cooperation with the UN, could be obstructed by VRS soldiers if the roads were necessary for strategic purposes, if foreign NGO personnel were in danger, or it was suspected that strategic material was being smuggled.⁸⁶⁸

In this way, Koljevic appeared to be shifting the blame for withholding permission for the rotation of MSF personnel onto the soldiers, but in practice it had more to do with a means of pressure to move the MSF organization via the French government to press to allow Pale to make contact with French diplomacy.⁸⁶⁹ MSF gave itself another few days to consider whether the international press should not be informed as a way of getting the issue on the agenda. This turned out to be no longer necessary, because the planned rotation was able to take place on 24 June.⁸⁷⁰

Problems between UNHCR and Dutchbat with UNHCR convoys

In the meantime, it could not be said that not a single UNHCR convoy was able to reach Srebrenica any more. However, their arrival was irregular with long intervening intervals, and so did not completely satisfy the need. On 18 June a UNHCR convoy of eight trucks arrived carrying 64 tons of flour. It had taken a considerable amount of effort, both before and shortly after arrival in Srebrenica. As an illustration of the problems faced by UNHCR convoys, we will go into more detail on the progress of this convoy.

⁸⁶⁶ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 339, 4160/SB.6 Incidents. Interoffice Memorandum Sven Frederiksen UNCIVPOL Commissioner to Yasushi Akashi, 24/05/95, No. 4160/HQ.24/128 and Egil Jacobson Acting UNCIVPOL Commissioner to Yasushi Akashi, 16/06/95, No. 4160/HQ.24/134.

⁸⁶⁷ NIOD, Coll. MSF. Capsat MSF Srebre to MSF Beo, Sitrep N 24 Srebrenica 17/06/95, No. Out 815. It is worthy of note that Swedish Rescue did receive a convoy with building materials.

⁸⁶⁸ NIOD, Coll. MSF. Capsat MSF to Teams Gorazde, Srebre and Blg, 19/06/95 15:13, No. In 408.

⁸⁶⁹ NIOD, Coll. MSF. Capsat MSF Team Pale, 20/06/95 19:21, No. In 417.

⁸⁷⁰ NIOD, Coll. MSF. Capsat MSF Belgrade to MSF Sre et Grd, 22/06/95 07:10, No. In 424 and MSF Srebre to Dutchbat LO Team, 24/06/95 09:36, No. Out 356.

The convoy left Belgrade on 17 June, but thirteen kilometres before Srebrenica, on Bosnian-Serb territory, it was stopped because of an unsafe situation. Rifle fire had been heard, and an excited VRS Major Nikolic arrived at the convoy with a group of soldiers. He said he had been attacked the previous night by ABiH soldiers from Srebrenica. The VRS had suffered four dead and thirteen wounded. As a counter measure, a curfew was imposed in Bratunac, and the VRS was now in the process of clearing up a group of seven or eight ABiH soldiers in the vicinity.

The convoy then drove a number of kilometres back, because Nikolic could not guarantee its safety. All this time the firing continued and there was a busy flow of orders over the radio to the VRS units. The Bratunac Brigade of the VRS advised the convoy to return to Zvornik. UNHCR had received no reports of the events from Dutchbat, but Bosnian-Serb residents confirmed that shooting had gone on the whole night and morning. UNHCR representative Almir Ramic was of the opinion, however, that the account of fighting in Bratunac was a cheap trick to obstruct the arrival of the convoy. He had heard no shooting, and Dutchbat confirmed that the northern OPs had observed nothing of that nature.⁸⁷¹ As a personal opinion, convoy leader Stefano Comazzi also told the MSF that something was afoot.⁸⁷² As will be evident in the next chapter, around this time there actually was small-scale fighting in the vicinity of Bratunac.

The convoy did indeed return to Zvornik and stayed there overnight. The VRS arranged a guard and shared their rations with the convoy supervisors. Although safety could still not be guaranteed, no prohibition on continuing was forthcoming.

At Yellow Bridge the VRS, both on the outward and on the return journey, carefully checked the quantity of fuel in the vehicles' tanks. The VRS soldiers appeared friendly, but the convoy leader could not say that about Dutchbat: the Dutchbat soldiers were instructed to check the vehicles, which was done conscientiously. Furthermore each truck was photographed. Major Franken explained this by saying that Dutchbat performed the checks as a precautionary measure, because otherwise the ABiH would do so; he feared that the ABiH would also set up a roadblock. This fear for ABiH checks proved realistic as such: the ABiH was indeed afraid that the VRS would join the convoys with stolen UN vehicles. Also, according to convoy leader Comazzi, the ABiH seized every opportunity to set up checkpoints, certainly after the VRS had used stolen UN vehicles in capturing the Vrbanja bridge in Sarajevo from the French. War President Osman Suljic of the Opstina had already tried in the time of Canbat to set up their own checkpoints in the enclave. Nevertheless, Comazzi was angry that Dutchbat started to check his convoy.

It surprised Franken that UNHCR was not aware of the ABiH measure of checking convoys, because he assumed that this had been passed on informally by the Dutchbat liaison officer to the local UNHCR representative. However, MSF also appeared to be unaware of this measure.

A reason for the convoy leader's anger was that the check took place in the no man's land between the Bosnian-Serbian area and the enclave, and not in a safer place in the enclave. This did not concern Franken, however: if the VRS wanted to fire on UNHCR, it could do that anywhere, he thought.

Otherwise, UNHCR in Zepa also had problems with convoys, but there they were not searched by the ABiH nor by the UNPROFOR unit there: the Ukrainian commander in Zepa had brought that about by saying that the ABiH was his problem.⁸⁷³

On 20 June, another UNHCR convoy arrived in the enclave, this time with 56 tons of sugar, beans, salt, fish, flour, soap, powdered milk and biscuits. Again Dutchbat searched the convoy, more thoroughly than the VRS had done. What is more, the VRS had first tapped some fuel from each truck until 100-150 litres remained. According to the UNMOs present on the site, the convoy commander

⁸⁷¹ CRST. UNHCR Srebrenica to UNHCR Belgrade, 17/06/95 18:51; Capsat MSF Srebre to MSF Beo, 19/06/95 14:13, No. Out 823.

⁸⁷² NIOD, Coll. MSF. Capsat MSF Srebre to MSF Beo, 19/06/95 17:42, No. Out 824.

⁸⁷³ Interview Jerry Champagne, Ottawa, 12/11/99; CRST. Memorandum [UNHCR] Stefano to Bill, Report of Srebrenica Convoy on 17 and 16/06/1995.

now again objected to the check by Dutchbat, and informed his headquarters. The result was that a convoy planned for the next day would be cancelled, unless Dutchbat changed the procedure. UNHCR had no objection to a check of the identity papers on entering the enclave, but the most logical place for the load was the unloading point in Srebrenica itself. If the ABiH was afraid of the VRS infiltrating a convoy, an ABiH representative could be stationed at the unloading point, but UNHCR thought that Dutchbat should not solve ABiH's problems: UNHCR felt that a check lasting several hours in no man's land was unacceptable. The result of such checks as seen by UNMOs was the cancellation of a convoy, more hungry stomachs, and tension between Dutchbat and UNHCR. This tension was all the more intense because Dutchbat had said that it would continue with the checks. In response, the next day's convoy was sent back to Belgrade by UNHCR.

In all this, the Opstina had the last laugh: the municipal executive had always wanted its own checkpoint for the convoys, and would be able to make political capital out of the hunger by blaming UNPROFOR.⁸⁷⁴ The reason for this was that the Bosnian Muslims were constantly afraid that Bosnian-Serb intelligence services would penetrate Srebrenica and via UNHCR or NGOs would succeed in gaining a foothold in the enclave. The 2nd Corps intelligence officer said that the ABiH had alerted UNPROFOR many times to this possibility, but UNPROFOR had never taken appropriate action. The ABiH was also afraid that the VRS had informants in the enclave. The Bosnian Serbs were said to have left agents behind as 'sleepers' in the enclave, so that information constantly leaked to the outside. These concerns actually went back as far as 1993.

The fear for the UNHCR convoys and the need to check them came because this UNHCR humanitarian aid came via Belgrade. It was mainly Ukrainian drivers who were not trusted: it was thought that they might engage in destabilizing activities during their stay in the enclave.⁸⁷⁵ Befriended Orthodox drivers were quickly suspected of taking out this information. Western intelligence analysts nonetheless did not believe in Bosnian-Serb infiltration in the enclave. That Ukrainian UNHCR transport drivers had a role in these infiltrations was dismissed as 'Balkan rumour' and 'paranoia'. To these analysts, infiltration in this way was unnecessary:⁸⁷⁶ if the Bosnian Serbs so wished, they could gain possession of sufficient information by other and less risky means. They knew the state of the population perfectly well, among other things by tapping the ABiH and Dutchbat communications, by interrogating Displaced Persons intercepted as they left Srebrenica, and by a thorough check on what entered the enclave.

Meanwhile, the consequence of the friction between UNHCR on the one hand and Dutchbat and the ABiH on the other was that UNHCR via its local employee informed the Opstina that no more UNHCR convoys would be sent until the ABiH dropped the requirement of an extensive check. This would then mean that Dutchbat also had no more reason to check the convoys. Franken was not happy with this; he saw it as an attempt to confront Dutchbat and ABiH with each other. According to him, it was certainly not the case that Dutchbat danced to the ABiH's tune. If UNHCR held principles, in this case the unwillingness to have their convoys searched, more important than the supply of aid, then they should not shift the blame onto Dutchbat and ABiH for what happened.⁸⁷⁷

According to convoy leader Jean-Paul Cavalieri, Franken refused to reconsider his decision. He had what he called an 'open and friendly' discussion on the subject with Franken. Cavalieri had the feeling that the local authorities had found a clever way of getting Dutchbat to man a checkpoint. Dutchbat had opted for the path of least resistance to appease these authorities. Cavalieri even thought that pressure had been brought to bear on Franken from the VRS side too, because the VRS was afraid

⁸⁷⁴ DCBC, 2485. Handwritten fax G3 Country Ops to DCBC, 21/06/95; NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Capsat TA to TX8, 251733B Jun 95.

⁸⁷⁵ Interview Sefko Tihic, 08/03/99; Interview Isnam Taljic, 18/05/99.

⁸⁷⁶ Confidential interview (52).

⁸⁷⁷ SMG 1003. Capsats 90L to 90E, 201010B Jun 95 and SMG 1003. Maj Franken to liaison officer Team Dutchbat through UNMO Srebrenica, 21/06/95 10:12.

of the smuggling of weapons to the benefit of the ABiH. The NIOD could find no evidence that this also actually happened in Srebrenica.

In Cavalieri's opinion, Dutchbat allowed itself to be used for unreasonable requirements of one of the combatants, because Dutchbat did not put up a fight in the form of a refusal to search a convoy. Franken did admit that the concerns expressed by the ABiH about VRS infiltration in the convoys were unfounded; the VRS really had less risky opportunities to enter the enclave. In the opinion of UNHCR representative Almir Rasic, the Muslim authorities would have been satisfied with an identity check. In a time of food shortage, it was extremely unfortunate that convoys were suspended, not now by the VRS, but imposed by UNHCR for alleged security reasons. Cavalieri therefore urged a compromise.⁸⁷⁸

The UNHCR Chief of Mission in Bosnia, Karen Koning Abu Zayd, urged UNPROFOR Chief of Staff Nicolai in Sarajevo to bring about a change. According to her, there was no necessity for UNPROFOR to check convoys. If it should be necessary by way of some form of concession, it should be a provisional check in a safer place.⁸⁷⁹

In any case, the food position improved for a while. Moreover, this also pushed the idea of supplies for the population by air to the background again. This did remain on the agenda, but not particularly high. For this, see the Appendix 'supply by air'.⁸⁸⁰ A problem that remained was that a convoy was sent back because of the problems between UNHCR and Dutchbat. On this matter, Sead Delic, the Commander of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH, submitted questions to the commander of the 28th Division in Srebrenica, Ramiz Becirovic. Delic wanted to know the circumstances under which the convoy had been sent back; whether it was the Dutchbat commander who had sent the convoy back; and whether the ABiH had been informed. Also, the 2nd Corps wanted to know whether Dutchbat had requested evidence of the nationality of the drivers in the convoy, and also whether the ABiH were allowed by Dutchbat to check the nationality of the drivers.

Separate from the answers to these questions, from now on the 2nd Corps ordered a stop to check the identity of the drivers. If there were indications that there were Serbs among the drivers, then they must not be allowed to move away from the route or from the UNHCR warehouse. In that case, the counter-intelligence service should follow them, so that they would be unable to engage in activities, such as leading artillery fire.⁸⁸¹

Ramiz Becirovic replied that he was unaware of the reason for sending the convoy back. Neither was he aware or whether Dutchbat had checked the identity of the drivers. Becirovic also made clear that there was not such a great necessity for all the trouble Dutchbat was taking for the ABiH by checking the convoys: neither himself, nor other members of the 28th Division had ever requested such a check, he stated. However, he had heard that it was in the vein of General Staff of the ABiH to check a possible VRS entry with UN vehicles. When a convoy arrived at the enclave border, attempts must indeed be made to have this carried out by the ABiH, Becirovic said.⁸⁸² After this, the checking of convoys quickly became irrelevant, because the capture of the enclave by the Bosnian Serbs then started.

The humanitarian situation in late June

In late June, the humanitarian situation in Srebrenica again became as poor as a few weeks previously because of the scarce arrival of convoys. Again, throngs of people gathered in front of the Opstina building and begged for food. At any moment the local authorities could ask again for supply by air. Rumours about ABiH actions outside the enclave led to fear among the population for shelling by the

⁸⁷⁸ CRST. Belgrade UNHCR, 22/06/95 1430Z. Interview Jean-Paul Cavalieri, 08/07/00.

⁸⁷⁹ CRST. Chief of Mission to Chief of Staff UNPROFOR, 30/06/95.

⁸⁸⁰ CRST. UNHCR Srebrenica to UNHCR Belgrade, 22/06/95.

⁸⁸¹ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa to Komandi 28. Divizije KoV n/r zastupnika komandant, 27/06/95, br. 02/1-670/2.

⁸⁸² NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa, 28/06/95, br. 01-149/95.

VRS as reprisal. Dutchbat had already warned that the population must no longer congregate in the market. UNHCR representative Almir Masic feared that if the rumours of ABiH actions outside the enclave were true, the arrival of a convoy planned for 27 June would not take place.⁸⁸³ It therefore came as a great surprise that the Bosnian Serbs actually allowed this convoy through, which consisted of ten trucks.⁸⁸⁴ It brought a little relief to the distressed circumstances, but convoys that were planned for 24 and 28 June, were cancelled again.⁸⁸⁵ At a meeting between Sector North East and the 2nd Corps of the ABiH on 23 June, Colonel Brantz did inform the 2nd Corps of the fact that he had issued a press release on the situation in which the population found itself: 'so the world is informed now'.⁸⁸⁶ It was to make no impression, however.

On 22 June, Radio Sarajevo reported that Karadzic had said that no more convoys would be permissible, because Srebrenica was not demilitarized. It therefore had the appearance of a response to the ABiH actions. The consequence was that a representative of the Opstina said in an interview on Bosnian radio that the population would quickly die of starvation. The hospital manager stated that there were medical supplies for fifteen days. MSF stated, however, that there were supplies for slightly less than a month, although there were shortages of some items. For these shortages, MSF submitted a shopping list to Dutchbat under the motto 'who knows when the next convoy will arrive'.⁸⁸⁷ Otherwise, the MSF staff discovered by accident that the hospital in Srebrenica - in small quantities - was drawing on the medical supplies to provide Zepa with resources.⁸⁸⁸

What MSF also discovered by accident was a rumour that the hospital was being used as a weapons store, and that MSF were turning a blind eye to it. This rumour reached MSF via the Dutchbat medical service. MSF thought it was just a dirty trick by the Dutch to suggest such a thing: it was clear that the demilitarization of the enclave had failed, in view of the large number of men that were openly walking around with a weapon, but the accusations directed at MSF were misplaced. It was still a point of concern for MSF, because if this rumour were to reach the Bosnian Serbs, it could form the pretext for shelling the hospital.⁸⁸⁹

Reports on the alarming situation in Srebrenica also reached Zagreb, but little more was done there than to forward the reports to New York. The population of the Safe Areas (not only Srebrenica) were not receiving the quantities of food that would help them survive in the longer term, Janvier reported to New York. Opposing the Restriction of Movement imposed by the Bosnian Serbs by force was not an option, also not on a local level, because UNPROFOR could not risk an escalation.⁸⁹⁰ Reports from the UNMOs in Srebrenica on deaths in the population only led to the request from both Sarajevo and Zagreb for confirmation and supplementary information.

Deaths had indeed occurred, the UNMOs reported in early July, although it was not entirely clear to what extent hunger had been the cause: not all the cases were documented, and in four cases the deaths were not investigated by a doctor. Three deaths documented by MSF had nothing to do with starvation, but the local authorities still entered them on the list of people who had died from hunger. The Deputy Mayor and the funeral committee announced that they were unaware of any people starving to death, and that the hospital had no cases of malnutrition.

⁸⁸³ NIOD, Coll. MSF. Capsat MSF Srebrenica to Medical Team Dutchbat, 22/06/95 13:40, No. Out 842.

⁸⁸⁴ ICTY (IT-98-33) D66/a. ABiH Command of 28th Division (Asst Commander for Morale Captain Nijaz Masic) to the Command of 2nd Corps Morale Department, 30/06/95, No. 04-113/95.

⁸⁸⁵ NIOD, Coll. MSF. Capsat MSF Srebrenica to MSF Beograd and Pale, 27/06/95; 19:24. Belgrade UNHCR, Sitrep for Gorazde, Srebrenica, Zepa and Serb areas of Eastern BH, 30/06/95 1115Z.

⁸⁸⁶ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Memorandum Meeting 2 Corps ABiH, 23/06/95.

⁸⁸⁷ NIOD, Coll. MSF. Capsat MSF Srebrenica to Medical Team Dutchbat, 22/06/95 13:40, No. Out 842.

⁸⁸⁸ CRST. UNHCR Srebrenica to UNHCR Belgrade 26/06/95 16:15 retransmitted HCR Belgrade to HCR Zagreb, 26/06/95 15:08; NIOD, Coll. MSF. Capsats MSF Srebrenica to Medical Team Dutchbat, 22/06/95 13:40, No. Out 842 and MSF Srebrenica to MSF Beograd, 26/06/95 18:27.

⁸⁸⁹ NIOD, Coll. MSF. Capsat MSF Srebrenica to MSF Belgrade, 06/06/95 17:37.

⁸⁹⁰ Confidential information (41).

The fact that it was not clear whether there were deaths from starvation did not detract from the fact that the situation was serious, of course. According to the UNMOs, however, alarming reports on this matter were mainly intended to attract attention to the fate of the population. The Bosnian government already spoke of thirteen deaths by starvation.⁸⁹¹ In June, of the twelve convoys, only four arrived. If the Bosnian Serbs continued to refuse convoys, then within a week there would be a catastrophe. People who could not afford to buy food at the exorbitant prices, begged on the street. The UNMOs found out little about food transports between Zepa and Srebrenica. Dutchbat had no data on the subject and the population were unwilling to talk about it for fear that the VRS would get wind of it and lay ambushes. The Deputy Mayor did confirm that every day one hundred to two hundred people went to Zepa in search of food.⁸⁹²

Humanitarian aid: concluding remarks

Humanitarian aid had been turned into a political instrument in the hands of the Bosnian Serbs. On the one hand, they used the argument that the aid was for the benefit of the ABiH, and on the other hand it was an instrument to force the international community to establish contact with the politically isolated Pale. Prof. Koljevic may well have promised more aid convoys to Sarajevo and the enclaves, but Karadzic had other ideas on the matter. He wanted the negotiator Bildt to come to Pale as quickly as possible. If he were to do so, the convoys would be resumed, the shelling would be stopped and an international conference could get under way.

The arrival of negotiator Bildt could be the first step on the way to the normalization of relations between the Bosnian Serbs and UNPROFOR, but his arrival in Pale was not on the agenda for the time being. Bildt did deem contacts with Pale to be essential, however, and he had also been given the necessary room by the European government leaders and the Contact Group, if it would help him achieve concessions. He wanted, partly in view of the sensitivity of the Bosnian government in Sarajevo on this point, however, to go to Pale only after Karadzic had made substantial concessions; Karadzic must open the land routes for convoys.

Bildt was prepared to meet Karadzic on the border in Zvornik, but that was rejected by the Bosnian Serbs as there had only been there had only been contacts at a lower level in Zvornik in early July. This closed the circle again, with the starving population of Srebrenica inside. A few days later, the end of the Safe Area would be ushered in.⁸⁹³

10. Conclusions

The Bosnian Serbs had considerable success in following their strategy. This was oriented towards creating an unbearable situation in Srebrenica. Both Dutchbat and the population suffered under this, albeit not to an equal extent. Dutchbat still had access to sufficient food, even though it was in the form of monotonous rations. The population had to make do with minimal quantities of food that were brought in on scarce UNHCR convoys. The refusal of humanitarian aid had become an instrument in the Bosnian-Serb strategy. The living conditions of the population were already poor, and those of Dutchbat were becoming steadily poorer because of fuel shortages. All the above could not continue to have no influence on morale and motivation.

The population became increasingly disillusioned, and, in its wake, the morale of the ABiH also suffered. This led to a flight of the population (for the time being only individuals and small groups) to somewhere safe (Tuzla) and to desertion from the ABiH. The psychological warfare that the Bosnian

⁸⁹¹ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 88040, File 4-2, SRSG Meeting, 95 May-Oct. Senior Staff Meeting, 06/07/95.

⁸⁹² MID/KL. [UNMO HQ Sarajevo] 041132B Jul 95. NIOD, Coll. MSF. Capsat MSF Srebrenica to MSF Beo, 04/07/95 17:47, No. Out 926; UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 434, UNMO HQ SNE Srebrenica. UNMO Srebrenica to UNMO HQ SNE, 041740B Jul 95.

⁸⁹³ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05244. Codes Van Mierlo circ. 410 and Van Mierlo 81 (paru081), 4/07/95 and Loudon 255, 3/07/95.

Serbs used, such as spreading false propaganda reports on the radio, also did not remain without effect, and contributed to the feelings of anxiety among the population. The absence of Naser Oric had a similar effect: he left the enclave in April 1995 and did not return before the fall. Until his departure, he had been an influential leading figure for the population: an analysis shows that he left on his own initiative.

Neither did the situation for the population improve as a result of quarrels between UNHCR and Dutchbat over checks on UNHCR convoys carrying humanitarian aid goods. This had escalated to the extent that a convoy that was on the way to the enclave was even sent back by UNHCR.

Dutchbat was semi-operational because of a lack of fuel, and became undermanned because those who had gone on leave were not given permission by the Bosnian Serbs to return to the enclave. This meant a heavier load for those who remained, under increasingly difficult conditions. The execution of duties duly suffered. It is not possible to say with any certainty to what extent their morale also suffered. Dutchbat held out, also after 'cries of distress' from Karremans had had no effect. It was not easy to keep up spirits, because there was no real prospect of relief and no certainty could be offered on the timing of return.

Also, the support for continued Dutch presence in public opinion and in a section of the parliamentary arena was crumbling: VVD leader Bolkestein openly expressed his doubt on whether the presence of Dutchbat III should be continued. Attempts to continue a Dutch presence with a combat battalion in Bosnia stood out somewhat starkly in contrast. After a great deal of shilly-shallying, a Ukrainian battalion or a Dutch battalion Dutchbat IV would finally take the relief for its account. However, neither could play any further role before the Bosnian Serb attack on the enclave started.

The situation in the former Yugoslavia was, through the lack of prospects of a political settlement to the conflict, hopeless, as was evident in Chapter 1. UNPROFOR drifted into a 'muddling-through scenario', and the circumstances in which the muddling-through had to take place were extremely poor for Srebrenica. This meant that the Bosnian Serbs had manoeuvred into a favourable starting position to tighten the thumbscrews on the enclave on 6 July, and also ultimately to capture it. This was exactly what would happen.

Chapter 5

The period from 25 May 1995 to 6 July 1995

1. Introduction

After the outline given in the previous chapter of the situation in which the population, ABiH and Dutchbat found themselves in the last month before the fall of Srebrenica, this chapter will focus on the more military aspects of that period.

The Pale bombings at the end of May, after which the UN personnel were taken hostage, had a considerable influence on the situation in Bosnia. The Bosnian Serbs not only took hostages, but also threatened observation posts (OPs) around the three eastern enclaves. Originally, this took place mainly around Gorazde and Zepa, but the Srebrenica enclave was not to escape.

In Srebrenica, the VRS went one step beyond threatening OPs: on 3 June an OP was actually captured, with which the southern point of the enclave fell into Bosnian-Serb hands. We will first investigate what signs existed in advance of the capture, how it proceeded and how Dutchbat and ABiH responded.

We will then deal with how the political and military state of affairs developed in Bosnia in the course of June 1995. Among the significant related events were the attempts made by the Bosnian Muslims to break the siege of Sarajevo. As the capital city of Bosnia, Sarajevo was the main scene of action in the war, and other combat activities in that period usually derived from the conflict around Sarajevo.

An element in the breaking of this siege of Sarajevo was formed by the military actions conducted by the ABiH from the Safe Area of Srebrenica, because such actions actually obliged VRS troops to be present around the enclave, so preventing them from being moved to Sarajevo to fight. Such ABiH actions led to skirmishes between the ABiH and the VRS around Srebrenica. We will deal with what these actions involved, and what effects they had on relations between the VRS and ABiH around the enclave.

The chapter ends at the start of the VRS attack on Srebrenica, on 6 July 1995. We will attempt to establish the possible motivation of the VRS for an attack on Srebrenica, what plans were made for capturing the enclave, and what indications existed for the impending attack. The next chapter will focus attention on the capture of the enclave itself.

2. The position of the Dutchbat observation posts (OPs)

The Pale bombings were important as a catalyst for the VRS activities. Around Srebrenica too, this was preceded by a period of skirmishes between the combatants. The initiative for this was not exclusively with the Bosnian Serbs; as early as 22 May, the 2nd Corps of the ABiH in Tuzla had ordered the 28th Division in Srebrenica to undertake offensive and sabotage actions behind the VRS lines, with the intention of undermining the morale of the VRS.⁸⁹⁴ Dutchbat had little view of what was going on outside the borders of the Safe Area: they only observed that armed ABiH soldiers were making their way outside the enclave, and that the observed battle noise was greater than before. Around this time, a situation also arose in which Dutchbat no longer had a satisfactory answer to the reciprocal protests from the two combatants. This gave Karremans the feeling that Dutchbat was gradually losing the grip that it once had on the situation.⁸⁹⁵

⁸⁹⁴ ICTY (IT-98-33) D51/a. ABiH 28th Division Command to Commander 280 IBLB personally, 22/05/95, No. 01-47/95, Military Secret.

⁸⁹⁵ Karremans, *Srebrenica: Who Cares?*, p. 132.

It is therefore impossible on the basis of Dutchbat observations to verify all the data provided by the ABiH intelligence service to the NIOD on the period May - June 1995 on the subject of manoeuvres and hostilities in and around the enclave. According to the ABiH, the VRS had already attempted in early May to penetrate the enclave from Jasenova, which was to the south of the enclave, so as to occupy the 799 metre high hill in the south of the enclave at Bucje and the 780 metre high hill at Zivkovo Bdro (see map Chapter 6, section 5). The ABiH assumed that the VRS wanted to control Zeleni Jadar at the southeast point of the enclave, and wanted to drive the ABiH back to Srebrenica town.

The VRS was also active elsewhere to the south the enclave. On 15 May, the VRS dispatched a group to the Zepa enclave to the south of the Srebrenica enclave, who were to launch an attack there on 17 May and create confusion. On 25 May, the VRS carried out an attack as a reaction to the bombing of Pale. At the same time, an attack was carried out on the hilly area of Suceška. On 28 May, the VRS laid mines at the entrances to the area of Slapovic, where the Swedish Shelter Project for Displaced Persons was located. On 30 May there was an attack on Dugo Polje. Constant pressure was brought to bear to force UNPROFOR further back while the VRS organized a base for an attack.⁸⁹⁶

Sometimes, the ABiH exchanged information with Dutchbat on a possible VRS attack, or related information was compared. For instance, the Commander of the 28th ABiH Division, Becirovic, pointed out to Dutchbat that the Bosnian Serbs had already started building up their armed forces around the enclave during May. He referred to the arrival of tanks, artillery and to an increasing number of soldiers. There was also mention of an increasing number of helicopter flights, both during the day and at night, including to Serbia. Becirovic said that he already expected an attack at this time.⁸⁹⁷ Dutchbat answered Becirovic by saying that the VRS actions were in response to ABiH activities, but that the VRS would not attack. According to Becirovic, neither did UNPROFOR then believe the ABiH reports of a Bosnian-Serb build-up, and they said that the ABiH did not have to be afraid of an attack.⁸⁹⁸ The ABiH, on the other hand, felt that an offensive was in the air, and attempted to organize the defence of the enclave between the Dutchbat OPs, including by digging trenches. Dutchbat would not permit this, and dispatched patrols between the OPs, according to ABiH liaison officer Ekrem Salihovic, so that the ABiH were unable to dig and constantly had to hide their weapons. Dutchbat also closed the trenches again.⁸⁹⁹

Much of the Bosnian-Serb revenge following the NATO bombing of Pale on 25 and 26 May concentrated on Sarajevo, but the eastern enclaves were not spared. This also had repercussions on the situation around Srebrenica. On 25 May, as immediate retaliation, a number of shells landed close to a school in Srebrenica. There were one dead and three wounded. The VRS also opened fire on the south-western part of the enclave.

UNPROFOR was also confronted with firing from the VRS side. It may be the case that the NATO air strike was announced in advance to all UN units, but UNPROFOR's vulnerability to a VRS reaction was unavoidable. The VRS retaliation struck the Headquarters of Sector North East on Tuzla airfield, which received ten direct hits from VRS artillery. Dutchbat then also had to retreat to the bunkers, but the situation in the Srebrenica enclave was still relatively favourable, at least in contrast to the situation in the Gorazde enclave. The warning that another NATO bombing of Pale would follow on 26 May led only to a short stay in the bunkers. When, on 26 May, the RTL evening news reported that Dutchbat was in an utmost state of readiness, Karremans viewed the report simply as an unnecessary way of putting the home front into an 'utmost state of anxiety'. At the time, Karremans

⁸⁹⁶ Interview Hazrudin Kistic, 17/05/99 and 18/05/99.

⁸⁹⁷ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 02/02/98 and 05/02/98.

⁸⁹⁸ ABiH Tuzla. 2nd Corps, unnumbered. Supplementary statement by Ramiz Becirovic, 16/04/98, based on an earlier statement of 11/08/95.

⁸⁹⁹ Interview Ekrem Salihovic, 02/12/98.

saw no reason for Dutchbat to be in an increased state of readiness, although he did see reason for increased alertness with respect to the OPs, the compounds and patrols.⁹⁰⁰

The first signals that there could be more at foot than retaliation shelling from the VRS did not come from Dutchbat itself, but reached the battalion via the British soldiers that were attached to Dutchbat, who were known as the Joint Commission Observers or JCOs. On 25 May, JCO Headquarters passed on the message that Bosnia-Herzegovina Command had announced from Sarajevo that 'a move on the eastern enclaves was a real possibility, and that if this occurred then Srebrenica would be the first'. It remained completely unclear, however, which OP or OPs would or could be first. The information was conveyed to Dutchbat 'who, it is reported, did not believe it'.⁹⁰¹ After the Pale bombings, there were no further indications that the VRS was preparing activity on the ground against Dutchbat.

The events of 28 May

On 28 May, the situation got increasingly out of hand in Gorazde, one of the other eastern enclaves. In a well-coordinated ambush, the VRS fired on British armoured personnel carriers, which were escorting a convoy. The VRS also harassed the British compound with mortars, detained the crew of two OPs, and then occupied the OPs themselves. As a precaution, the crew of six other OPs withdrew to Gorazde town, leaving behind a great deal of equipment: a large number armoured vehicles, and hundreds of UN uniforms and helmets fell into Bosnian-Serb hands. It had appeared earlier that the VRS would make use of captured UN uniforms and weapons. Thereby, more than before, the VRS would be in a position to provoke incidents and then to place the responsibility on the UN side. The VRS also took 33 of the British hostage, with the intention of securing protection against an ABiH attack.

The ABiH responded by occupying the Ukrainian OPs in the Gorazde enclave and blockading the Ukrainian compound in Gorazde.⁹⁰²

On the same day, 28 May, Dutchbat's situation also became steadily less favourable, however. Ever more alarming messages reached the battalion at a rapid tempo. From Sarajevo, Lieutenant Colonel De Ruiter, the Military Assistant to the Chief of Staff of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command, General Nicolai, would first inform Karremans at 15.00 hours on that day that actions by the VRS against Zepa and Srebrenica were not yet to be expected, but that vigilance was called for. A mere half an hour later, Nicolai asked Karremans to consider giving up a number of less important and remote, relatively inaccessible and difficult to defend observation posts, and only to continue to occupy the most important OPs. In this way, the battalion could carry on longer in a critical situation. In Nicolai's opinion, another aspect was that Karremans himself had already come up with a similar proposal (on 10 May), because of the lack of fuel. At the same time, Nicolai made clear that any requests for Close Air Support must be kept to a minimum, in order to prevent further escalation. For Nicolai and his staff in Sarajevo, the events in Gorazde were a terrifying example.⁹⁰³

At 17.00 hours, the Dutch Colonel De Jonge sent a message from Zagreb that the Arkan Brigade had left Croatia and was on its way to the surroundings of Tuzla and Srebrenica, to take local hostages at UN posts. Because De Jonge was unable to reach Dutchbat on a secure telephone link, he

⁹⁰⁰ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 135-7.

⁹⁰¹ Confidential information (1).

⁹⁰² UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, Weekly Situation Report, 31/0595, No. Z-900, Restricted; MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, No. 25/95, closed 301200B May 1995; Confidential Information (121); SMG 1012. RNLA Army Crisis Staff Weekstrep for 25 May - 02 June 1995.

⁹⁰³ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 135-7; interview J.A.C. de Ruiter, 29/06/00.

forwarded the message to Dutchbat via the Royal Netherlands Army Crisis Staff in The Hague. The message was from 28 May 17.00 hours.⁹⁰⁴

In the late evening of the same day, 28 May, there was another telephone conversation between Nicolai and Karremans. Dutchbat was now ordered to abandon the most vulnerable OPs with immediate effect, and especially the OPs that could be surrounded by surprise at night and taken over. In particular, this concerned two remote western observation posts, OP-A and OP-C.

At Karremans' request, Nicolai granted him half an hour to make an assessment of the situation. In that half hour, Karremans and his deputy Franken arrived at the position that they did not share Nicolai's assessment of the situation with respect to the OPs: according to them, it was not only OP-A and OP-C that could be surrounded, but *all* OPs. In view of the severe weather conditions at that time and the poor state of the (unmetalled) roads, it was impossible and irresponsible to withdraw from a number of OPs in the middle of the night. The persistent rain meant that OPs were difficult to reach even on foot; roads and paths that had already become poorly negotiable, were washed away. Furthermore, mines laid by the VRS in the south of the enclave had come adrift. Karremans' and Franken's assessment was furthermore that once an OP had been abandoned, it would be lost for good.

Karremans said that he was so dumfounded by the discussion that he had requested time to think. 'It simply cannot be true. After all: you then open the door (even wider) to the VRS (and this is not to mention the practical feasibility). Seldom have I been so disappointed in the results of the military decision making process of a headquarters and in the imaginative powers of those who were in command there. How in God's name can someone come up with such an idea', Karremans said. Dutchbat stated that it had been doing all in its power for months to ensure that the OPs functioned as well as possible with the few resources they had at their disposal. At the same time, this was almost the only justification of Dutchbat's existence, because it was only from the OPs that a degree of protection could be offered to the population. Karremans therefore also concluded with respect to Nicolai's order that: 'In brief, I refuse to obey and I accept the risk.'⁹⁰⁵

The events of 29 May

In the night of 28 and 29 May, there was another telephone conversation between Karremans and Nicolai. An assessment of the situation was also made within the staff of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo. This time it resulted in the order to abandon six to eight OPs: in any case OP-A, OP-C, OP-D, OP-K, OP-M, and OP-N, and, if necessary, also OP-E and OP-F. The OPs would have to be concentrated around Srebrenica, and that would have to be carried out that same night. Karremans pointed out to Nicolai that it was undesirable to withdraw the OPs at night. Nicolai then pointed out to Karremans that the OPs had to be withdrawn anyway: Bosnian Serbs were said to have been murdered by Bosnian Muslims from Srebrenica, and as a reaction the VRS might capture the OPs. Karremans did not attach much value to that account, which came from the Serbian press and had therefore already taken place at an earlier stage.

A compromise then appeared in the consultation between Karremans and Nicolai: preparations would be made to be able to abandon the OPs within one hour should that be necessary. There would be consultation the following morning with General Smith, and more detailed instructions were to follow. The OPs could be maintained until further notice or until serious danger threatened. Finally, Sarajevo pointed out the fact that no unnecessary risk must be taken and that no UN lives must be put in danger.⁹⁰⁶ The staff of Sector North East in Tuzla, which was between Dutchbat and Bosnia

⁹⁰⁴ CRST. G3 Land Ops HQ UNPF Zagreb to Chief of Staff Crisis Staff BLS, 18/05/95, unnumbered, the message was from 281700B.

⁹⁰⁵ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 137-8.

⁹⁰⁶ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. 1(NL) UN Infbat Dutchbat 3, 29/05/95, No. TK9581.

Hercegovina Command in Sarajevo in the hierarchy, was noticeably absent in this decision-making process; this link in the chain of command was also passed on other occasions, however.

On the morning of 29 May, more detailed guidelines indeed came from Sarajevo. The OPs might remain in place until further notice. They may remain as long as possible, until serious danger threatened. No unnecessary risk was to be taken, and no lives put in danger. OPs related to the ABiH positions must be retained as long as possible, which, according to Karremans, concerned nearly all OPs. After abandoning the OPs, they must fall back on positions surrounding the most densely populated part of Srebrenica; the Srebrenica-Potocari route must be kept open. The Quick Reaction Force (a rapidly deployable reserve unit of the battalion with the APCs at their disposal) received renewed attention: they were to be expanded, and preparations must be made to reoccupy OPs after being abandoned.⁹⁰⁷ Karremans disregarded this last order. Without having the necessary resources at his disposal, an order to recapture one or more OPs was 'suicide', he thought.⁹⁰⁸ What grounds Karremans had for assuming that there was no other way back than by recapture, is unclear, however. When danger threatened, the Norwegian battalion (Norbat) in the region of Tuzla repeatedly left an OP on the confrontation line between VRS and ABiH, only to reoccupy it later without a problem.⁹⁰⁹

That afternoon, Major Franken called a meeting with the ABiH and members of the Opstina. According to Karremans, the mood of the meeting was positive, because Dutchbat indicated that it did not intend to abandon OPs. This gave Karremans the feeling that he was on the right track.⁹¹⁰ What else was discussed exactly cannot be deduced from Dutchbat sources. However, the Commander of the 28th ABiH Division in the enclave, Ramiz Becirovic, made a comprehensive report of this meeting with Franken. It is clear from this report that it actually was a remarkable meeting. The meeting was arranged in the greatest secrecy, and for this reason there were no UNMOs (United Nations Military Observers) present, which would have been usual in such meetings.

Franken started by referring to the dangerous situation in Gorazde. He said that Dutchbat had been ordered to withdraw the OPs, but that Dutchbat had protested. According to the report of this discussion given by Becirovic, on that morning an order followed to the effect that Dutchbat must remain on the OPs, that permission was given to use weapons, and that permission was also given to deploy Close Air Support should OPs be attacked. Vulnerable OPs were reinforced, the most critical of which were identified as Zeleni Jadar (OP-E), Yellow Bridge (OP-P) and Zalazje (OP-R).

In Becirovic's document, all this was presented as Franken's analysis; Becirovic added that the ABiH shared this analysis. Subsequently, Franken informed Becirovic that Arkan was on his way to Srebrenica. All this, according to Becirovic, led Franken to conclude that little could be done other than for the ABiH and Dutchbat to jointly defend the enclave. According to this report, Dutchbat considered itself capable of defending the OPs for 72 hours. According to the report, Franken proposed that the ABiH should position itself close to the OPs in order to provide any necessary help against the VRS. Becirovic accepted this proposal. At the same time, he accepted the proposal that ABiH and Dutchbat jointly reconsider the positioning of the armed forces at the most vulnerable points.⁹¹¹

These proposals were, as having come from Dutchbat, known to the headquarters of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH in Tuzla. This promptly led to suggestions from Naser Oric that testified to a great mistrust in the joint operation of Dutchbat and the ABiH. For instance, Oric suggested a trial to see whether the Dutch actually were so determined that they would fire on the VRS together with the

⁹⁰⁷ Record CO Dutchbat, 29/05/95, No. TK9581. Appx. 18 in Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?* The report of the discussions is from the hand of Karremans. No records were found in the UNPROFOR archives on this matter from Smith or Nicolai.

⁹⁰⁸ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 139.

⁹⁰⁹ Interview G. Arlefalk, 18/05/00.

⁹¹⁰ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 139.

⁹¹¹ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 2. Korpusa Odjeljenje za moral, 02/06/09, br. 04-84/95.

ABiH. At the same time, Oric directed Becirovic to take care not to allow Dutchbat to see what weapons the ABiH had at their disposal, in case Dutchbat's objective was to discover this information by means of the agreements reached. Oric also wanted Becirovic to ask Dutchbat whether they were prepared to return the weapons and ammunition held in the Weapon Collection Point to the ABiH. Oric's ukases were further that Becirovic must not agree to the distribution of their own ammunition supplies across the OPs by the Dutch, because then the ABiH would lose sight of them. It might well all be a Dutchbat trick to ensure that the ABiH would be unable to confiscate that ammunition for its own use, or to be able to say that the VRS had captured the ammunition. It was not only necessary to keep a close eye on the VRS, the same applied to the Dutch.⁹¹²

Meanwhile, Dutchbat drew up a plan for blocking positions (roadblocks to be set up at strategic points) for the eventuality that OPs did have to be abandoned. The intention was not so much to take up defensive positions against the VRS, but rather to occupy positions to the rear so as to be able to continue to observe from there.⁹¹³ This plan would later become relevant in the VRS attack.

On the same afternoon, 29 May, Lieutenant Colonel De Ruiter called again from Sarajevo with the message that there were indications of a repeat of the pattern of Gorazde (the OPs overrun by the VRS) in Zepa. The UNPROFOR commander in Zepa was invited for a discussion with the VRS on an observation post. One hour before, all manner of VRS troop movements had been observed in the vicinity of the OP concerned. However, Karremans was able to conclude nothing from the situation reports of that day that pointed in the direction that De Ruiter had indicated: all still seemed to be quiet in Zepa.

Later that day, Karremans again had a discussion with De Ruiter, and learned that the Ukrainians in Zepa had been forced to stay on the OPs, and had no more freedom of movement. The pattern of Gorazde had therefore indeed been repeated in Zepa. Furthermore, there was open fighting in Gorazde between the VRS and the ABiH.⁹¹⁴

However, the situation surrounding Srebrenica remained exceptionally quiet, and therefore Karremans saw no reason still to resort to the withdrawal of OPs. He had no indications that Arkan was actually in the area, and he knew nothing of any incident in which Bosnian Serbs had been murdered by Bosnians, as Nicolai had told him from Sarajevo.⁹¹⁵ According to Sarajevo, this was actually consistent with a pattern: De Ruiter observed that it was hard going for Bosnia-Herzegovina Command to convey to Karremans what was actually happening in other places in Bosnia.⁹¹⁶ This was in line with what is known as a siege mentality, which visitors had observed with Dutchbat at an earlier stage. The siege mentality meant that the view of what was going on in the outside world became cloudy, because circumstances dictated that they concentrate on their own surroundings.⁹¹⁷

Karremans unwilling to withdraw the OPs

Karremans' position of 28 May that he wanted to maintain the OPs was remarkable in itself: earlier (on 10 May) he actually requested Bosnia-Herzegovina Command to be allowed to withdraw OPs. It was already mentioned in the previous chapter that Karremans had informed Sarajevo on that day that Dutchbat had gone from 'bare minimum' to 'survival' status where the fuel reserves were concerned. According to him, this could only be sustained for ten days, and after that Karremans wanted to withdraw all OPs. For operational reasons, he did not deem it acceptable to withdraw a single OP, he wrote, because once the OPs had been withdrawn, there was no way back. Dutchbat would then lose

⁹¹² NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. Brigadir Naser Oric to Komandi 28. D KoV Srebrenica n/r Nacelnika staba majora Becirovic Ramiz, 31/05/95.

⁹¹³ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 140.

⁹¹⁴ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 140.

⁹¹⁵ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Record CO Dutchbat, 29/05/95, No. TK9581.

⁹¹⁶ Interview J.A.C. de Ruiter, 29/06/00.

⁹¹⁷ Confidential interview (87).

credibility, and the control of the demilitarized zone would be lost, with an increase in the fighting as a possible consequence. Karremans also estimated that the ABiH would oppose the abandonment of the OPs or would take over the OPs before the VRS did so.⁹¹⁸

Four days later, on 14 May, Karremans and Nicolai spoke to each other about additional fuel saving measures. Karremans was then of the opinion that all further economy measures had been exhausted. He rejected the idea of turning off the lighting of the OPs after dark for safety reasons.⁹¹⁹ Nicolai then requested Karremans to try to survive until 1 June with the available quantity of fuel.⁹²⁰ In his time schedules, Karremans had actually left the possibility open that a recalculation of the fuel reserves would permit an extension to 1 June.⁹²¹

On 28 May, however, the Battalion Commander decided to disregard Nicolai's order from Sarajevo to abandon OPs. This begs the question as to where this reversal came from: the fact is that no fuel arrived in the meantime, and the deadline agreed with Nicolai was approaching. In searching for a reason for the reversal, consideration must be given to the fact that Karremans wanted to continue to perform his task, in spite of all the misery, even when it had become almost impossible.

It seems very likely that, in taking the position that he took on 28 May (that the OPs must not be abandoned) Karremans allowed himself to be influenced by the circumstances of the moment (relative quiet in the enclave) and concerns about the withdrawal of OPs at night and/or in poor weather: he did not appear to be greatly aware of the impending danger that was hanging over Dutchbat's head in view of the forced withdrawal of the OPs in the other enclaves, although this had been drawn to Karremans' attention from Sarajevo. On the other hand, it must be said that a factor in the Battalion Commander's decision not to withdraw the OPs was that Karremans simply did not think it was justified, because danger could then be feared from the ABiH.⁹²² In early July it would be apparent that this certainly was a valid argument. Indeed, abandoning the OPs would also have meant Dutchbat being even 'blinder' than they already were for observing what was going on around the enclave.

It is established that Karremans felt pushed into a corner by the circumstances, without seeing any way out. He was disappointed in the upper echelons and felt let down.⁹²³ What did not make it any easier for him was that he felt no empathy with Sarajevo (General Nicolai), which he did with the level above, Zagreb, (Colonel De Jonge). De Jonge felt that Karremans had good reasons not to withdraw his OPs. The fact is that the battalion would otherwise have had absolutely no eyes, and no one knew what was going on around the enclave, De Jonge argued.⁹²⁴ In his decision to maintain the observation posts, Karremans was also supported by the Director of Operations of the Royal Netherlands Army, Major General A.P.P.M. van Baal, who he had informally asked for advice.⁹²⁵

Withdrawal of the OPs after all?

Dutchbat had hardly any view of what was happening at the edge of the enclave and outside: as already mentioned, it had to rely on messages from Bosnia Hercegovina Command in Sarajevo, and there too, not everything was known about what was happening around the enclave. For instance, it turned out (afterwards) that Arkan units really were in position in the surroundings of the enclave. The multiple murder by Bosnian Muslims on Bosnian Serbs that Nicolai had mentioned to Karremans, and that Dutchbat was only aware of from a Serbian newspaper, was concerned with five (the number seven

⁹¹⁸ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. CO Dutchbat to Comdr BH Command thru Comdr SNE, with Appendix A: Consequences of the withdrawal of OPs, 10/05/95, No. TK9565.

⁹¹⁹ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. C-Dutchbat 3 to COS BHC Sarajevo suppl. to C-RNIA Crisis Staff, 15/05/95, No. TK 9566.

⁹²⁰ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 133.

⁹²¹ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Time schedule for abandoning OPs, 12/05/95, No. TK 9567.

⁹²² Interview J.A.C. de Ruiter, 29/06/00.

⁹²³ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 133.

⁹²⁴ Interview H. De Jonge, 17/09/99.

⁹²⁵ Interview A.P.P.M. van Baal, 01/11/01.

was also mentioned) VRS soldiers who were killed by a group of Bosnian Muslims outside the enclave at Rupovo Brdo near Milici on 27 May.⁹²⁶ The ABiH reported in relation to this that an ABiH patrol had come across VRS personnel, that the ABiH personnel concerned had seen the VRS soldiers earlier, and had opened fire, killing five Bosnian Serbs. Two patrols met each other in a similar way on 29 May, this time in Podravanje, outside the enclave. This time the VRS was the first to open fire, which left the ABiH with two wounded. The VRS also took revenge by laying ambushes between Srebrenica and Zepa, where in two incidents there were three dead and three wounded among food scavengers and ABiH soldiers.⁹²⁷

Dutchbat had been on maximum vigilance since 28 May. The .50 machine guns had to be engaged, and no more patrols that were vulnerable to being overrun must be undertaken from the OPs. In the night of 28 to 29 May, Karremans gathered his company commanders together. He issued the guideline that it must be possible to leave the OPs within one hour. To this end, all vehicles at the OPs must be loaded, and a plan must be drawn up for each OP of what was to happen with the rest of the equipment. The Quick Reaction Forces of the companies and the reconnaissance platoon commands were given new duties: if a meeting was to take place with the VRS on one of the OPs, then 'alarm phase red' was to be in force there and the Quick Reaction Force must be stationed visibly in the vicinity of the OP with an armoured personnel carrier (APC).⁹²⁸ The instructions had nothing to say on what should happen in the unlikely event that the VRS wanted to enter an OP.

The fact that preparations had been made to leave the OPs did not mean that permission had already been given to leave the OPs. The associated preparations were completed on the same night, however.⁹²⁹ The crew of one OP were so seized with the situation that they burned their personal belongings and wrote farewell letters.⁹³⁰

Otherwise, preparations had already been made in May to be able to withdraw the entire battalion within 48 hours in a secret operation. Interpreters, local personnel, UNMOs and *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) were not acquainted with this plan, because the battalion was counting on opposition from the population. They were assumed to try in all conceivable ways to obstruct the departure of Dutchbat, so that there must be no suspicion of preparations being made to leave the OPs and the compounds. Such preparations had therefore to be made in darkness, or when there were no 'locals' around. The vehicles at the OPs would then go via designated routes to a particular point. However, it would first be necessary to ask for clearance from the VRS to venture outside the enclave.⁹³¹

3. The days of late May and early June 1995: the VRS threaten around OP Echo

The area around OP-E at Zeleni Jadar, in the south-eastern corner of the enclave, had long been a disputed area. There were several reasons for it being of strategic importance: it was on the three-forked road that controlled the southern access to the enclave. Important Bosnian-Serb places in the region could be reached easily via Zeleni Jadar, including Milici, Vlasenica and the military stronghold Han Pijesak. If the route via Zeleni Jadar was unusable for the Bosnian Serbs, a detour was necessary via the northern side of the enclave.

In addition, both warring factions had economic interests at stake in Zeleni Jadar. For the Muslims, without control over Zeleni Jadar, the important route from Srebrenica to Zepa would be more difficult, because it was on the connecting route to that enclave. For the Bosnian Serbs, on the

⁹²⁶ Interview Zoran Jovanovic, 13/09/99.

⁹²⁷ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 2. Korpusa Odjeljenje za moral, 02/06/99, Str. pov. br. 04-84/95.

⁹²⁸ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 138-9.

⁹²⁹ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. CO Dutchbat to Comdr BH Command thru Comdr SNE, 04/06/95, No. TK9587.

⁹³⁰ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 139.

⁹³¹ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Appendix D (Gevplan) to Operation plan no 2 (Departure from enclave) of C-1(NL) UN Infbat, 13/05/95, UN Secret.

other hand, Zeleni Jadar formed the access to the bauxite mines on the southern side of the enclave. It was also important to both parties that the Srebrenica drinking water supply could be controlled from this location.

Apart from Zeleni Jadar itself, the industrial area to the south was of potential importance. According to a member of the Opstina, the Deputy Mayor of Srebrenica, the Canadian battalion (Canbat) in Zeleni Jadar had had an observation post behind the factories. This is why the industrial area formed part of the enclave before the arrival of Dutchbat I, and the Muslims therefore considered that it belonged to the enclave. However, according to this Opstina source, immediately after its arrival in March 1994, Dutchbat I took up an observation post in front of the industrial area for security reasons, so that the factories fell to the Bosnian Serbs. The Opstina were said to have pointed out the wrong position of OP-E, but they received the answer that Zeleni Jadar was a Bosnian-Serb area according to Dutchbat I.⁹³²

Moreover, a Canadian source refuted that in 'their' time the industrial area had belonged to the Bosnian Muslim territory: both Canbat battalion commanders were unanimous in their opinion on the matter. Dutchbat had simply taken over the OPs that Canbat had set up. OP-E was then also within the enclave, and then too - as some Muslims asserted - had not been situated to the south of the factory complex.⁹³³ However, the OP had been moved: originally it was 200 metres outside the factory complex. Because of the shooting there, and because the ABiH had occupied positions there, the OP was moved,⁹³⁴ but not to the south: the Canadians did attempt to include the local water plant in the area, but they were unsuccessful. Therefore, the Srebrenica drinking water supply remained a point of dispute between the warring factions.⁹³⁵

OP-E was a thorn in the VRS' flesh because it cut through the roads to the south of the enclave, and interfered with supplying the units around Srebrenica. The Bosnian-Serb side had nurtured the desire to be able to use the road to Milici for a long time. There were various meetings in which the use of the road was raised for discussion, but no agreement was ever reached because military traffic was involved, which no one wanted to permit.⁹³⁶

For instance, the Bosnian Serbs asked as early as September 1994 to be able to use the road to Milici, at a meeting between the VRS, Naser Oric and Battalion Commander Vermeulen of Dutchbat I (all of which was covered in Part II).

The War President of Srebrenica, Osman Suljic, did not agree with the use of the road by the VRS; he did not want to accept such a proposal. Suljic made no report to Sarajevo on this meeting because, he said, it was difficult to convey the information. The Civil Affairs Officer of Sector North East, Ken Biser, also heard of the meeting and did make a report. He was on a visit to Srebrenica. On 22 September he met Professor Nikola Koljevic, the Vice President of the Republika Srpska, and they discussed the use of the road. Koljevic originally wanted direct UNPROFOR assent to the use of the road, but finally agreed to discuss the matter in a meeting of the Joint Demilitarization Commission, in which there were also Bosnian representatives. This would not then happen in Srebrenica but in Sarajevo.⁹³⁷ If UNPROFOR, as a goodwill gesture to the VRS, were not to permit the road to be used, then the Bosnian Serbs would feel obliged to open the road by force, Koljevic said. In this sense, the capture of OP-E could not have come as a strategic surprise.⁹³⁸

In March 1995, General Mladic had also requested General Smith to withdraw the UNPROFOR units in the south-eastern part of the enclave. According to Mladic, the UNPROFOR

⁹³² Interview Hamdija Fejzic, 03/02/98.

⁹³³ Interview Pierre Desjardins, 12/11/99.

⁹³⁴ Interview Yvan Bouchard, 15/11/99

⁹³⁵ Interview Thomas K.D. Geburt, 18/11/99.

⁹³⁶ Interview Petr Uscumlic 14/09/99.

⁹³⁷ CRST. Civil Affairs, Sector NE, Srebrenica Trip Report, 21-14 September, 1994.

⁹³⁸ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 25/77, File 1.1.57, SNE 4 April - 23 August 1995. Fax Biser to Corwin, 09/06/95, unnumbered.

presence there permitted the ABiH to occupy territory, as well as ‘an important road that was by rights Serbian.’ Smith refused.⁹³⁹ In April/May 1995, Koljevic found himself back at OP-E for the same purpose, but War President Osman Suljic did not meet him then.⁹⁴⁰

The events of 30 May

In spite of the apparent quiet in the enclave at the end of May, there were indeed rumblings in the surroundings of Srebrenica. On 30 May at 20.30 hours, the VRS requested an emergency meeting in the vicinity of OP-P in the north of the enclave. This came entirely out of the blue for Karremans. Dutchbat was represented by Section 5, the section for military-civil contacts; the VRS was represented by Major Nikolic and an unknown officer from Pale, who were apparently nervous. Nikolic announced that he had intelligence that the ABiH would attack OP-A and OP-C within two days and would take over all the equipment. The message was clear: when the ABiH was to take over OPs, the UN personnel must no longer be in that area. Otherwise, they would be a target for the VRS. Furthermore, the VRS complained that too many ABiH soldiers were in the vicinity of the Dutch OPs, especially OP-R in the east of the enclave, on the Zanik hill. If the ABiH were to attack the OPs, the message from the VRS side went, then Dutchbat personnel were welcome in the VRS lines, as long as they brought along their weapons and ammunition. Otherwise, Dutchbat was free to leave the enclave whenever it wanted.

Karremans did not know how to react to these statements. This could be a new approach from the VRS, or some kind of trick. The offer to Dutchbat of an unopposed withdrawal from the enclave and the offer to escape to the VRS lines had been made at an earlier stage, and complaining voices about too many ABiH soldiers in the vicinity of OPs were familiar. What was new, however, was that Dutchbat was considered to be a VRS target should the ABiH take over an OP. Under the prevailing circumstances, the Battalion Commander did not consider it very likely that the ABiH would adopt the position that the VRS predicted: that would be an upside-down world. Karremans had sensed earlier that the VRS were looking for a pretext to start an offensive operation, but again Karremans saw no necessity to abandon OPs.⁹⁴¹ In Gorazde, in the meantime, two OPs had been taken over by the VRS.

On the same day, 30 May, in the south-eastern part of the enclave, at OP-E, VRS Colonel Vukota Vukovic personally made clear to the OP crew that his men had already surrounded OP-E.⁹⁴² This was evident when, half way through discussion, Vukovic hurriedly departed because there was shooting from a hill opposite the OP. The previous night, Sergeant Ceelen had already heard the sound of falling rocks, but he was unable to see anything with vision.⁹⁴³ In the evening, fires could be seen in the hills. When the OP crew whistled, the VRS whistled back. Muslims, who under other circumstances would be waiting at the gate to the OP for bread, batteries, aid, sweets and tobacco, were no longer to be seen.⁹⁴⁴ Shortly after midnight on 31 May, a powerful explosion was heard about one hundred metres from the OP: it appeared to be an attempt at intimidation.⁹⁴⁵ Following an order from his company Commander, Captain Groen, Ceelen went to investigate by daylight, and to measure the crater that had resulted from the explosion. It turned out to be a large crater in the road.

⁹³⁹ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 215, File BHC95 7Mar-14Mar95. Meeting Gen Smith and Gen Mladic 7 March 1995, Ref 8594. BHC FWD to DOKL. 091100A Mar 95. Outgoing fax No. 122/95. UN Conf.

⁹⁴⁰ Interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98.

⁹⁴¹ CO Dutchbat to HQ UNPROFOR Sarajevo through HQ BH Sector NE, 30/05/95, No. TK9583. Appx. 19 in Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?* See also p.141.

⁹⁴² SMG/Debrief. Diary of E.R. de Vries.

⁹⁴³ Interview W.A. Ceelen, 02/0799.

⁹⁴⁴ SMG/Debrief diary of E.R. de Vries.

⁹⁴⁵ Dijkema, *Dutchbat in vredesnaam*, p. 157.

The events of 31 May

The following day, 31 May, the VRS fired at Ceelen during a patrol. It was clear to Ceelen that the VRS were staging incidents around OP-E as a way of putting pressure on Dutchbat. Company Commander Groen decided to reinforce the OP: Sergeant Smit and a number of soldiers were added to the OP crew, bringing the crew strength up to twelve. At the same time, Groen ordered a foxhole to be dug in an area of higher ground behind the OP, and to have it occupied during the day by one of the two sergeants and a soldier.⁹⁴⁶ The purpose of this observation post was to give warning of a VRS arrival, to facilitate denial of access to the enclave entrance road by any armoured personnel carriers.⁹⁴⁷ For this purpose, the post was equipped with AT-4 short range anti-tank weapons.⁹⁴⁸

On 31 May, the combatants in the vicinity of OP-E were indeed fighting with each other, although Dutchbat had little relevant information. There was also fighting at OP-F, which was a little further away. It is possible that during the previous night there had been VRS infiltrations in the vicinity of OP-K and OP-D to the south of the enclave. Reconnaissance patrols stumbled across each other on two occasions in the vicinity of OP-E on 31 May, and two ABiH soldiers were wounded, and two from the VRS died.

More problems appeared to be on the way, because the ABiH had understood from intercepted message traffic that Zeljko Raznjatovic, better known as Arkan, had arrived in Bratunac on 1 June to prepare sabotage and terror actions. The VRS Drina Corps had also ordered the Milici Brigade to lay ambushes in the area to the south of Srebrenica with the intention of regaining control of the area between Srebrenica and Zepa, where - as is evident from a Milici Brigade report - the Muslims were then lord and master. This resulted in three operations in the night of 31 May to 1 June, in which ten ABiH soldiers died, six were wounded and one was taken prisoner. Messages from the ABiH confirmed the events, but spoke of seven dead on their own side, including four soldiers (of the 284th ABiH Brigade), who were carrying a wounded soldier who had trodden on an anti-personnel mine; they were taking him from Zepa to the hospital in Srebrenica.⁹⁴⁹

What the warring factions were after was OP-E, from where the southern part of the enclave and the access to the town could be controlled. In a letter to Bosnia-Herzegovina Command, Karremans adopted the position that he would continue to defend OP-E with support from the Quick Reaction Force. If the ABiH were going to attack the OP, the VRS would close the road between OP-E and Srebrenica. In that case the VRS would find themselves confronted with the Quick Reaction Force. Dutchbat did not have a mind to give up OPs, was in a position to defend each OP, and would act accordingly, Karremans said in his letter. It was unacceptable for the VRS to cross the confrontation line: when that happened, Dutchbat would resist with all means at their disposal. Karremans added that there was a 'massive reserve echelon'. The VRS had announced that they would not start any offensive actions against UN units. The VRS wanted to maintain good relations with UNPROFOR in general, and on a local level with Dutchbat in particular. The VRS were unable to understand Dutchbat's firmness. Nevertheless, Karremans concluded from a meeting with VRS officer Vukovic on that day, that the VRS were looking for a pretext to start an action, and that the VRS were trying everything to step up the pressure on the battalion.⁹⁵⁰

The VRS also expressed their rage through Colonel Vukovic regarding an ABiH infiltration on 28 May that had cost the lives of seven Bosnian Serbs. Whereas earlier Karremans had dismissed the

⁹⁴⁶ Interview W.A. Ceelen, 02/07/99.

⁹⁴⁷ Dijkema, *Dutchbat in vredesnaam*, p. 158.

⁹⁴⁸ Debriefing report M.J. Koper, 08/09/95.

⁹⁴⁹ ICTY (IT-98-33) D122/a, D53/a, D52/a. Command of 1st Milici Brigade to Command of Drina Corps, 01/06/95, No. I/02-495-1. ABiH 28th Division Command, Asst Commander for Security Captain Nedžad Bektić to Command of 2nd Corps Security Department, 02/06/95, No. 13-05-77/95; ABiH 28th Division, Distribution of materiel and technical equipment, 02/06/95, No. 02-35/95.

⁹⁵⁰ CO Dutchbat to HQ UNPROFOR Sarajevo through HQ BH Sector NE, 31/05/95, No. TK9584. Appx. 20 in Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*

murder of these seven Bosnian Serbs as an irrelevant historical fact towards General Nicolai, he now saw it as a pretext for the VRS to start an action. Another point that the VRS had brought up in discussions was that they expected the ABiH to provoke an attack near OP-E. OP-A and OP-C in the west, about which this fear had been expressed earlier, were now apparently out of the picture. In the event of an attack by the ABiH, the VRS would defend themselves, and the VRS were concerned about the fact that OP-E would then be in the line of fire. Vukovic therefore came up with the proposal that, in the event of an attack, the crew could seek shelter with the VRS. In any case, the OP would have to be evacuated as rapidly as possible. Later in the afternoon, Section 5, for military-civil contacts, informed the ABiH of the substance of the discussion with the VRS.⁹⁵¹ The ABiH response was not recorded.

The events of 1 June

On 1 June, VRS Colonel Vukovic again had a discussion with a Dutchbat representative, this time at OP-E. Karremans agreed to a discussion, and this time attended in person, although De Ruiter in Sarajevo had expressly told him two days earlier not to go himself; the fact was that experience in Zepa and Gorazde had shown that one hour before the meeting troop movements would take place near the venue.⁹⁵² After the Dutchbat liaison team had arrived at the post, the VRS was called on the phone. Despite the guarantee of their safety, the VRS negotiating team did not wish to come to OP-E, however: Vukovic did not consider it safe. The VRS therefore proposed another venue, between the OP and the VRS positions, three hundred metres to the south, which the Dutchbat negotiators could reach by foot or APC.⁹⁵³ Karremans was unwilling to do this, in view of the experiences in Gorazde, where two days earlier the VRS had taken two OP crews hostage. Karremans therefore later spoke briefly with Vukovic through an interpreter, on a phone line that ran between the OP and the VRS positions, while standing on the lookout tower of the OP.

Vukovic notified Karremans on behalf of the Commander of the Drina Corps, Major General Zivanovic himself, that the VRS intended from that moment on to use the road to the south of the enclave that led to the bauxite mine area. Dutchbat was therefore requested to open the road at OP-E, and to evacuate the OP.⁹⁵⁴ Karremans rejected this request. In the evening, Vukovic also received written confirmation at OP-P of the rejection of his proposal: the fact was that OP-E lay within the borders of the Safe Area, and it was Dutchbat's duty to man OPs along the confrontation line, Karremans said.⁹⁵⁵

According to Corporal de Vries, Sergeant Ceelen on OP-E asked Karremans after the discussion between Karremans and Vukovic whether there were any details that he should be aware of. According to De Vries, the Company Commander had answered Ceelen by saying that this was not the case. Ceelen confirmed this, and added that Captain Groen had asked Karremans the same question, and had also received the answer that nothing had been discussed that was of interest to the crew of the OP. The Dutchbat soldiers on the OP had other ideas, however; the pressure from the VRS increased. Ceelen heard later on the Netherlands World Service radio that Vukovic had demanded the evacuation of an OP. If that was indeed the case, which it was, Karremans should have said so, in Ceelen's opinion, because the OP was in danger from that moment on. Furthermore, Ceelen heard from the interpreter about the VRS plans to take the southern point of the enclave.⁹⁵⁶

⁹⁵¹ CO Dutchbat to HQ UNPROFOR Sarajevo through HQ BH Sector NE, 31/05/95, No. TK9584. Appx. 20 in Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?* See also p. 141.

⁹⁵² Karremans, *Srebrenica: Who Cares?*, p. 140.

⁹⁵³ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. CO Dutchbat to BH Command, 01/06/95, No. TK 9586.

⁹⁵⁴ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 144 and Appx. 21.

⁹⁵⁵ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. CO Dutchbat to Col Vukovic, 01/06/95, No. TK9585.

⁹⁵⁶ SMG/Debrief. Diary of E.R. de Vries; interview W.A. Ceelen, 02/07/99.

The 28th Division was preparing for further hostilities, and in the meantime sent extra ammunition to the various brigades. Altogether this was a reasonable quantity, but in proportion to the number of available rifles it was not much more than twenty cartridges each. The ammunition that was distributed consisted of 43,000 rifle rounds, 4500 machine gun rounds, 280 hand grenades, 45 M-57 anti-tank rockets, 30 82 mm mortar shells and 52 rounds for a 60 mm rocket launcher.⁹⁵⁷

It remained unsettled in and around the enclave. In the town of Srebrenica itself, men with weapons became an increasingly common sight.⁹⁵⁸ According to the Canadian UNMO Captain Bob Patchett, there was a hint that something was about to happen, but it was unclear when it would be. The VRS had been complaining for weeks that the ABiH were digging trenches and were walking around heavily armed, but now more positions than before were being occupied on both sides. According to Patchett, another signal was being shown a map by the VRS with new confrontation lines. These lines implied that the Swedish Shelter Project - whose entrance was not far from OP-E - would come under Bosnian Serb control.⁹⁵⁹

The ABiH liaison officer requested to be able to discuss the situation with UNMOs on a daily basis, and also requested information on the state of affairs in Gorazde. However, the UNMOs did not have this. In turn, the UNMOs requested the ABiH to refrain from provocation. The population had already been warned not to allow cattle to graze in the vicinity of the confrontation line, and not to cut wood there.⁹⁶⁰

In the morning of 1 June, there was an exchange of fire to the south of the enclave. Residents reported that the VRS had laid an ambush in the hills of Sucasca in the vicinity of OP-K (two kilometres west of OP-E), which was located on one of the smuggling routes to Zepa, along which a group had just returned to Srebrenica. According to an ABiH source, eleven people died in this ambush, including several ABiH soldiers.⁹⁶¹ The ABiH then formed a special unit to retrieve the bodies, including those of several boys under the age of sixteen. According to an ABiH source, a local Dutchbat commander was said to have told the VRS that the ABiH men had been in combat action, and that, although only flour was found in their rucksacks brought from Zepa. There was no publicity on the incident.⁹⁶²

The crew of OP-K had indeed counted 46 ABiH soldiers, who were walking to the ambush site. The OP crew also saw that the VRS were unloading weapons from a vehicle and were setting up weapon mounts. Later the same day, Dutchbat also observed a T-55 tank there. A returning group of Bosnian Muslims smugglers even reported that the VRS had ten tanks to the south of the enclave, and that the VRS regularly entered the enclave via this smuggling route. Even more remarkable was that this group (35 men, 20 of whom were armed, and 35 horses) said that they had bought five armoured personnel carriers (type BTR-60) from the Ukrainian battalion in Zepa. Karremans had the story of the purchased armoured personnel carriers investigated and came to the conclusion that it was untrue.⁹⁶³

On the other hand, UNMOs reported, as the 'oddest item of news', that two such armoured personnel carriers had entered the enclave at night. The crew of OP-K is said to have seen the armoured personnel carriers, fired flares, and even tried to shoot at them, but the vehicles were out of range. The corresponding OP-K report indicated that two wheeled vehicles, probably armoured

⁹⁵⁷ ICTY (IT-98-33) D122/a, D53/a, D52/a. Command of 1st Milici Brigade to Command of Drina Corps, 01/06/95, No. I/02-495-1; ABiH 28th Division Command, Asst Commander for Security Captain Nedžad Bektić to Command of 2nd Corps Security Department, 02/06/95, No. 13-05-77/95; ABiH 28th Division, Distribution of materiel and technical equipment, 02/06/95, No. 02-35/95.

⁹⁵⁸ MSF Brussels. Capsat MSF Srebrenica to MSF Beograd, 02/06/95 03:06, No. Out 679.

⁹⁵⁹ Interview Bob Patchett, 19/11/99.

⁹⁶⁰ SMG 1001. Capsat TX to TA info Dutchbat LO Team, 012130B Jun 95.

⁹⁶¹ Interview ABiH Captain Hazrudin Kisić, 17/05/99 and 18/05/99.

⁹⁶² Confidential interview (51).

⁹⁶³ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 144.

personnel carriers of the same type BTR-60, entered the enclave via the road that ran 250 metres to the east of the OP, and subsequently made their way to the north.⁹⁶⁴

One month later, more reports emerged on these armoured personnel carriers: during the night of 1 July, OP-C in the southwest heard heavy engine noises from the adjoining Bandera triangle. A resident reported that ABiH BTR-60s were involved.⁹⁶⁵ No further indications regarding the presence of this type of armoured personnel carrier in the enclave were found. There was a story that they had continued through the lines on to Tuzla.

The events of 2 June

Confusion and fear reigned in these days in the enclave. A contributory factor was that the UN had withdrawn its Civil Police from the town to the Dutchbat compound in Potocari.⁹⁶⁶ UNHCR also reported that the tension was increasing hand over fist. This was not only a consequence of the ambush laid by the VRS at OP-K, but also of reports that could be heard on Radio Bratunac: 1500 Arkan troops were on the way to Bratunac to capture Srebrenica, and the VRS intended to capture OPs from Dutchbat by force.⁹⁶⁷

Dutchbat heard still more panic reports. 10,000 VRS soldiers were reported to be on standby on the Drina and they were to attack that same evening. All they were waiting for was a political decision, but when it came they would attack on a front approximately ten kilometres wide. The ABiH claimed it could resist an attack for up to seven days.⁹⁶⁸

The Dutch Military Intelligence Service (RNLA) followed the developments with concern. The service suspected that the VRS ambush was intended to bring an end to the smuggling practices, after accusations that the ABiH was using the routes for supplying weapons and ammunition. Both claimed that UNPROFOR was not performing its duties adequately. The Bosnian Serbs were said to claim that UNPROFOR was unable to hold the Muslims in the enclave, and the Bosnian Muslims were said to blame UNPROFOR for not protecting the population sufficiently.⁹⁶⁹

The 28th ABiH Division expected that the VRS Drina Corps, reinforced with auxiliaries from Serbia, would step up the pressure on the enclave. In this way, the VRS would seek to provoke a continuous migration of the population to Tuzla. The ABiH also expected that the VRS would put pressure on Dutchbat to render the battalion powerless, so that Dutchbat would have no way open to it other than evacuation. A first phase in that process would be the capture of OPs. Once UNPROFOR had been driven away, the Bosnian Serbs could make a start on their attempt to 'cleanse' the left bank of the Drina once and for all. The ABiH therefore expected further attacks with tanks or armoured vehicles, to gain possession of the road link from Bratunac to Milici via the south of the enclave. The VRS mobilized men in Han Pijesak, Milici, Bratunac and Zvornik. The ABiH wanted to step up their intelligence activities because of the situation, and the 28th Division's brigades were therefore ordered to set up observation posts, which would be able to warn of traffic on the roads from Bratunac to Konjevic Polje, from Milici to Podravanje and from Jasenova to Zeleni Jadar. These posts would then have to be situated partly outside the enclave.⁹⁷⁰

⁹⁶⁴ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 434, UNMO UNPROFOR HQ North-East, Milinfosummaries/1, SNE/1. UNMO HQ Sector NE to UNMO HQ Zagreb, Weekly Infosum 21/95 (22 - 28 May) and 22/95 (29 May - 4 Jun), 281500B May 95 and 040800B Jun 95. The report from OP-K was from 270015B May 95. MID. Doc Rest 200,300,200,200,200.Yo.12423 (AMID 443-0305 Box 113).

⁹⁶⁵ SMG 1001. C-BCie to Dutchbat Potocari, Daily Sitrep of 301600BJun95 - 011600BJul95.

⁹⁶⁶ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 25/77, File 1.1.57, SNE 4 April - 23 August 1995. Fax Biser to Mihov D-SRSG BHC FWD, 03/06/95, unnumbered.

⁹⁶⁷ CRST. UNHCR Srebrenica to UNHCR Sarajevo, 02/06/95 08:07.

⁹⁶⁸ SMG 1004/20. Capsat 61 to 90, 02/06/95 12:12.

⁹⁶⁹ MID/RNLA. Military Intelligence Service Army Dept, INTSUM 105/95, 021200Z Jun 95. Confi.

⁹⁷⁰ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 285. IBLbr, 02/09/95, Str. pov. br. 01-71/95.

On this day, 2 June, the level of the activities of the warring factions seemed at first to decrease for a while, although the trenches of the warring factions generally remained occupied. At the start of the evening, however, the VRS suddenly fired fifteen shots at Dutchbat OP-E personnel, who had just returned from the observation post above the OP. Dutchbat also noticed that an exchange of fire was taking place in the south-western corner of the enclave between the VRS and the ABiH.⁹⁷¹ According to an ABiH report, the VRS had already attempted on 2 June to capture OP-E. The ABiH was prepared for it, however, and could foil an attempt by opening fire on the VRS, which cost the VRS two wounded. The ABiH reported to the 2nd Corps in Tuzla that it was in a state of readiness to face surprises, in particular the capture of Dutchbat OPs. The ABiH also observed that the VRS was bringing in reinforcements.⁹⁷²

Meanwhile, Sector North East in Tuzla assessed the threat against Srebrenica as high.⁹⁷³ However, little information yet pointed to an attack on OP-E, until the following day, on 3 June, the OP-E crew observed fifty VRS soldiers in the factory complex on the opposite side of the road. Fifteen to twenty men then crossed the road and so came close in front of the OP: the VRS had started operation 'Jadar-95'.

The events of 3 June: the capture of OP-E

Sergeant Ceelen and Corporal De Vries, who at that time were manning the observation post above the OP, identified the VRS soldiers as Arkan fighters. The OP crew were instructed via a megaphone to leave the OP within ten minutes. Shortly after that, the VRS surrounded the OP. At the same time, two explosions could be heard close by, as well as a couple of heavy bursts of fire. De Vries wrote about this event as follows: 'the message was clear as far as we were concerned. The OP was under heavy fire.'

Ceelen and De Vries gathered their property together in the observation post and watched the scene. Meanwhile, hasty contact was sought with the Company's Second in Command, Captain P.J. Hageman, who in turn, also in this crisis situation, had to feed all the messages back to the battalion leadership. De Vries wrote the following about this in his diary: 'The Serbs either had no clock, or no patience. After a couple of minutes the message became more earnest: "This is your chance to leave the OP". The only thing that that they can say at battalion level is: "stand by, out" [indicating that the battalion staff did not know how to deal with the situation] and "situation? Over".'⁹⁷⁴

The man behind the megaphone was Petr Uscumlic: on that day, the VRS had brought this Montenegrin UNMO interpreter, who was stationed in Bratunac, against his will to an improvised headquarters on the Kvarac hill to the east of Srebrenica. He was then told that the VRS were going to capture OP-E, but that the VRS did not want Dutchbat to have the slightest suspicion. Uscumlic was given a megaphone to urge Dutchbat personnel on OP-E to leave the OP. However, he thought it was understandable that they had opted for the safety of the bunker within the OP, because this was the safest place. After five to ten minutes of hesitating, the crew left the OP, 'thank God' Uscumlic said. The VRS did fire on the OP's defensive embankment, but the crew were able to leave the post unharmed. Dutchbat officers later said that they were 'pissed off' with Uscumlic, but he never had the chance to explain the situation.⁹⁷⁵

⁹⁷¹ CRST. Dutchbat Milinfo, period 020600-030600B Jun95.

⁹⁷²NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 2. Korpusa Odjeljenje za moral, 02/06/09, Str. pov. br. 04-84/95.

⁹⁷³ CRST. HQ Sector NE Daily Milinfosum from 311700B May to 011700B Jun 95. UN Confidential.

⁹⁷⁴ SMG/Debrief. Diary of E.R. de Vries.

⁹⁷⁵ Interview Petr Uscumlic, 14/09/99.

A Standing Order for Dutchbat was to set fire to everything in the event of a forced departure from an OP. OP-E was prepared for this, but on the instruction of the B Company Commander, it was not carried out.⁹⁷⁶

The Commander of B Company, Groen, was in Potocari at the time of the capture of OP-E for the daily discussion with the Battalion Commander. He received the following message from his Second-in-Command, Hageman: 'OP-E is under attack! Return immediately!' Groen followed the message traffic on the radio on the way; Hageman maintained contact with the OP. The battalion staff had Hageman ask: 'When is the last chance for leaving without casualties?' The answer from the OP was: 'Yes, that is right now!' with which the OP crew broke off the communication.⁹⁷⁷

The rule for such a necessarily rapid evacuation was that the Dutchbat members who formed the crew of the observation post were to descend the slope in an arc to the road, to be picked up there by the withdrawing APC; the crew of the OP were already in the APC, with the exception of Ceelen and De Vries. Ceelen noted: 'The OP Commander was already sitting in the vehicle when our company [referring to the Second-in-Command] said: 'break off'. However, Ceelen's account of this last communication between the company leaders and OP-E was somewhat different from that of Groen, above.

Ceelen then ran with a machine gun to the road, and De Vries with a rifle and two anti-tank weapons. The wet weather meant that they had to slide down the slope. The APC arrived and waited for them in the middle of the road. The problem now was how to get in, because the APC's hatch remained closed. The two of them lay in the verge, and the VRS fired in the direction of the APC. Bullets whistled close above them, and they heard the crack of branches. They wanted to tell the APC crew on their walkie-talkie that the hatch had to be opened, but all the running and falling had changed the frequency setting of the walkie-talkie, so that there was no reaction from the APC. They therefore had to wait until the hatch opened, and when that finally did happen the two of them ran forward and dived in. To make matters worse, the hatch would not close again, because a phosphorus grenade had become lodged in it. After opening and closing the hatch a few times the vehicle was able to drive away, 'under the rattle of farewell fire'.

After moving one and a half kilometres from their terrifying adventure, the APC came to a halt: the OP crew met the Quick Reaction Force there, and Company Commander Captain Groen,⁹⁷⁸ who remarked with hindsight, with a feeling for understatement: 'They had been forced to swallow quite a lot. They were really tense.'⁹⁷⁹

Follow-up of the capture of OP-E

The attack gave rise to alarm on the compound in Srebrenica. The B Company Quick Reaction Force (QRF), consisting of an APC with nine men under the command of Sergeant Struik, was alerted. When the QRF arrived, they found Captain Groen and Sergeant Ceelen two kilometres to the north of OP-E, standing on the roof of a house so as to be able to see the OP. Groen wanted to know how far the VRS were advancing on Srebrenica town, and whether they were continuing to the nearby Swedish Shelter Project. 'In which case there would no end to the misery.' In order to get a better view of what was going on, Groen took someone from the APC, got in and then drove at walking pace to the south to approximately 500-600 metres from OP-E.⁹⁸⁰

They were reasonably tense and they did not know how the VRS would react. After all, the VRS had earlier opened fire on the Dutchbat personnel. The APC proceeded slowly forwards, stopping occasionally, turning off the engine so as to listen, seeking the location of the VRS, and whether

⁹⁷⁶ Interview W.A. Ceelen, 02/07/99.

⁹⁷⁷ Interview J. R. Groen, 05/07/99.

⁹⁷⁸ SMG/Debrief. Diary of E.R. de Vries.

⁹⁷⁹ Interview J. R. Groen, 05/07/99.

⁹⁸⁰ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (36).

contact could be made with them. According to a patrol of the commands in the lateral area, with which the APC was in contact, the APC had even already passed the newly created VRS line. Groen then wanted to return to a location that he had seen earlier and that offered a clear view of the valley.

At that point, ABiH soldiers suddenly appeared from the woods and set up a roadblock. They had walked into the woods with the APC without being seen, and they wanted to see how far the APC could go: which would be how far they could go, too. When Groen wanted to turn back with the APC, the ABiH set up a roadblock to indicate that they must not give up the territory the vehicle had managed to move into.⁹⁸¹

An ABiH soldier stood on the road with an M-79 anti-tank weapon on his shoulder, and five were standing in the verge.⁹⁸² The intention was clear: no further back towards Srebrenica. The ABiH soldier who made that clear had a sniper's rifle, which he demonstrated on the spot. The VRS positions were visible in the valley. The ABiH fired a mortar shell at them and a VRS soldier who jumped up to change position was shot down. After that, the same happened again. The ABiH were in front of, alongside and above the APC and fired intensely on the VRS positions. All this time, the apparently disciplined VRS did not fire back, while the ABiH soldiers did their best to involve the UN in the fight. Via the battalion Ops Room (the command post), Groen requested the VRS to be informed that the UN remained neutral. Whether that happened he did not know.⁹⁸³

Captain Groen felt obliged to stay in the vehicle so as not to be taken hostage by the ABiH. The way back to Srebrenica was blocked. The ABiH continued to fire on the VRS from the direct vicinity of the APC for the entire evening. This persisted until three o'clock in the morning. Contact was made by radio with the battalion staff, and the ABiH liaison team was requested to mediate.⁹⁸⁴ After some time, the ABiH liaison officer, Ekrem Salihovic, indeed appeared at the location. After that there was no more firing. According to Salihovic, there was chaos at the time among the ABiH soldiers there, and panic broke out because they ended up behind Dutchbat lines. In turn, Dutchbat demanded that the ABiH make an opening to allow the APC to withdraw.⁹⁸⁵ The ABiH appeared to have no other intention than to pin the APC to the spot. After consultation with the battalion staff, Groen sought a new location for an OP.⁹⁸⁶ An agreement was arrived at between the ABiH and Dutchbat: Dutchbat would remain in the new position, and the ABiH would occupy new positions somewhere else, and would not fire on Dutchbat.⁹⁸⁷ At five o'clock in the morning, the ABiH vanished.⁹⁸⁸ In the morning, another APC appeared under the command of Sergeant Van Eck to set up a new OP, which became OP-U.⁹⁸⁹ The Bosnian Muslims continued to insist on the recapture of OP-E by Dutchbat, however.⁹⁹⁰

Although the Dutchbat situation reports as well as Karremans' report made no mention of it, Close Air Support had been requested at the time of the capture of OP-E. This was the first time that Dutchbat III had done so. The request was submitted to Sarajevo, contrary to the applicable procedure, without a list of objectives. At that time there was a considerable amount of reluctance in Sarajevo to permitting Close Air Support. The staff officer responsible in Sarajevo had to ask the headquarters of Sector North East whether an attack was involved and whether that attack was directed specifically at UNPROFOR units. Before consensus was reached between Dutchbat and UNPROFOR on these questions, following extensive discussion, much time had been lost; the NATO aircraft that would have to carry out the Close Air Support could not remain in the air indefinitely. Therefore, according to the Chief of Staff of Sector North East, Colonel Brantz, it was not surprising that Sarajevo returned with

⁹⁸¹ Interview J. R. Groen, Havelte, 05/07/99.

⁹⁸² Information based on confidential debriefing statement (36).

⁹⁸³ Interview J. R. Groen, Havelte, 05/07/99.

⁹⁸⁴ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (36)

⁹⁸⁵ Interview Ekrem Salihovic, 02/12/98.

⁹⁸⁶ Confidential debriefing statement (36).

⁹⁸⁷ Interview Ekrem Salihovic, 02/12/98.

⁹⁸⁸ Confidential debriefing statement (36).

⁹⁸⁹ Confidential debriefing statement (36).

⁹⁹⁰ Confidential debriefing statement (43).

the statement that no aircraft were available; they had returned to their base. Brantz said that Dutchbat responded with amazement to this decision by Sarajevo; the battalion staff could not make head or tail of Sarajevo's air support policy.⁹⁹¹ In this case, Dutchbat was not entirely to blame. Not only had an American F-16 been shot down one day earlier, but a decision taken a few days earlier meant that, in view of the delicate situation in which UNPROFOR found itself after its personnel had been taken hostage, New York also wanted to be consulted before Close Air Support was considered. This meant that a decision on Close Air Support took even longer. The directive was otherwise confidential and was not to be disclosed to the troops.⁹⁹²

After the occupation of Zeleni Jadar, the VRS had the access to the town of Srebrenica in their hands. The VRS Skelani Brigade under the command of Colonel Vukovic, was now on either side of the road at Zeleni Jadar and controlled the communication lines and the high ground. War President Osman Suljic of the Opstina was convinced that the VRS were going to occupy the enclave at a later stage, and said that they conveyed this message to Karremans. The UN personnel may originally have understood matters correctly that only the OP was involved, but Suljic continued to think otherwise.⁹⁹³

The Bosnian Muslims were in agreement regarding the VRS objective of capturing OP-E: the use of the road link with Milici, the closure of the link between Zepa and Srebrenica, and gaining access to the bauxite mines.⁹⁹⁴ With the occupation of Zeleni Jadar, as mentioned the VRS also had the southern access to Srebrenica in their hands.⁹⁹⁵ According to Ramiz Becirovic, the Commander of the ABiH 28th division, there was no direct connection with the later attack on the enclave, however. There were provocations by the ABiH all that time, and the VRS had responded to it since December 1994. At the start of the actual attack on Srebrenica on 6 July too, Becirovic still assumed that the only objective of the VRS was to further open the road from Zeleni Jadar to Milici.⁹⁹⁶ Osman Suljic also thought that the objective of capturing OP-E was to enable the free use of the road from Bratunac to Milici.⁹⁹⁷ An underlying reason seen by the intelligence staff of the 2nd Corps in Tuzla was that the ABiH was supplied from Zepa via Zeleni Jadar, and the VRS wanted to bring an end to that situation.⁹⁹⁸ Within Sector North East, the staff likewise thought that the issue was the use of the road. It shortened the east-west links for the VRS considerably, it increased the possibility of keeping the population in the southern part of the enclave under control, of keeping an eye on the factory complexes to the south of OP-E, of restricting the traffic to Zepa and of exercising control on the bauxite mines (which were said to belong to the vice-president of the Parliament of the Republika Srpska).⁹⁹⁹ Civil Affairs Officer Ken Biser said that he had been proclaiming for a year that the VRS wanted to wrest control of the road concerned.¹⁰⁰⁰

The VRS did not accept Dutchbat's invitation for a discussion with a representative of the Drina Corps, the purpose of which was to convey a protest and to request the return of the materiel left behind: night vision sight, a radio, ammunition, two generators and UN uniforms were missing.¹⁰⁰¹ Dutchbat Liaison Officer Boering had already requested VRS Liaison Officer Nikolic to withdraw the

⁹⁹¹ NIOD, Coll Brantz. Diary of Brantz (version August 1999), p. 89.

⁹⁹² NIOD, Coll Brantz. Code Cable Janvier to Smith, 30/05/95, UN Conf.

⁹⁹³ Interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98.

⁹⁹⁴ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 2. Korpusa Odjeljenje za moral, 02/06/09, Str. pov. br. 04-84/95. Interview Dzemaludin Becirevic and Sefket Hafizovic, 21/10/97.

⁹⁹⁵ Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98, 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

⁹⁹⁶ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

⁹⁹⁷ Interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98.

⁹⁹⁸ Interview Hazrudin Kistic, 17/05/99 and 18/05/99. According to the service, a black shirt unit from Central Serbia had executed the attack on OP-E. Radio Milici and Radio Bratunac never made a secret of the fact that soldiers from Serbia served in the VRS.

⁹⁹⁹ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 25/77, File 1.1.57, SNE 4 April - 23 August 1995. Fax Biser to Corwin, 09/06/95, unnumbered.

¹⁰⁰⁰ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 42, File SNE, 25/77, 04/04/95 - 23/08/95. Fax Ken Biser to Ed Joseph Civil Affairs UNPF HQ, 05/06/95.

¹⁰⁰¹ NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. HQ Dutchbat to Sector HQ North East, Sitrep and Milinfo period 021700 to 031700B Jun 95.

VRS after the capture of OP-E, otherwise NATO Close Air Support would be requested. Nikolic said that he would pass the message on to a higher level, but it had no effect.¹⁰⁰²

Dutchbat also had a meeting with the leaders of the Opstina, Osman Suljic and Mayor Salihovic Fahrudin, and Military Commander Ramiz Becirovic. They stated that the ABiH was not in a state of readiness at the time of the VRS attack. The three proposed that the UN present an ultimatum to the VRS to the effect that the VRS should return as rapidly as possible to the old positions, and, failing that, to use Close Air Support. However, Karremans thought that, in the middle of a hostage crisis, the UN was not in a position to make demands. Karremans did agree to the request to intensify the observation activities at the Swedish Shelter Project and OP-R.¹⁰⁰³ In addition, Becirovic discussed with Dutchbat the return of surrendered ammunition, but this was refused by Dutchbat.

According to Becirovic, the battalion leaders pointed out in later discussions that Dutchbat had no mandate and insufficient weapons to act against an attack by the VRS. The Dutchbat leaders explained that the loss of OP-E was merely an incident and it could be solved.¹⁰⁰⁴ Moreover, according to Chief of Police Hakija Meholjic, Karremans did his best: he sent reports on the situation to his superiors in the organization and asked the War Presidency of Srebrenica to do the same towards Sarajevo.¹⁰⁰⁵ Such reporting from Srebrenica encountered problems however, because of trouble with the links at that time. For this reason, the 2nd Corps in Tuzla was not in a position to verify reports of the capture of OP-E, but if it was true, according to this 2nd Corps, then the General Staff of the ABiH should request UNPROFOR for military intervention at the highest level.¹⁰⁰⁶

Civil Affairs in Tuzla was afraid that the loss of OP-E would expose UNPROFOR to severe criticism in the media, especially if the Bosnian government were to recall that Bosnia-Herzegovina Command had been asked in September/October 1994 to arrange negotiations for the use of the road in exchange for electricity and water and better access to the enclave;¹⁰⁰⁷ it might have been possible to achieve that last aim then, but not any longer. The negative publicity came on 14 June with an issue of the newspaper *Ljiljan*, which reported that there was excellent collaboration between Dutchbat and the VRS, and that the VRS had informed Dutchbat that OP-E would be attacked so that Dutchbat could pull out in good time. The article was also full of insinuations: the Company Commander had urgently requested to be able to leave Srebrenica and had reported that the ABiH intended to attack UNPROFOR and to confiscate their weapons. Lower-ranking Dutchbat soldiers had requested the 'unarmed ABiH' for assistance in resisting further VRS attacks. The newspaper also accused two captains who they identified by name, the Dutchman Kooij and the Norwegian Toksted, of stating at a Sector North East intelligence meeting in Tuzla that the massacre in Tuzla on 25 May, in which a single shell in the centre had inflicted a large number of casualties, had been the work of the ABiH.¹⁰⁰⁸

The Bosnian Minister for UN Affairs, Hasan Muratovic, called the withdrawal from OP-E utterly 'outrageous'. The UN had neglected its duties and he deplored the UNPROFOR attitude towards the Safe Areas. Muratovic took the opportunity to stress that the Bosnian government had no plans for protecting the town, but it did have plans for protecting the residents. He did not make clear how this was supposed to happen.¹⁰⁰⁹ Governor Izet Hadzic of the Tuzla Canton requested the recapture of OP-E, which should take place in a similar way to what the French had done with the Vrbanja bridge in Sarajevo. Although Hadzic admitted only reluctantly that there were ABiH soldiers in

¹⁰⁰² Interview Omer Subasic, 19/10/97 and 20/10/97. Subasic was the interpreter on this occasion.

¹⁰⁰³ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 146.

¹⁰⁰⁴ ABiH Tuzla. 2nd Corps, unnumbered. Supplementary statement by Ramiz Becirovic (1956), 16/04/98, based on an earlier statement of 11/08/95. (The original statement was not found.)

¹⁰⁰⁵ Interview Hakija Meholjic, 02/02/98 with supplements on 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

¹⁰⁰⁶ ABiH Sarajevo. ABiH Command 2nd Corps to Command General Staff, 03/06/95, No. 02/1-592/2.

¹⁰⁰⁷ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 25/77, File 1.1.57, SNE 4 April - 23 August 1995. Fax Biser to Corwin, 09/06/95, unnumbered.

¹⁰⁰⁸ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 25/77, File 1.1.57, SNE 4 April - 23 August 1995. Fax Biser to Corwin, 21/06/95, unnumbered. A translation of *Ljiljan* of 14/06/95 was attached.

¹⁰⁰⁹ MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, No. 28/95, closed 141400B June 1995.

Srebrenica, he said to Civil Affairs Officer Ken Biser that he would warn them to refrain from provocative actions. According to Biser, it would only be a matter of time before the ABiH lured VRS vehicles into ambushes, which would result in the shelling of the enclave and the capture of even more OPs along the southern edge. The day after the capture of OP-E, the VRS had already started to take the road into use.¹⁰¹⁰

The only weapon Biser could see that he could use in the conflict to prevent further incursions of the VRS into the enclave was to mobilize the international media, but because Tuzla had no Public Information capacity, this would be a disastrous path to go down.¹⁰¹¹ Furthermore, the international media had other interests as long as the hostage crisis had not ended. Therefore there were no reports of the capture of OP-E in the international press. Only Radio Sarajevo referred to UNPROFOR's impotence to protect the population of Srebrenica; it was added that Dutchbat was even unable or unwilling to protect itself against attacks from the Bosnian Serbs, because it had handed over an OP complete with weapons. The station also reported that five tanks, ten armoured personnel carriers and ten howitzers had been brought in from Serbia, which had subsequently been fired on the innocent citizens of Srebrenica, killing or wounding dozens of citizens in Srebrenica and Zepa. The station claimed that the source of the information was the 2nd Corps in Tuzla, but the correspondent Nino Catic also informed Radio Sarajevo from Srebrenica that the VRS had shelled villages in the south on 5 June.¹⁰¹² It was not untrue that there had been shelling, that there was no question of there being many dead and wounded. The reports of the large-scale supply of equipment from Serbia was a part of the psychological warfare.

The loss of OP-E was also raised in discussions between Sector North East and the staff of the 2nd Corps in Tuzla. There was some sympathy for the fact that Dutchbat had abandoned the OP under pressure from the VRS, but it must not be allowed to happen for a second time, because it put the population in danger, the Chief of Staff of the 2nd Corps stated. Should Dutchbat abandon a second OP, then the ABiH should take matters into their own hands. At that time, the 2nd Corps feared that this would happen in the northeast of the enclave. Colonel Brantz, who represented Sector North East, said that he understood the 2nd Corps' attitude, but he emphasized that the Dutchbat commander was the only person who took decisions and Dutchbat was 'capable to do the job in the most proper way.'¹⁰¹³

Dutchbat feared attempts by the ABiH to recapture OP-E and to restore the old confrontation line, in which case the conflict would escalate and the ABiH would want their weapons back from the Weapon Collection Point. Meanwhile, Karremans informed the UN staff in Tuzla that if the capture of OP-E was indeed the start of a larger VRS attack, it would be inevitable that the ABiH would have to be given back their weapons in order to be able to defend themselves, because Dutchbat would not be in a position to defend the enclave.¹⁰¹⁴

It could not be ruled out that the ABiH wanted to take matters into their own hands. Ramiz Becirovic wanted instructions from Naser Oric on how the 28th division should position itself against Dutchbat if there was a threat of another OP being abandoned: should they disarm the Dutchbat personnel and take their equipment, or prevent them from withdrawing from the OP? In Becirovic's analysis, Dutchbat would not allow matters to come to a fight with the VRS, and the battalion had the intention of withdrawing further from the OPs and more into the enclave. However, Dutchbat would not want to admit that to the ABiH. The ABiH therefore felt that it had been misled by Dutchbat.

¹⁰¹⁰ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 25/77, File 1.1.57, SNE 4 April - 23 August 1995. Fax Biser to Corwin, 09/06/95, unnumbered.

¹⁰¹¹ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 25/77, File 1.1.57, SNE 4 April - 23 August 1995. Fax Biser to Joseph, 05/06/95, unnumbered.

¹⁰¹² BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 07/06/95, source Radio Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo, in Serbo-Croat 1300 gmt 05/06/95.

¹⁰¹³ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Memorandum Meeting with COS 2 Corps ABiH, 04/06/95.

¹⁰¹⁴ NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. HQ Dutchbat to Sector HQ North East, Sitrep and Milinfo period 021700 to 031700B Jun 95.

According to him, nothing had yet been achieved in the field, with which Becirovic was probably referring to the ideas mentioned earlier about a joint defence, which Franken had revealed on 29 May. The VRS was visibly busy everywhere demonstrating its strength. Srebrenica and Zepa were seriously threatened, and Becirovic also considered a media campaign to be necessary in order to maintain the enclaves. Becirovic further stated that it would be said that OP-E would be recaptured, and it concerned him that the VRS had taken away the OP's equipment and that an unknown quantity of weapons and uniforms had fallen into VRS hands.¹⁰¹⁵

The requested instructions of the 2nd Corps arrived on 7 July, not from Naser Oric, but from Sulejman Budakovic, the Chief of Staff of the 2nd Corps. Attempts must be made to make an agreement with Dutchbat to jointly repel a VRS attack. If Dutchbat refused, Becirovic was to take all possible measures not to allow a single metre of territory to fall into VRS hands. If a Dutchbat OP were to withdraw, the OP must be disarmed and the weapons used for their own purposes. According to Budakovic, the UN's instructions were to defend the enclave in the event of an attack, and that Dutchbat had also been given corresponding orders.¹⁰¹⁶

The fact that some Muslims said that Dutchbat abandoned OP-E without a struggle appeared to be motivated mainly by disappointment about the loss of this important point. The effect that the fall of OP-E had on the Potocari brigade (284th brigade), who were in the northern part of the enclave, was one of total demoralization. If the UN also gave in, what was the ABiH supposed to do then?¹⁰¹⁷ The loss of OP-E also meant that access to the Swedish Shelter Project, where three thousand Muslim Displaced Persons lived, was now open. The population had already declined from three thousand to two thousand.¹⁰¹⁸ As a result of the VRS shelling and the threat of sustained armed VRS force, 1000-1500 people fled from the Swedish Shelter Project to Srebrenica town. It was not the first and it would certainly also not be the last time that Displaced Persons in the period to the fall of the enclave would leave the Swedish Shelter Project. Forced by the degrading conditions in the overpopulated town, they always returned, however, when conditions appeared to be quiet.¹⁰¹⁹

It was not out of the question that fighting could break out on a larger scale in the south of the enclave. The VRS added reinforcements around OP-E and established lines around the factory complexes in Jasenova near Zeleni Jadar.¹⁰²⁰ In the night of 3/4 June, the population reported to the gate of the compound in Srebrenica that the ABiH was to launch a counterattack with one thousand men in the morning. Dutchbat did see many armed ABiH around OP-F but there was no question of a counterattack to regain control of the area near OP-E. Dutchbat also feared for the two other southern OPs: OP-F and OP-K could well be a subsequent VRS target. To be prepared for all eventualities, they took the precaution of moving four Quick Reaction Force APCs from the Potocari compound to Srebrenica. In the meantime, the VRS had settled into OP-E and was busy rebuilding it, but a bulldozer that was intended to reposition the defences was forced to turn back by ABiH rifle fire.¹⁰²¹

The VRS was informed on 4 June that Dutchbat has set up a new OP (OP-U) to the east of the Swedish Shelter Project in order to protect the population there. The VRS, in the person of Major Nikolic, accepted that; the establishment of new OPs was permitted in the vicinity of Slapovic (to the west of the Swedish Shelter Project) or Zivkovo Brdo on Hill 780 (to the east of the Swedish Shelter Project). Otherwise, Nikolic expressed his wrath about the fact that, after the capture of OP-E, Dutchbat had not intervened when the ABiH opened fire on the VRS. The ABiH had fired ten mortar

¹⁰¹⁵ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 2. Korpusa n/r k-danta 28.dKoV brig. Naser Orica, 03/06/95, Str. pov. br. 01-73/95.

¹⁰¹⁶ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa to K-di 28. DKov n/r zastupnika k-ta, K-di 285.lbr n/r k-danta, naznanje, 07/06/95, Str. pov. br. 02/1-620/1.

¹⁰¹⁷ On the basis of discussions with two Bosnian witnesses who wish to remain anonymous.

¹⁰¹⁸ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Eastern Enclaves Assessment, Appendix A to HQ UNPROFOR 800, dated 06/06/95, UN Confi.

¹⁰¹⁹ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Diary of Brantz.

¹⁰²⁰ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa to K-di 28. DKov n/r zastupnika k-ta, K-di 285.lbr n/r k-danta, naznanje, 07/06/95, Str. pov. br. 02/1-620/1.

¹⁰²¹ NIOD, Coll. Koremans, Diary of Koremans, 35th and 36th week p. 34 and 1-2.

shells on the VRS positions, and Dutchbat did not obstruct them, although they were sixty to seventy metres from the ABiH firing position. There was not even any attempt to stop the firing by the ABiH, and there was no attempt to disarm the ABiH soldiers. The VRS had not taken reprisals for the ABiH attack with artillery fire because a Dutchbat APC was positioned there. Nikolic demanded the immediate disarming of the ABiH and their removal from the hills above the Jadar valley, in other words, in the enclave. Otherwise, the VRS would drive the Muslims out by force. Furthermore, Dutchbat must remove the APC from the ABiH position, in order to avoid it being exposed to VRS fire in the event of the ABiH again opening fire on the VRS.¹⁰²² In an apparent attempt to press home this demand, a VRS tank (type T-54) pointed its gun at the new OP-U and fired. It missed the OP by one hundred metres.¹⁰²³

Assessment of the state of affairs

It was clear that the capture of OP-E entailed many tensions in the enclave. It made the population realize that the UN was not in a position to protect them. The warring factions started to behave more violently now that they saw that the UN remained inactive. After this, the UNMOs had little further contact with the VRS. Interpreter Petr Uscumlic was requested to contact the VRS, but he said that no one was available to talk to the UNMOs. This limited the chances of finding out what was going on on the Bosnian-Serb side.¹⁰²⁴

Disarming the ABiH was one of the conditions that Karadzic had set on UNPROFOR for the release of the UN soldier hostages. Karadzic also demanded complete demilitarization of the Safe Areas and enforcement of the arms embargo.¹⁰²⁵ In his assessment of the state of affairs, Karremans stated that it was impossible to disarm thousands of ABiH soldiers. Karremans concluded from the threats to drive out the Muslims if the ABiH were not disarmed, which had been made by VRS Major Nikolic, that the VRS might continue the attack within 36 hours. The objective would then be to gain control of the River Jadar valley and the high ground to the north of them as far as Mount Kak, which would correspond with the southern border of the enclave as the VRS saw it. With this, the Swedish Shelter Project, where there were still two thousand people, came to lie in the line of fire. For Dutchbat too, such an advance would have considerable consequences, because it would mean that OPs K, D, S and U would become isolated and then easy for the VRS to take over. In fact, Dutchbat would then have to take back these OPs. Karremans saw this as impossible, however, because the ABiH had already indicated that they would then take over Dutchbat's weapons and APCs, if necessary by force.¹⁰²⁶ In this way, a pattern developed in which Dutchbat increasingly found itself caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.

The intelligence section (in military terms known as the G-2) of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo assessed that the ABiH lacked the manpower to unite Srebrenica with Zepa, and that any conflict would probably be limited to defensive operations on the confrontation line. In turn, the VRS was expected to want to exercise greater control over ABiH activities in the enclave. After gaining possession of the southern access, the pressure would only increase. The pressure on the western edge of the enclave was already considerable. Attacks on the ABiH systems of trenches along the edge of the enclave would be certain to happen. Especially the roads in the north and south and in the vicinity of the bauxite mines would be hit hard. Because the ABiH was probably in no position to launch a counterattack, the VRS could carry out the operations slowly and methodically to avoid victims among

¹⁰²² CRST. Handwritten, English language statement of Major Nikolic. Appx. to Fax HQ Dutchbat to CO Sector North-East, COS BHC, 041500B June 1995. The same message reached the UNMOs through their interpreter in Bratunac, Petr Uscumlic. SMG 1001. Capsat UNMO Srebrenica to Dutchbat LO Team, 042123B Jun 95.

¹⁰²³ Diary of Koreman, 35th and 36th week p. 34 and 1-2.

¹⁰²⁴ Interview Bob Patchett, 19/11/99.

¹⁰²⁵ MID. MID INTSUM 27/95, closed 081400B Jun 1995.

¹⁰²⁶ CRST. Fax HQ Dutchbat to CO Sector North-East, COS BHC, 041500B June 1995.

their own troops. The Jadar valley and the ridge of hills to the north of it were viewed by the intelligence section as a probable target of a VRS attack. However, the intelligence section deemed an attack on the entire enclave and its occupation as improbable: the VRS would want to leave the refugee problem to the Bosnian authorities. The intelligence section saw little room for a Dutchbat withdrawal because the ABiH would thwart such an operation, as the situation around OP-E had shown. Furthermore, the ABiH had already stated that it would confiscate Dutchbat's weapons and armoured personnel carriers by force to obstruct a subsequent withdrawal.¹⁰²⁷

The Army Commander, General Rasim Delic, also expressed disappointment about the withdrawal of OP-E and said he would consider the UN to be an accessory if they failed to attack the VRS in the future. In a reply, General Smith indicated that he was extremely concerned about the outbreak of fighting in Srebrenica (and Gorazde). Smith took the opportunity to reiterate his instructions: 'to deter attacks on the civilian population by our presence, acting only in self-defence'. Delic should understand that UNPROFOR was not equipped and was in no position to fight. Smith assumed that Delic was also informed of the problems with supplying the enclaves and understood that reinforcement was out of the question. In spite of the situation, Smith believed that UNPROFOR was still in a position to be a deterrent and could continue to man OPs until such time as the situation became untenable and the lives of peacekeepers were in danger. Smith took the opportunity to again make clear to Delic that UNPROFOR had to remain neutral. This meant that UNPROFOR could not act together with the ABiH. Smith did emphasize that he was prepared to use force and to recommend the use of air power.¹⁰²⁸

On 6 June, Smith sent his assessment of the situation in East-Bosnia to Akashi and Janvier. In Smith's opinion, the VRS appeared to be aiming to exhaust the ABiH and force them to capitulate by means of a siege. Smith also expected that the VRS would continue to neutralize UNPROFOR. The arrival of supplies, and in particular fuel, was subjected to strict VRS control, or was not permitted at all. The Bosnian Serbs were aiming to undermine the Safe Area regime in such a way that they could deal with their enemy with impunity. The deteriorating situation would also not leave the politicians unmoved, Smith thought: the humanitarian need among the population, possible ethnic cleansing and the further immobilization of the UN would lead to a call to punish the Bosnian Serbs or to deter them from further action. Should UNPROFOR resign itself to the situation, then this would lead to pressure from the Bosnian government to lift the arms embargo. Smith feared that it was impossible to return to a Safe Area regime such as had existed before the air strikes of 25 and 26 May, certainly in view of the impossibility of adequate supplies. In order to prevent a withdrawal from the enclaves, and because the troops and population could no longer be fed, a solution was necessary for the long term. And, Smith wondered in his letter to Akashi and Janvier, what would happen if they were to be an attack on a Safe Area?¹⁰²⁹

4. Developments in June: an imminent VRS attack?

After the skirmishes in early June and the capture of OP-E, it was again reasonably quiet in Srebrenica, also compared with the state of affairs elsewhere in Bosnia. The situation resembled a status quo. There was a change in the situation towards the end of the month. The number of reported Firing Close Incidents on Dutchbat OPs and patrols increased sharply, so that the number of incidents in June ultimately exceeded the number for the entire period from January to June 1995.¹⁰³⁰

¹⁰²⁷ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Eastern Enclaves Assessment, Appendix A to HQ UNPROFOR 800, dated 06/06/95, UN Conf.

¹⁰²⁸ NIOD, Coll. Smith. LtGen R.A. Smith to Army General Rasim Delic, 05/06/95, unnumbered. Delic's letter to Smith was not found.

¹⁰²⁹ NIOD, Coll. Smith. LtGen R.A. Smith to HQ UNPF for SRS, FC, DFC, COS, 06/06/95, File No. 8940, UN Conf.

¹⁰³⁰ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Letter Commanding Officer 1(NL)UN Infbn (Dutchbat3) to Commander Sector North East, 07/07/95, No. TK95112.

Around the time that the hostage crisis consequent to the Pale bombings in mid June was resolved, the ABiH started an offensive around Sarajevo. June was also marked by heavy fighting around Sarajevo, which radiated out to other areas in Bosnia, and also did not leave Srebrenica unaffected. In Gorazde, the fighting that had started in May continued. In comparison, it was still quiet in Srebrenica. After mid June, however, the number of incidents between the combatants increased around Srebrenica too, with provocative actions that extended beyond the enclave borders. This was largely concerned with the offensive started by the ABiH at Sarajevo. These actions around Srebrenica at the end of June appeared to create an atmosphere that led to increasing embitterment on the side of the Bosnian Serbs and that paved the way for more drastic measures.

Matters were brewing in the south of the enclave especially. Skirmishes between VRS and ABiH in the area around OP-E continued. The ABiH reinforced its positions and fired with mortars and weapons of all calibres at the factory complex at Zeleni Jadar.¹⁰³¹ The VRS showed that they were not satisfied with the occupation of OP-E, and after 4 June they attempted to occupy the area of Turija (between OP-F and OP-E) too. In the early evening of 5 June, there was another attempt by the ABiH to recapture the surroundings of OP-E. The VRS replied with mortar and tank fire. The pressure waves from the explosions could be felt on OP-U. As darkness fell, the fighting ended, however; the attack had failed. The resistance was too great for the lightly-armed ABiH. On 6 June there were new attacks by the VRS on Turija.¹⁰³²

In all the confusion during the ABiH's attempts to recapture OP-E, the three thousand residents of the Swedish Shelter Project fled yet again, only to return because of the lack of accommodation in Srebrenica. Many left their possessions behind in Srebrenica in anticipation of another quick escape. The rumour machine, fed from outside the enclave, continued to run at full speed.¹⁰³³ Representatives of the Swedish Rescue Service Agency heard on *Sky Radio* that the VRS had threatened to fire on Dutchbat if Dutchbat were to try to recapture OP-E, and that in response, Dutchbat had threatened air strikes. There were no grounds for either assertion.¹⁰³⁴

The VRS, through Major Nikolic, complained to Dutchbat that the ABiH was continuing to send patrols to lay ambushes outside the enclave. The VRS would keep quiet if the ABiH did too, according to Nikolic. But if the ABiH attacked, the VRS would repulse the attack with heavy weapons and attack the ABiH positions to oust them not only from the positions, but, if necessary, also from the entire enclave. Nikolic took the opportunity to repeat that the attack on OP-E had been provoked by the ABiH. The VRS nonetheless had some understanding for the fact that Dutchbat had to keep doing its work, and Nikolic promised that the battalion would therefore no longer be attacked directly.¹⁰³⁵

In the meantime, the ABiH was busy improving its positions, and digging trenches and bunkers. The ABiH denied Dutchbat access to some areas. For instance, for no clear reason, Dutchbat was no longer allowed on Zanic hill near OP-R. On the Kvarac hill, on the opposite side, there were many positions that controlled the eastern access road to Srebrenica via Zalazje. Dutchbat personnel were able to use a thermal imaging sight to observe forty to fifty people digging day and night in the surroundings of OP-Q. Dutchbat turned a blind eye to Bosnian Muslims carrying weapons in the enclave, because of the threat of the presence of the Bosnian Serbs. The battalion staff indicated that they disregarded the practice and did not deny the ABiH the right to self-defence, although this was not in line with orders from higher echelons.¹⁰³⁶

¹⁰³¹ SMG, 1001. Milinfo 07/06/95, period 060600-070600B.

¹⁰³² NIOD, Coll. Koreman. Diary of Koreman, 36th week, p. 7; NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. Dutchbat Milinfo period 040600 - 050600 B Jun 95; SMG 1001. Daily Sitrep of 041600B Jun 95 - 051600B Jun 95, C-BCie to Dutchbat; Interview Hazrudin Kistic, 17/05/99 and 18/05/99.

¹⁰³³ MSF Brussels. Capsat MSF Srebrenica to MSF Beograd, 05/07/95 15:56 No. Out 709.

¹⁰³⁴ CRST. UNHCR Srebrenica to UNHCR Belgrade, 5/06/95 20:56.

¹⁰³⁵ SMG 1004/23. Capsat Maj Franken to Cap Groen, 06/06/95. NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. HQ Sector NE Daily Milinfosum from 051700B to 061700B Jun 95.

¹⁰³⁶ Debriefing statement of First Lieutenant L.C. van Duijn, 12/09/95; interview L.C. van Duijn, 02/07/99.

Dutchbat knew almost nothing of what was going on outside the enclave. There was only an occasional sighting of VRS troop movements, which were mainly in the south, where the occasional tank was spotted.¹⁰³⁷ On rare occasions, the lights of the columns could be observed with thermal imaging sights on a clear night as they moved along the Drina, although it was impossible to say whether this was on the Bosnian or the Serbian side. Dutchbat also saw that the ABiH regularly patrolled with two or three men. They left the enclave at OP-Q and OP-R, and then proceeded through a valley in the direction of Bratunac and Sase as far as the Drina. Mines were also said to be laid, and now and again they went off.¹⁰³⁸

Otherwise, there all sorts of events that Dutchbat did not immediately understand. For instance, in the night of 5 to 6 June, helicopters were spotted several times at various places around the enclave. Also, a number of pieces of VRS artillery that had been set up to the northwest of the enclave, disappeared. Not that it became any quieter there: there was also intimidation of OPs by the VRS in the north of the enclave, and bullets flew over various OPs. On the same night, an ABiH patrol encountered a VRS patrol in the surroundings of OP-E, which led to exchanges of fire, with the VRS using mortars and tanks.¹⁰³⁹ This exchange of fire arose more or less by coincidence; the ABiH said that it was not planning to attack there.¹⁰⁴⁰

From the battle noise that Dutchbat observed, however, it could be concluded that something was brewing. For instance, on 8 and 9 June, the battalion counted 1165 small calibre shots, 316 heavy calibre shots and 27 explosions in a period of 24 hours, the great majority of which were outside the enclave.¹⁰⁴¹ Nevertheless, Dutchbat still expected no change in the situation in the short term.¹⁰⁴² The Military Intelligence Service of the RNLA also expected the skirmishes to continue for some time, but the Service assessed the probability of an attack on one of the eastern enclaves under these circumstances as low.¹⁰⁴³

Signs of a VRS attack?

The Dutch Military Intelligence Service's assessment that a VRS attack was improbable suddenly appeared to change when the Commander of the 28th Division, Ramiz Becirovic, and his intelligence officer, Ekrim Salihovic, called an emergency meeting with Dutchbat on 8 June. They informed the liaison team that a VRS attack was to be expected during the evening of 8 June or the morning of 9 June. General Mladic was said to have personally ordered the attack and the neutralization of all Dutchbat OPs. Troops concentrated in the area of Brezani (four kilometres to the east of OP-E). One axis of attack would be to the south of OP-R towards Srebrenica town, while the other would run alongside OP-F and then bear off to the north towards the town. In addition to the VRS Skelani Brigade, special units, which were involved earlier in the capture of OP-E, were to take part in the attack. Because the message came from the same source that announced the attack on OP-E, Karremans considered it to be reliable.¹⁰⁴⁴

The intelligence report that the liaison officer of the 28th Division of the ABiH, Ekrem Salihovic, sent to the 2nd Corps in Tuzla, was less alarming in its tone. Although this report indicated that data on the possible attack had been passed to Dutchbat, the VRS activities that were mentioned related mainly to the north-western part of the enclave. The VRS may have been performing intensive

¹⁰³⁷ NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. HQ Dutchbat to Sector HQ North East, Daily Milinfosum from 061700 to 071700B Jun 95.

¹⁰³⁸ Interview L.C. van Duijn, 02/07/99.

¹⁰³⁹ NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. Milinfo 05 and 07/06/95, period 040600-050600 and 060600-070600B.

¹⁰⁴⁰ SMG 1004/23. Capsat Maj Franken to Cap Groen, 06/06/95.

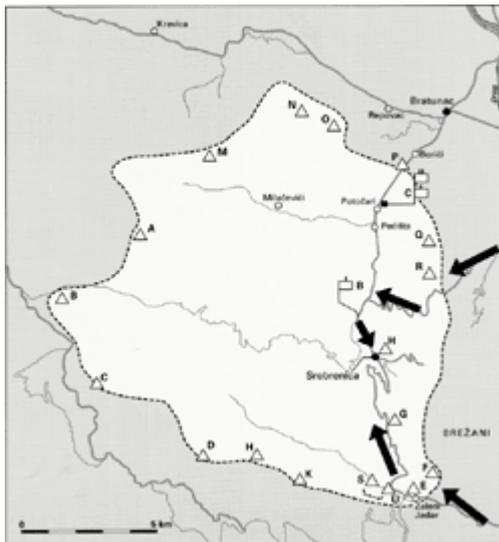
¹⁰⁴¹ NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. Milinfo, 09/06/95, period 080600-090600B.

¹⁰⁴² NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. HQ Dutchbat to Sector HQ North East, Daily Milinfosum from 061700 to 071700B Jun 95.

¹⁰⁴³ MID/RNLA INTSUM 106/95, 061200Z Jun 95.

¹⁰⁴⁴ SMG 1004/25. Fax Dutchbat to CO-SNE, COS-BHC info CO-RNLA Crisis Staff, 08/06/95, UNPROFOR Confi. This document does not exist in the Coll. Karremans, neither is it included in *Srebrenica: Who Cares?*

reconnaissance at Zalazje near OP-R, but the ABiH themselves had not observed it in the field.¹⁰⁴⁵ Other ABiH sources did consider that the situation was alarming and that a VRS attack on the enclave was imminent: Captain Nijaz Masic, who was responsible for the morale of the 28th Division, concluded from the intensification of the propaganda from the VRS side, the logistics support that was said to be received from Serbia, and the improving VRS morale, that the VRS finally wanted to conquer East Bosnia.¹⁰⁴⁶ An intelligence officer of the 2nd Corps also said that on 6 June military engineers from Serbia had arrived with equipment, artillery and direction finding equipment in Pribicevac, where the VRS had an advance command post.¹⁰⁴⁷



Karremans mentioned in his *Srebrenica: Who Cares?* that, on 8 June, the British Joint Commission Observers (the JCOs) attached to the battalion, also approached him with the suspicion that the VRS would attack all enclaves within two weeks. In his book, Karremans said that he passed reports from them and from the ABiH regarding a possible attack on to the higher echelon,¹⁰⁴⁸ but the specific message that Karremans sent to Tuzla, Sarajevo and The Hague only included the information that had been provided by the ABiH on an attack, and not the JCOs' suspicions. Neither did the JCOs make their own report, although they did report to Sarajevo that the warning from the ABiH regarding an 'imminent attack' was reason for concern, but that they themselves had heard such rumours on several occasions and attached little value to them. The JCOs said they could not provide Sarajevo with any confirmation of the VRS plans.¹⁰⁴⁹

The Military Intelligence Service (MOD) in The Hague analysed the report from the ABiH and came to the conclusion that there were no indications of large-scale troop concentrations. On the other hand, according to this Military Intelligence Service (RNLA) analysis, the VRS were strong enough around the enclave to perform a limited operation in the enclave border area, and it did not appear unlikely that, as in Gorazde, the VRS would attempt to gain control of parts of the enclave. However, the MID (Military Intelligence Service) considered it premature to view the limited operation against OP-E as an overture for further operations. In Gorazde, similar warnings from the ABiH reached UNPROFOR. However, their import appeared to be that Dutchbat should vacate the OPs so that the ABiH could take them over themselves. It was conceivable that the Bosnian warnings in Srebrenica had

¹⁰⁴⁵ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa, 08/08/95, Str. Pov. Br. 02-06-27/95.

¹⁰⁴⁶ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa RBiH Odjeljenje morala, 09/08/95, Str. Pov. Br. 04-93/95.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Interview Hazrudin Kisić, 17/05/99 and 18/05/99.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Karremans *Srebrenica: Who Cares?*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Confidential information (1).

the same purpose. Another possibility seen by the Military Intelligence Service (MID) was that the ABiH warning could be intended to lay the responsibility for any escalation at the door of the VRS in advance. The minister was informed of the matter.¹⁰⁵⁰

Later in July 2000, this 'warning from Karremans' would emerge in the media as evidence of advance knowledge of an attack on the enclave, and as evidence of the fact that The Hague had paid no attention to the matter. It was stated that Deputy Commander Van Baal did not consider it necessary to inform Minister Voorhoeve about Karremans' message, but, as stated above, Voorhoeve definitely was informed. According to a Ministry spokesman, the fact that Voorhoeve did not respond was because the message was also addressed to UNPROFOR: Defence said that it was the UN's task to respond, and not the Army's.¹⁰⁵¹

Another accusation was that UNPROFOR had done nothing with Karremans' information that the entire enclave would be attacked. This was with reference to the report from the British JCOs, but it was argued that it involved no more than a warning and not a probable event.

Analyses of the MID (MID/RNII) regarding a possible VRS attack went no further than to assume that the VRS might continue capturing OPs and that the ABiH would attempt to step up the tension through provocation, resulting in: shelling of ABiH positions and possible civilian targets.¹⁰⁵² This analysis was confirmed a few days later: according to an analyst, a repetition of the scenario that was applied in the capture of OP-E was possible, but as long as the hostage crisis had not been resolved, this would be politically unacceptable to the command of the Republika Srpska. Should the VRS nonetheless resort to action, they would probably limit themselves to OPs; the occupation of large parts of the enclave was unlikely for the time being.¹⁰⁵³ At the time, neither did anyone within Dutchbat have the notion that the Bosnian Serbs might capture the entire enclave. The idea did exist that the VRS would try to nibble away at parts of the enclave, in particular OP-A, OP-R and OP-Q.¹⁰⁵⁴

Provocations from the side of the ABiH were meanwhile a cause of great concern for UNPROFOR. The Commander of Sector North East in Tuzla, the Norwegian Brigadier General Haukland, demanded that General Sead Delic, as commander of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH, take steps to ensure that the ABiH refrained from making their way outside the enclave. The fact was that this would only aggravate the situation in which Dutchbat and the population found themselves. The concerns also included 'slivo-firing', which was the warring factions' practice of firing bullets and shells while under the influence of drink. ABiH soldiers regularly fired on the VRS, which led to escalation if the VRS fired back with heavy equipment.

Delic, however, responded by washing his hands in innocence: he did not see how firing a couple of rounds could provoke someone, and the ABiH only responded to actions by the VRS. According to him, the men in the enclave had no choice but to defend their families. Delic announced that he feared for the safety of the enclave, and that the ABiH and Dutchbat should defend it together. He also proposed that Dutchbat lay mines in front of the OPs, but he received the answer that there were no mines in a peacekeeping force's arsenal. At the same time, Delic did not think that the VRS would resort to combat with Dutchbat about the OPs. However, should Dutchbat withdraw from them without firing, it would be a sign of weakness that the VRS would want to exploit. This led to Delic's announcement that he had ordered the ABiH 'with all means to provide security for UNPROFOR'. In other words, the protector was to be protected by a nominally disarmed ABiH in

¹⁰⁵⁰ Bstas. Memorandum Head of Operations (Col R.S. van Dam) to the Minister, State Secretary, CDS, PCDS and SCOCIS, 09/06/95, unnumbered. It is unclear whether and how Karremans was informed of the MID's findings. The MID also pointed out that in the preceding days the ABiH had fired over the newly equipped OP-U towards the VRS, with the apparent purpose of provoking the VRS and involving the UN in the conflict.

¹⁰⁵¹ See current affairs section NOVA of 11/07/00 and: 'Alarm Karremans over enclave werd genegeerd' (Karremans' alarm about enclave ignored), in: *De Volkskrant*, 12/07/00.

¹⁰⁵² MID/RNLA, INTSUM 107/95, 071200Z Jun 95.

¹⁰⁵³ MID/RNLA. INTSUM 109/95, 091200Z Jun 95.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Interview L.C. van Duijn, 02/07/99.

Srebrenica! Haukland did not ask for any explanation of the meaning of this announcement. Delic did say that he was satisfied with Dutchbat's presence; according to him, the Netherlands was one of the few countries able to do the work there, and he would not want to see the battalion replaced by one from another country.¹⁰⁵⁵

After the alarming reports that reached Dutchbat from the ABiH side on 8 June of an imminent attack, relatively little happened. On the contrary, the situation even appeared to become more relaxed and the battle noise declined. Only in the north of the enclave did the VRS fire 25 rounds at OP-M. OPs in the southern part of the enclave, and in particular OP-K, may well have seen regular movement of the VRS, or were told so by residents, but the movements did not appear to be hostile. The VRS occupation of OP-E was actually reinforced with thirty men, and there was movement in the factory complex near Zeleni Jadar, but that had more of an economic than a military significance: groups of VRS soldiers were dragging slabs of marble away. A number of days saw no change in this picture of relative quiet. There was also frequent traffic again between Srebrenica and Zepa for supply purposes, with horses.¹⁰⁵⁶

On the face of it, therefore, the message that originated from the ABiH about an attack was incorrect. However, there could have also been more strategic factors at that time for not persisting with an attack; the VRS' attention was needed on other fronts. The strategy of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH was to attack at as many locations as possible, so as to confuse the VRS soldiers about where real attacks were going to take place. In this way, the VRS were tied up around the enclave, and the ABiH prevented these VRS men being deployed elsewhere (around Sarajevo). The VRS indeed had a shortage of men and had lost the initiative. The Bosnian Muslims were out to gain time and to avoid significant defeats. It was not the intention to get involved in a real fight, because then the ABiH would be no match for the VRS.

The VRS was probably also keeping its powder dry around the Srebrenica enclave in the light of the imminent ABiH offensive around Sarajevo; in the event of it becoming necessary to fight there, it would be better for them to conserve their strength now. The ABiH had already concentrated 25% of its total strength there. Closer to home, there were ABiH troop movements around Tuzla, division command posts were moved forward, and a new attack seemed likely on the Stolice communication towers and on positions in the Majevisa hills and Mount Vis, from which it was possible to fire on Tuzla. The VRS strategy was mainly oriented to the conduct of a counter-offensive in those areas and the strengthening of units there.

In mid June, the assessment of the Army Intelligence and Security Departments was still that a large scale attack on Srebrenica was improbable. In addition, the strategic importance of Gorazde to the Bosnian Serbs was not considered to apply to Srebrenica.¹⁰⁵⁷

In mid June, Dutchbat too expected no change in the fairly quiet situation in the coming days.¹⁰⁵⁸ Karremans stated that Dutchbat was completely surrounded, but a withdrawal of the OPs was no longer an option. In the light of a possible UNPROFOR regrouping and some relief of the fuel shortage problem, Karremans did speak on this subject with the Chief of Staff of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo, Nicolai. Withdrawal of the OPs was no longer urgent for Sarajevo, however.

¹⁰⁵⁵ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 118, Civil Affairs-Sector North-East, 1994-1995. Minutes of Meeting with Brig Delic/Comd 2 Corps on June 7th 1995. Author MA/Comd Sec NE Maj Valved.

¹⁰⁵⁶ SMG, 1001. Capsat OPS 61 to OPS 90, 9/06/95 11:00; C-BCie to Dutchbat, 9/06/95 13:22; NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. HQ Sector NE Daily Milinfosum from 081700B to 091700B Jun 95; NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. HQ Sector NE Daily Milinfosum from 091700B to 101700B Jun 95; CRST. HQ Sector NE Daily Milinfosum from 101700B to 111700B Jun 95.

¹⁰⁵⁷ CRST. HQ Sector NE Daily Milinfosum from 081700B to 091700B Jun 95; NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. UNMO HQ Sector NE to UNMO BHC, Weekly Milinfosum 23/95, 111000B Jun 95; NIOD, Coll. Theunens. Interoffice Memorandum G2 Military Information Branch UNPF-HQ, G2 to COS, 12/06/95. Appendix A (Milinfosum) to HQ UNPROFOR Sarajevo dated 13/06/95; NIOD, Coll. Svensson. G2 Briefing SRSG 12/06/ 95; MID/RNLA. DOKL, Dept Intelligence and Security, Sect Information: Weekintsum No. 23/95, 7 June - 12 June, Confi.

¹⁰⁵⁸ MSF Brussels. Capsat MST Srebrenica to MSF Beo, 13/06/95 15:43.

Karremans also stated that it was no longer an option to hold fuel in reserve for a possible hasty departure of Dutchbat from the enclave.¹⁰⁵⁹

5. The NATO withdrawal plan

Whereas for Dutchbat at that time an evacuation was no longer a requisite, around this time NATO's Southern European Command (AFSOUTH) did seriously work on a plan for a possible withdrawal of UN troops from the enclaves, in the context of what was known as NATO contingency plan (OPlan) 40104, also known as Operation Determined Effort. The purpose of this plan was for the UN personnel and their personal weapons to be withdrawn; everything else was to be left behind.

In August 1994, NATO had already started to draw up plans to facilitate a withdrawal of UNPROFOR from Bosnia and Croatia in military terms. This meant the start of a slow and complicated process, which was actually also the first time NATO had developed a major plan that was no longer oriented to the East-West differences of previous times. Whereas the political line then used to be clear, in the case of the former Yugoslavia it was not. This led on the one hand to unsatisfactory political direction from the North Atlantic Council, and on the other hand to a significant involvement of this Council in all manner of details. Neither did the fact that both the UN and NATO were involved make matters any easier, with the prospect of UNPF still performing its duties while elsewhere in the operational area NATO was busy with an evacuation. Neither would it be an easy operation. Only at the end of June 1995 did the North Atlantic Council give provisional approval to the most important parts of the 'Contingency plan 40104 Determined Effort'. Before the plan could be put into effect, in addition to a decision by the North Atlantic Council, a resolution was also first required from the Security Council. In the execution of this plan, the United States stood opposite the European countries, with the Netherlands in the middle.¹⁰⁶⁰ (For the relevant political background, see Chapter 1).

The operational preparations would also be drastic: before a start could be made on the execution of the plan, it would first be necessary to concentrate a NATO military force in Italy, followed by a deployment to Croatia and the Adriatic Sea. After that, withdrawal routes must be opened for UNPROFOR. Execution of the plan was no sinecure, certainly not if it should come down to fighting with the warring factions. For Bosnia, the plans had to be tailored to the evacuation of 22,000 men, 1300 armoured personnel carriers, 5000 other vehicles and 14,000 containers. For Croatia, 13,000 men, 800 armoured personnel carriers, 2000 other vehicles and an unknown number of containers were involved. For the eastern enclaves, withdrawal meant that several confrontation lines had to be crossed. Each enclave would need a brigade with tanks and armoured personnel carriers (in military terms: a mechanized brigade). Subsequently, a road would have to be found to an embarkation port.

How the warring factions would react to all this was a question that NATO found difficult to answer. The Bosnian Serbs might see a withdrawal as a signal to attack the ABiH, so that UNPROFOR would then become involved. The ABiH would seem to have the most interest in a continuation of the UNPROFOR presence, and could consequently apply delaying tactics. The most unpredictable response would be that of the population. The residents of the enclaves especially would probably prefer not to see UNPROFOR depart, and could attempt to prevent them from doing so using women and children. This could well form the greatest threat and challenge for NATO. The danger of sabotage, mines, the blowing up of bridges and the theft of equipment came in second place. Neither were shelling with artillery and mortars ruled out. Attacks with ground forces on the NATO units still formed the smallest threat.¹⁰⁶¹

¹⁰⁵⁹ NIOD, Coll. Nicolai. Diary of Nicolai 11/06/95.

¹⁰⁶⁰ DCBC, 1456. Code Veenendaal NATO 975, 28/06/95.

¹⁰⁶¹ RNLAf. The head of the Central Support Operations Department, Training, Plans, Evaluations and Reports to distribution list, 19/06/95, No. DOP 95049467/956, Conf.

The military plan that was necessary for this operation was actually at an advanced stage, and if the worst came to the worst it was expected that the political decision-making could also be speeded up. General Janvier and Admiral Smith had spoken to each other at the end of May regarding what was known as the Quick Response Options (rapidly deployable NATO units). This was specifically intended to withdraw the troops from the eastern enclaves. Janvier had then emphasized the necessity of immediately having a plan available for the support of UNPROFOR in a combat situation.¹⁰⁶² The associated planning was delegated to Strike Force South, the mainly American NATO fleet in the Mediterranean, where Royal Netherlands Marine Corps Major E.J. van Broekhuizen made the plan for Srebrenica.

The attention in the plan was mainly on Bihac and in the second place on Zepa and Gorazde, and not so much on Srebrenica. For the execution of the operations, there were to be two Quick Response Options: the Marine Expeditionary Unit was available and the United Kingdom/Netherlands Landing Force would be made available. Both these marine units were able to reach the eastern enclaves by helicopter from amphibious vessels off the coast, possibly through a Forward Operating Base. An important part of this plan consisted of identifying Landing Zones where large helicopters (types CH-53 or CH-47) could land simultaneously, and could not be threatened.

For Srebrenica it was not a simple matter in the densely populated and hilly area to find such landing sites. Many questions had to be answered for the rest of the planning: could the Landing Zones and the inward and outward flight paths be secured, was it also possible to assemble the personnel of the OPs there, and what danger did they have to fear from the local Armed forces? Dutchbat answered a questionnaire that was intended to clarify such questions. The fact that the ABiH and the local population would obstruct a departure, whether or not by force of arms, formed a greater problem than the VRS response. The Bosnian Serbs were possibly even prepared to lend a helping hand and allow the helicopters to land in their territory. This was certainly not an absurd idea: on 18 September 1994, Karadzic had already offered General Rose permission for isolated UNPROFOR units in the enclaves to withdraw via Bosnian-Serb territory, in which the VRS would provide help to prevent UNPROFOR weapons falling into the hands of the ABiH. The cooperation of the VRS in the event of execution of the plan might even be necessary: the only possible Landing Zones in the enclave were on and adjacent to the Potocari compound in the sight of the VRS, and voltage power lines also formed a problem. Furthermore, the entire enclave was within range of the VRS artillery. On request, Dutchbat made 'tactical pictures' of the area, and marked them up with the terrain configuration and the VRS positions.¹⁰⁶³

The intention was to keep these withdrawal plans secret, but this was unsuccessful. For instance, Dutchbat asked *Médecins Sans Frontières* what it would do in the event of a Dutchbat evacuation.¹⁰⁶⁴ Dutchbat interpreters also got wind of the search for Landing Zones, although it had the effect of reinforcing their suspicion that plans for bringing in supplies by air were involved.¹⁰⁶⁵

In the execution of the plan, the NATO commanders could be confronted with a nightmare scenario and ethical dilemmas. The North Atlantic Council decided that alongside the military tasks, it was necessary to deal cautiously with obstruction from citizens, that obstacles to negotiation had to be removed by negotiation or - if necessary - the clearance must take place with non-lethal force. Commanders would also have to provide 'humanitarian support' to the population, while not allowing it to deflect them from a timely completion of the withdrawal, and to the extent that they had troops

¹⁰⁶² UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 88040, File 4-2 SRSG Meeting, Srebrenica Staff 95 May-Oct. SRSG, Senior Staff Meeting, 01/06/95.

¹⁰⁶³ DCBC 2404. Fax Dep NLL0 AFSOUTH (KLTZ A. Stoel) to HDCBC, 30/05/95 and fax DCBC to the RNLA Crisis Staff, 12/06/95, No. 442; DCBC, 1451. Fax NLL0 AFSOUTH, 27/06/95; DCBC, 1460. Fax HQ Dutchbat Srebrenica to RNLA Crisis Staff, 14/06/95, 'Questions from Strike Force South'.

¹⁰⁶⁴ MSF Brussels. Capsat MSF Srebre to MSF Beo, 14/06/95 15:41, No. Out 801.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Interview Hasan Nuhanovic, 05/08/97 and 06/08/97.

available for the purpose. Life-threatening violence would have to be stopped if the necessary resources and opportunities were present.¹⁰⁶⁶

All that was easier said than done: inadvertently it resurrected images from March 1993 of General Morillon detained in Srebrenica. NATO assumed that in the event of an UNPROFOR departure, the confrontation lines in Bosnia would remain where they were, but that in the event of execution of the plan, the Bosnian government could well decide to evacuate Srebrenica and Zepa. This would bring about an exodus in the direction of Tuzla, which could have an influence on NATO military operations. NATO units would have to offer the population limited protection, and lead them through the confrontation lines with movement control.¹⁰⁶⁷

6. The ABiH offensive at Sarajevo

On an operational level, the ABiH resumed the offensive at Sarajevo in June.¹⁰⁶⁸ It is important to dwell briefly on this offensive, because it also appeared to have an influence on the situation around Srebrenica. In addition to all the problems that existed in connection with restrictions to the freedom of movement and the supplying of the enclaves, there was also the uncertainty surrounding the intentions and outcomes of the offensive that had started around Sarajevo. The strategy behind this offensive was discussed in Chapter 1; we discuss here the operational aspects of the offensive.

The Bosnian Serbs appeared to be able to offer resistance to the offensive, which led to the - justified - fear at UN headquarters in Zagreb that the ABiH in the eastern enclaves would attempt to tie up as many VRS units as possible there, to prevent them from going to take part in the fighting around Sarajevo.¹⁰⁶⁹

The offensive at Sarajevo was a life-and-death affair for the ABiH. The ABiH attempted, with the support of Croatian artillery, to cut off all VRS supply routes by attacking at several locations and exhausting the VRS. Thirty thousand men (ABiH), supported by six thousand Croatian soldiers found themselves confronted by twelve to fifteen thousand VRS men (VRS).¹⁰⁷⁰

Attacks were launched on five different roads to Sarajevo, both to and from Sarajevo. As usual, the VRS responded with the use of heavy weapons on the ABiH axes of attack, and the shelling of military targets and government buildings in the town.¹⁰⁷¹ UNPROFOR had little insight into the precise relationship of this offensive with the fighting in Northeast Bosnia, although it was observed that the activities died down at the same time as the offensive at Sarajevo.¹⁰⁷²

The apparent objective of the ABiH in East Bosnia was to prevent the Drina Corps sending reinforcements to Sarajevo, and to cut the link with Zvornik. The Sector North East Military Intelligence Officer was of the opinion that the ABiH also had the longer term desire to recapture Zvornik and the Podrinje (the area containing Srebrenica). The Drina Corps was responsible for an enormous area, which, as a former Muslim area, was largely empty, and gave rise to a wide scattering of the troops.

The VRS appeared to be satisfied for the time being with occupying the hilltops and assuming that with their superior artillery strength would enable them to prevent the ABiH concentrating for an

¹⁰⁶⁶ DCBC, 1459. Code Veenendaal NATO 931, 19/06/95.

¹⁰⁶⁷ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 62/77, File 2.8, Nato 25/05/93 - 05/07/95. UNPF HQ, Internal Memorandum from Matthew Hodes Legal Adviser to HCA, 14/06/95, Conf.

¹⁰⁶⁸ NIOD, Coll. Theunens. G2 UNPF HQ, Daily Military Information Summary from 250001B to 252359B Jun 95.

¹⁰⁶⁹ MID/RNLA. MID/RNLA, INTSUM 114/95, 161200Z Jun 95.

¹⁰⁷⁰ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, Weekly Situation Report, 28/06/95, No. Z-1069.

¹⁰⁷¹ NIOD, Coll. Theunens. G2 UNPF HQ, Daily Military Information Summary from 160001B to 162359B Jun 95; NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Meeting 2 Corps ABiH, 16/06/95.

¹⁰⁷² CRST. HQ Sector NE Daily Milinfosum from 241700B to 251700B Jun 95; HQ UNPROFOR Sarajevo, Military Information Summary, 25/06/95. UN Conf.

attack. According to Sector North East in Tuzla, in this assessment of the strategy of the parties, Srebrenica played no role, however:¹⁰⁷³

Because of its superior infantry strength at Sarajevo, the ABiH was in a position to force a temporary breakthrough, but the preponderance of VRS heavy weapons meant that the gain in territory would be lost again.

According to messages from the Dutch ambassador in Paris, the media, and in particular CNN, were exaggerating the strength of the troop concentrations on the Bosnian side: in reality, achieving a sustained breakthrough of the siege of Sarajevo was beyond the reach of the Bosnian Muslims. The French government therefore wondered whether the Bosnian government had a sufficient understanding of the political damage to be expected if the offensive turned out to be a failure. Likewise, Paris was fearful for Croatian lightning operations to recapture the Krajina, now that the Bosnian Serbs' attention was necessarily on Sarajevo.¹⁰⁷⁴

The Dutch government showed understanding for the endeavours of the Bosnian Muslims to bring an end to the distressing situation in Sarajevo, but adopted the position that the conflict must be solved at the negotiating table. The government was concerned about possible victims among the population of Sarajevo and also feared for the safety of the UN troops.¹⁰⁷⁵

The ABiH offensive did appear to give the Bosnian Serbs something of a surprise: they called a state of war around Sarajevo. The chairman of the Parliament of the Republika Srpska, Momcilo Krajisnik, still did not call that an expression of panic, but a preventive measure to be able to mobilize all available resources. This measure was also intended to show the international community that the Bosnian Serbs were resolved to defend their Republika Srpska as long as the international community failed to condemn the Bosnian Muslims and the Croats, and even looked with favour on the attack on the Bosnian Serbs.¹⁰⁷⁶

Akashi also noticed that Milosevic was seriously concerned about the strength of the ABiH offensive, and that he appeared less self-assured than normal. This time, Milosevic even managed to express some sympathy for the Bosnian Serbs, who felt threatened and treated with disrespect. Although Milosevic did not believe that the siege of Sarajevo could be broken, he was concerned about the matter.

Around this time, Milosevic happened to make an incorrect assessment of the situation: he said that the Krajinas could be defended successfully, in contrast to the Serbian region in Bosnia. The exact opposite appeared to be the case. Milosevic may also have shown some interest in a ceasefire in Bosnia, but he assumed that the Bosnian government would not want one as long as no humanitarian aid reached the Bosnian Muslims. In his view, the most important step in the political process to be set in motion by EU negotiator Bildt was to bring an end to the ABiH offensive and to the NATO air strikes on Bosnian-Serb targets, and to treat the Republika Srpska equally with the Muslim-Croat Federation. Both Milosevic and his Minister of Foreign Affairs Jovanovic said they were concerned about the misuse of the Safe Areas.¹⁰⁷⁷

Later in the summer, a Croatian offensive was indeed to be expected. President Tudjman had said that he wanted to solve the problem of the Krajina before November. He no longer found a self-declared Republika Srpska Krajina on Croatian territory acceptable. If the integration of the part of Croatia inhabited by Serbs that had awarded itself an autonomous status (the Republika Srpska Krajina) did not occur willingly, then it would happen with a *Blitzkrieg*. The fact was that the UN mandate in Croatia ran out in November and it would be political suicide for Tudjman if he were to assent to its extension. All manner of military measures had been set in motion and the Croatian army, the HVO, was regularly seen with brand new American equipment. The chances that the Krajina-Serbs would

¹⁰⁷³ SMG 1004/7. MIO SNE (Maj. P.H.D. Wright) to Zagreb/BH Comd for COO/MIO. 27/06/95.

¹⁰⁷⁴ ABZ, DPV/ARA/00797. Code Wijnaendts 196, 15/06/95.

¹⁰⁷⁵ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05243. Press release Min BZ, DVL, 16/06/95, No. 049/1995.

¹⁰⁷⁶ CRST. Transcript Bosnian Serb Radio, 17/06/95, 22.00 hrs; Fax Fred Eckhart to Yasushi Akashi, 17/06/95.

¹⁰⁷⁷ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 19/06/95, No. Z-1020.

receive help from the VRS appeared to be relatively small, because the VRS could no longer easily move around as a result of a shortage of fuel.¹⁰⁷⁸

The offensive failed

The ferocity with which the ABiH offensive started diminished again fairly rapidly, however. After two days the attacks were broken off, and the ABiH had booked territorial gains in only two places. UNPROFOR could only guess why the offensive was broken off so rapidly, and neither could the UNMOs acquire any information from the ABiH side because they were not allowed to visit hospitals; the intention was to deduce from the number of wounded how heavy the conflict had been.

It was possible that the offensive was intended to test the reaction of the international community before launching an offensive in earnest, or the ABiH could have been out to lure the VRS units towards Sarajevo, or - which UNPROFOR considered to be the most likely reason - the offensive stranded because of the usual problems with logistics and the inability to exploit tactical successes, in combination with unexpectedly high losses.¹⁰⁷⁹

A Croatian source said to Akashi that the offensive was indeed stopped because of the heavy losses suffered by the ABiH when they wanted to penetrate the well-organized VRS defence. The intention had been for the offensive to last a month, with the purpose of capturing Bosnian-Serb suburbs of Sarajevo, such as Ilidza, Ilijas and Vogosca. The greatest problem that the ABiH wrestled with was making passages through the minefields.¹⁰⁸⁰

Bosnian politicians gave different explanations for why the offensive was started. Prime Minister Haris Siladjic said that the offensive was intended to nip a Bosnian-Serb attack in the bud; President Izetbegovic said that it was intended to break the stranglehold that the Bosnian Serbs had on Sarajevo. As conditions for stopping the offensive he set the withdrawal of VRS heavy weapons and clearance for humanitarian aid.¹⁰⁸¹ Other government circles were of the opinion that the ABiH had indeed not succeeded in breaking the siege and that points of departure would now be occupied ready for a renewed attempt later in the summer.¹⁰⁸² There was evidence for the fact that the Bosnian Serbs were taking a resumption of the offensive into account in the request to Civil Affairs of UNPROFOR to make five hundred body bags available.¹⁰⁸³

7. The situation around Srebrenica in mid June

After the ABiH had warned in early June of a possible attack on the enclave, it remained, as stated above, relatively quiet. After mid June, the number of incidents started to rise again, however. Originally these skirmishes had little substance. Neither could they be seen as an overture to the later attack on Srebrenica. This changed after mid June. The actions of both warring factions took on more significant forms, and so started a chain reaction culminating in the conflict around the enclave. Precisely how this chain reaction came about is difficult to establish with any accuracy. It did not start in June 1995, but in fact went back to April 1993. The capture of Srebrenica by Mladic was then nipped in the bud by Morillon's action, with the ultimate approval of Karadzic. This also refers back to the ensuing period of the failed demilitarization and the lack of agreement on the demarcation of the

¹⁰⁷⁸ CRST. Fax G3 Land Ops HQ UNPF Zagreb to G2 Crisis Staff, 22/06/95.

¹⁰⁷⁹ NIOD, Coll. Theunens. G2 UNPF HQ, Daily Military Information Summary from 180001B to 182359B Jun 95; SMG/1012. RNLA Crisis Staff, Weeksitrep 15 - 22 June 1995.

¹⁰⁸⁰ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, Weekly Situation Report, 28/06/95, No. Z-1069. The statements came from HVO Brigadier-General Vinko Lucic.

¹⁰⁸¹ *International Herald Tribune*, 20/06/95; MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation 29/95, closed 211400B Jun 1995. Conf.

¹⁰⁸² UNGE, UNPROFOR, box 42, Sector North-East-Tuzla, File 25/77, 04/04/95 - 23/08/95. Fax Ken Biser to Philip Corwin, 23/06/95, Report for week Ending June 23 1995.

¹⁰⁸³ BDL. Outgoing Fax David Harland to Philip Corwin, Sector Sarajevo, Weekly Situation Report, 24/06/95.

borders of the Safe Area. Military activities, not only around the Safe Areas, but also from enclaves, had been commonplace since April 1993.

It was not for nothing that the Security Council again spoke in Resolution 998 on 16 June of the necessity to demilitarize the Safe Areas and the immediate surroundings, because this would be to both parties' advantage 'in terms of the cessation of attacks on the Safe Areas and of launching military attacks therefrom'. However, this admonition did not deter the combatants from fighting a small war around Srebrenica. This was payment for the fact that the borders of the enclave were not properly established and visibly marked out on the ground: according to the Bosnian Serbs the area was smaller, and according to the Muslims it was larger. Consultation on the subject did not lead to a result, and neither was much done by the UN to bring the parties to agreement, even if this was within the UN's grasp.

From mid June battle noise could be heard every day around the enclave: there were shots, either in earnest, or as an exercise, or to cross each other. The warring factions respected no suspension of hostilities, and they made use of UNPROFOR for realizing their own objectives, or they accused UNPROFOR of not doing its work properly, if it suited them to say so. It was a fiction that Srebrenica as a Safe Area had been demilitarized. In the spring of 1995, the ABiH purposefully smuggled weapons into the enclave, and orders came from above to carry out military operations outside the enclave.

Consequences for Srebrenica of the offensive around Sarajevo

The ABiH offensive around Sarajevo caused an intensification of the tension in East Bosnia and around Srebrenica. Large changes were made in the order of battle of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH. Two thousand men and a complete attack brigade were said to have been moved to the south to be deployed at Sarajevo. UNMOs had observed no Corps reserve of the ABiH for some time.¹⁰⁸⁴ The Bosnian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sacirbey, linked the isolation of the eastern enclaves with the release of VRS manpower for deployment elsewhere for offensive purposes.¹⁰⁸⁵ Around Srebrenica too, the VRS had transferred armed forces to the front at Sarajevo.¹⁰⁸⁶ At the same time, the VRS intensified the laying of mines around the enclave.¹⁰⁸⁷

Concurrently with the offensive at Sarajevo, the ABiH attempted to cut the road link between Vlasenica and Zvornik via Sekovici and the attacks from Gorazde and Srebrenica were intensified.¹⁰⁸⁸ With few exceptions, this involved small scale actions. The laying of ambushes was a favourite activity. In late May and early June, this had already happened several times, but it also stopped again, until the offensive at Sarajevo lit the fuse and the actions became larger in scale. Most of the actions took place outside Dutchbat's field of view, so that it was often difficult for the battalion to assess what was actually going on. It was not possible to closely monitor fifty kilometres of front line in extremely hilly terrain with a limited number of OPs. Furthermore, UNPROFOR and Dutchbat lacked the resources to gather their own intelligence. At the same time, ABiH reports frequently mentioned the fact that Dutchbat was thought to be passing intelligence to the VRS, as well as Dutchbat's passive attitude towards the Bosnian Serbs.¹⁰⁸⁹

¹⁰⁸⁴ CRST.UNMO HQ Sector NE to UNMO BHC, 251000B Jun 95.

¹⁰⁸⁵ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05243. Code Vie Coreu, 19/06/95, No. pesc/vie 248. The statement was made in the presence of the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Schuessel.

¹⁰⁸⁶ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 2. Korpusa Odjeljenje za moral, 16/06/95, br. 04-99/95.

¹⁰⁸⁷ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 2. Korpusa Odjeljenje bezbjednosti, 15/06/95, br. 13-05-86.

¹⁰⁸⁸ ICTY (IT-98-33) D 127/a. Command of Drina Corps, 15/06/95, No. 15-354/32.

¹⁰⁸⁹ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije Odsjek bezbjednosti to Komandi 2. Korpusa Odjeljenje bezbjednosti, K-dantu 28. Divizije KoV, 23/06/95, Str. Pov. br. 13-05-92/95.

Because the ABiH had the idea that Dutchbat were mostly patrolling the middle of the enclave, the ABiH requested Dutchbat to start to patrol the edges of the enclave, in Zalazje and Jasenova, but the battalion refused. This was no surprise because these places were outside the enclave borders.¹⁰⁹⁰

A corridor between Tuzla and Srebrenica?

The VRS assumed in June 1995 that the ABiH were nurturing plans to link the eastern enclaves with each other.¹⁰⁹¹ Chapter 1 also mentioned that Mladic was already afraid in March 1995 of an ABiH attack from Tuzla towards Srebrenica and Zepa. He expressed to General Smith his fear of an ABiH attack towards the eastern enclaves along two axes, one of which was from Tuzla to Srebrenica and Zepa, and the other from Trnvo to Gorazde. Should the ABiH resort to an attempt to link Srebrenica with Tuzla, it would have to lead to a VRS action against the enclave, Mladic informed Smith. He then wanted to attack the enclaves to disable the ABiH fighting power that existed there.¹⁰⁹²

Such ideas were not entirely plucked out of thin air. The ABiH had indeed nurtured plans for some considerable time for opening a corridor to Tuzla. As early as 1992 it had been an important task for Naser Oric and his ABiH unit (which was known then as 8 OG) to bring it about, and he almost succeeded at the time. In 1993, such plans were no longer realistic after all the territory near Cerska had been lost and Srebrenica had almost been trampled underfoot. An intelligence service also confirmed that there was a plan for the opening of a corridor between Tuzla and Srebrenica via the Sapna Thumb, but they were unaware of the planned timing of the opening of the corridor.¹⁰⁹³

The commander of the 28th Division of the ABiH in Srebrenica, Ramiz Becirovic, said, however, that he was unaware of any plans for a corridor between Tuzla and Srebrenica. He said he had only once seen a plan to come to the enclave's help, but that was from 1994.¹⁰⁹⁴ Becirovic was possibly referring to an ABiH plan from November 1994 that is said to have been developed to break the blockade of Srebrenica. As Chief of the General Staff of the ABiH, General Enver Hadjihasanovic was said to have been its deviser. The plan consisted of two options: an attack from Kalesija (between Tuzla and Zvornik) or from Kladanj.¹⁰⁹⁵

These ideas for a corridor were raised again in 1995. They were consistent with the notion of a Bosnia that extended to the Drina and that incorporated a link with the three eastern enclaves. When the idea that a VRS attack on Srebrenica could not be ruled out started to take hold, Hadjihasanovic is said to have developed new plans to open a corridor in a concerted ABiH effort from Tuzla on the one hand and from Srebrenica and Zepa on the other, as a possible countermove. The existence of such a plan can also be deduced from statements of the Commander of the 2nd Corps, Sead Delic, and of Ramiz Becirovic.¹⁰⁹⁶

Furthermore, Zulfo Tursunovic, the ABiH Commander in the south-western part of the enclave, is said to have suggested the plan of opening a corridor via Milici to Kladanj. The Bosnian Serbs would never have been able to obstruct a wholesale breakout of the population to Kladanj, he thought. The distance to Kladanj was also less than to Tuzla. The Chairman of the Municipal Council, War President Osman Suljic, is said to have dissuaded him of such ideas, however. This is evident from a diary of Zulfo Tursunovic that was found in the enclave after the fall.

¹⁰⁹⁰ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 2. Korpusa n/r K-danta 28. divizije brigadira, Naser Oric, 18/06/95, Str. Pov. broj. 01-120/95.

¹⁰⁹¹ ICTY (IT-98-33) D95/a. Command of Drina Corps to the General Staff of the VRS, 26/06/95, No. 02/6.

¹⁰⁹² UNNY, DHA: Sergio de Mello Papers. Meeting Gen Smith and Gen Mladic 7 March 1995, Ref 8594; UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 215, File BHC95 7 Mar-14 Mar95. BHC FWD to DOKL. 091100A Mrt 95, Outgoing fax No. 122/95. UN Confi; interview R.A. Smith, 12/1/00.

¹⁰⁹³ Confidential interview (6).

¹⁰⁹⁴ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Interview Isnam Taljic, 18/05/99.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Statement of Brigadier Makar 23/3/99. See also *Dani*, 17/03/00, interview of Vildana Selimbegovic with General Sead Delic.

The underlying idea in the plans for a corridor from Srebrenica to Central Bosnia was that President Izetbegovic was only making efforts for the defence of Gorazde. He is said to have given up on Srebrenica. Furthermore, Tursunovic may have believed that there was something of an international conspiracy against the Bosnian Muslims of Srebrenica, because troops from Christian countries were always stationed there.¹⁰⁹⁷

It proved to be impossible to uncover the details of similar plans on the Bosnian side. That the ABiH was strong enough to open and to keep open corridors to the enclaves appeared to be an overestimate of its military capabilities. ABiH offensives from Tuzla and Kladanj had already been brought to a halt on 24 June, and the breaking of the siege around Sarajevo was given priority over actions to link the area around the enclaves Zepa and Srebrenica with Tuzla. In view of the military-strategic circumstances, it was in fact impossible in July 1995 to race to provide help to Srebrenica from Tuzla or from Kladanj via a corridor.

From the VRS side too, some details were known of such a corridor. According to VRS liaison officer Major Nikolic, the VRS expected that Oric had gone to Tuzla in April 1995 to establish a corridor with Srebrenica from there. In this, a breakthrough would be forced from both areas towards the other, where the 2nd Corps of the ABiH would leave from Crni Vrh. From the corridor that would be created in this way, the entire area remaining in the direction of the Drina would then be 'swept clean' by the Bosnian Muslims and stripped of Bosnian Serbs. According to Nikolic, the VRS had intelligence that this plan was to be carried out between 20 and 25 July 1995.¹⁰⁹⁸

The Bosnian-Serb Chief of Police, Luka Bogdanovic, said after the fall of Srebrenica that a plan for opening a corridor between Srebrenica and Tuzla had fallen into his hands. The plan was on a diskette that was left behind in Srebrenica after the fall and was dated April 1995. Its objective was to open the corridor in August 1995. It involved a simultaneous advance from Srebrenica and Tuzla. Naser Oric made a case for executing the plan, and sent it to Army Commander Rasim Delic. The plan may have been known to the VRS, but in July it played no role in the decision to attack Srebrenica. Neither was the plan for the corridor a determining factor in the timing of the VRS attack.¹⁰⁹⁹

Noises about a corridor could also be heard in late June 1995 when the VRS Drina Corps reported to the VRS General Staff on ABiH actions around Mount Vis. The VRS saw its possession as a necessary condition for the ABiH for further ABiH actions towards the Podrinje, the area containing Srebrenica and Zepa. The ABiH actions were brought to a halt, however. The associated message from the VRS was full of rhetoric. Not only did it speak of 'superhuman efforts' and 'six days of hand-to-hand combat' but also that 'Alija [Izetbegovic] had never, and never will take a cup of coffee on Vis, and we are inviting President Karadzic and General Mladic to take a cup of "Turkish" coffee on the Serbian Vis.' In a more distant past, Mount Vis had already been a place where decisive battles had been fought between Muslims and Serbs.¹¹⁰⁰

8. Individual skirmishes between ABiH and VRS

This section will discuss how the warring factions harassed each other around Srebrenica in June. A summary will be given below of what has become known about this on the basis of reports from both ABiH and VRS. These reports could not be verified from sources other than the warring factions (Dutchbat). The activities of both parties on either side of the enclave border usually took place out of sight of UNPROFOR, and in only a few cases were they reported in the press.

Apart from that, the actions were mainly on a small scale. Two larger and more hazardous actions, the VRS raid on Vitlovac and the ABiH raid on Visnjica later in June, will be dealt with

¹⁰⁹⁷ Interview Rajko Dukic, 14/06/00.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Interview Momir Nikolic, 20/10/00.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Interview Luka Bogdanovic, 10/12/99.

¹¹⁰⁰ ICTY (IT-98-33) D89/a. Command of 1st Milici Light Infantry Brigade to All Subordinate Units, 19/06/95, No. I/01-617-1.

separately. All these events illustrate the tension that prevailed around the enclave, which increased as time went by. The month of June 1995 was the epitome. Ultimately these actions would form the overture to the VRS attack in early July.

The previous history of military actions around the Srebrenica enclave

The actions in June were not actually new: there had been activity for some considerable time by groups that had ventured outside the enclave. ABiH activities outside the enclave had been a problem since the time of the Canadian battalion (Canbat). The VRS complained constantly through Colonel Vukovic as early as 1993, at the time of Canbat I, about hit-and-run actions.¹¹⁰¹ Canbat II observed that there had indeed been excursions from the enclave three or four times a week by the ABiH at group or platoon level. Major Yvan Bouchard, the Commander of Canbat II in Srebrenica, had already warned Naser Oric at the time that he was risking killing his own people inside the enclave.¹¹⁰²

Use of the Safe Area for military purposes therefore had an entire history, which dated from before Dutchbat's arrival. The Commander of the 28th Division, Ramiz Becirovic, later also admitted that there had been provocations all that time, and that the VRS had been responding to them since December 1994.¹¹⁰³ These actions were not always based on a local initiative: they were usually ordered from above.

On 6 October 1994, the ABiH brigades (the predecessor of the 28th Division, known as 8 OG) were ordered to form reconnaissance teams to infiltrate Bosnian-Serb territory. These reconnaissance actions were also executed. In November, the VRS became aware of the supply of ammunition via a route from Kladanj, which appeared to have been in progress since July 1994.

On 7 November, the ABiH made plans for actions against the VRS to capture important areas of terrain outside the enclave. During sabotage actions in 1994 and the first half of 1995, the ABiH set fire to houses of members of the Bratunac Brigade.¹¹⁰⁴

Along the north side of the enclave, where some considerable traffic passed from and to Bratunac, the ABiH laid a series of ambushes for vehicles near Voljevica and Glogova at the end of 1994 and in January-February 1995.¹¹⁰⁵

Actions of the warring factions in the period 25 May - 6 July

In the period immediately preceding the fall of Srebrenica, the incidents were on a small scale, but they did constantly result in dead and wounded among the combatants.

On 28 May, five VRS soldiers who were cutting wood at Rupovo Bdro (near Milici) died when an ABiH patrol stumbled across them.¹¹⁰⁶ The ABiH spoke in a report of a VRS patrol, and not of woodcutters.¹¹⁰⁷

The ABiH suffered losses as a result of landmines. In the night of 27 to 28 May, a cloudburst caused a mudslide in which the water took dozens of mines with it.¹¹⁰⁸ On 8 June, an ABiH patrol chanced upon a minefield in Jasenova, that had been laid there by the VRS after the capture of OP-E. It resulted in one death and four wounded for the ABiH.¹¹⁰⁹

¹¹⁰¹ Interview Thomas K.D. Geburt, 18/11/99.

¹¹⁰² Interview Yvan Bouchard, 15/11/99.

¹¹⁰³ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

¹¹⁰⁴ ICTY (IT-98-33) D 160/a, Radinovic Report, para 2.16-2.18, 2.20.

¹¹⁰⁵ Interview Luka Bogdanovic, 10/12/99.

¹¹⁰⁶ Interview Zoran Jovanovic, 13/09/99; ICTY (IT-98-33) D 160/a, Radinovic Report, para 2.32.

¹¹⁰⁷ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 2.Korpusa Odjeljenje za moral, 02/06/09, Str. pov. br.04-84/95.

¹¹⁰⁸ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28.Divizije to Komanda 2.Korpusa, 02/06/95, br. 04-84/95. GSS ABiH

¹¹⁰⁹ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 28.Divizije to Komandi 2. Korpusa Odjeljenje Bezbjednosti, 15/06/95, br. 13-05-86.

In the second half of June 1995 especially, there were an increasing number of skirmishes between the ABiH and the VRS. Both parties took the initiative.

In mid June, the ABiH laid an ambush in inhospitable and difficult terrain, seven kilometres in a straight line outside the enclave border to the south of Zeleni Jadar. A small lorry that was taking VRS soldiers home on leave from the lines around Srebrenica was caught in the ambush. Three soldiers died and nine were wounded.¹¹¹⁰

On 14 June, three soldiers of the VRS Milici Brigade went to pick berries in the area outside the minefields. They were caught in an ambush in the deserted village of Bozici, to the west of the enclave. Two of the three soldiers died, and the third managed to escape. According to the VRS, the bodies of the two who died were mutilated. According to the Drina Corps, five soldiers of the VRS Milici Brigade had already died earlier in the same way.¹¹¹¹

Not only the ABiH, but also the VRS was active around Srebrenica. According to ABiH 2nd Corps intelligence, the VRS attempted to send a group of soldiers to the village of Suceška to stir up panic there on 14 June. The purpose of this, according to the ABiH, was to exert pressure and to erode the confidence of the people living there.¹¹¹²

It cannot be established whether there was a connection between the actions of the ABiH and of the VRS on that day. On 15 June, Major General Milenko Zivanovic, the Commander of the Drina Corps, reiterated in an instruction that all his units must be completely battle ready. The VRS General Staff had also already determined this on 6 June. Zivanovic pointed out that there was every reason for this, because the ABiH was active everywhere in the area under his control, including in Teocak, Kalesija, Vis, Kladanj and Olovo and between Srebrenica and Zepa.¹¹¹³

Around 16 and 17 June, the VRS Milici Brigade again attempted to carry out attacks in the area near Suceška. On 22 June the VRS again sent an attack team into Suceška. In that area the high ground, in particular the 946 metre high Kak, were important for controlling the road to the south of Srebrenica and the bauxite mines.¹¹¹⁴

Sector North East in Tuzla reported that in the night of 18 to 19 June, the ABiH from Srebrenica had laid an ambush for a VRS patrol. The report did not state exactly where this had taken place. The assertion that the VRS patrol commander had been killed and that a captured machine pistol had been handed as a gift to Naser Oric, gave the report a low credibility: Oric was no longer in the enclave. The Dutchbat B Company did report that the ABiH had fired on a VRS vehicle in the vicinity of OP-U on that day, and as a consequence it ended up in the ditch. After that, the VRS and the ABiH fired on each other.¹¹¹⁵

From mid June, Dutchbat also reported an increase in incidents that were directed against the battalion itself. OPs were fired on at intervals, mostly hitting the OP defence wall, and the origin of the firing was not always clear. This happened at several OPs: OP-M, OP-C, OP-U, OP-P and OP-A. Other events took place in the vicinity of the OPs: for instance, the crew of OP-S witnessed an enclave resident treading on an anti-personnel mine fifty metres from the OP. A few missiles fired by VRS tanks landed at Buljim (between OP-M and OP-A). Moreover, a message reached Dutchbat via residents that in the south, at Jasanova, there were four VRS tanks.¹¹¹⁶

Other events took place around the eastern enclaves: the situation around Srebrenica was not unique. As a result of all the incidents, the VRS had become afraid of infiltrations in its own rear area. From Gorazde, the ABiH had cut the roads that the VRS used and the VRS had abandoned positions

¹¹¹⁰ Interview Dane Katanic, 16/09/99.

¹¹¹¹ ICTY (IT-98-33) D 127/a. Command of Drina Corps, 15/06/95, No. 15-354/32.

¹¹¹² Interview Hazrudin Kistic, 17/05/99 and 18/05/99.

¹¹¹³ ICTY (IT-98-33) D 128/a. Command of Drina Corps, 15/06/95, No. 01/04-122-5.

¹¹¹⁴ Interview Hazrudin Kistic, 17/05/99 and 18/05/99.

¹¹¹⁵ NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. HQ Sector NE Daily Milinfosum from 181700B to 191700B Jun 95, UN Confi.; SMG 1001.C-BCie to Dutchbat, Daily Sitrep 181600B Jun95 - 191600B Jun 95.

¹¹¹⁶ NIOD Coll. Koreman. Diary of Koreman, 37th and 38th week.

in panic. VRS positions had even been captured at Visegrad. They had to be recaptured, which cost the VRS fourteen dead, five missing and thirty wounded. The ABiH therefore managed to operate behind the lines on various occasions, which led to panic in the Drina Corps.

The Commander of the Drina Corps, General Milenko Zivanovic, determined that the problems occurred in units that had not been involved in combat action for a considerable time, in the lines where there were contacts between the warring factions, and in the lines where trade took place. He again ordered the VRS units to be battle ready and no longer taken by surprise. He took measures to this end: he went on an inspection tour to check an entire shopping list of points; all personnel must be made aware of the consequences of ABiH infiltrations; and anyone who had contact now or in the past with the other party could expect to be investigated.¹¹¹⁷ A lack of fuel did not make matters easier for the VRS to secure the rear area, however.¹¹¹⁸

On approximately 18 June, the VRS observed ABiH nighttime activity outside the enclave at Repovac, one kilometre to the west of Bratunac. The ABiH was said to want to murder a certain Nurija Memisevic there, and for that purpose the ABiH had laid an ambush on the road from Bratunac to Konjevic Polje.¹¹¹⁹

The Commander of the VRS Bratunac Brigade, Colonel Vidoje Blagojevic, understood from a reliable source that the ABiH in Srebrenica had been ordered to perform diversionary actions and reconnaissance and sabotage missions outside the enclave in order to spread panic in the VRS ranks and to wreak havoc. The ABiH was said to be busy with its reconnaissance for that objective. Blagojevic's assumption was correct. The ABiH conducted much reconnaissance in the VRS area of responsibility with the purpose of making the greatest possible contribution to the struggle for Sarajevo by organizing all manner of activities in the VRS area: the intention was to lure as many VRS soldiers away from Sarajevo as possible. This brought ABiH patrols into contact with the VRS on several occasions, which - according to an ABiH report - yielded the VRS thirteen dead and several dozens of wounded, as opposed to two dead and three wounded on the ABiH side.¹¹²⁰

One of these reconnaissance actions took place between 20 and 22 June, and was oriented to the areas north of Srebrenica. On 14 June, Zulfo Tursonovic's 284th ABiH Brigade was ordered by the 28th Division to perform reconnaissance and sabotage actions in the direction of Buljim, Konjevic Polje, Cerska, Zvornicka Kamenica and Snagovo. Snagovo was near Zvornik, and more than twenty kilometres in a straight line outside the border of the enclave. These were places that were again to play a role after the fall of Srebrenica, during the flight of the column of Muslims to Tuzla: in the breakout from the enclave on 11 July, the same route would be followed (see the Chapter 1 in Part IV).

The primary objective of the action was to explore the terrain there and to determine the position and strength of the VRS troops. If there was a good chance of success and they could return safely, the ABiH were to carry out sabotage actions.¹¹²¹ A concentration of VRS soldiers was observed in Kravica, and also in Konjevic Polje, where a number of small army units and pontoon bridges were found. The other places that the ABiH encountered on the way were unpopulated and burned out, as were all other villages in the surroundings. The ABiH patrol thought it had not been observed. It remains unclear whether the action was linked with the plans that the VRS said the ABiH had of opening a corridor between Tuzla and Srebrenica later in August.¹¹²²

At Ladja Lamanac (between OP-N and OP-P) on 23 June, an ABiH patrol seized the opportunity to dismantle two mines and subsequently place them on a communication path between

¹¹¹⁷ ICTY (IT-98-33) D88/a. Command of Drina Corps, 19/06/95, No. 94/76-3.

¹¹¹⁸ ICTY (IT-98-33) D90/a. Command of 1st Bircani Infantry Brigade, 21/06/95, No. 03/1-691.

¹¹¹⁹ ICTY (IT-98-33) D89/a. Command of 1st Milici Light Infantry Brigade to All Subordinate Units, 19/06/95 No. I/01-617-1. ICTY (IT-98-33) D89/a.

¹¹²⁰ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. Komanda 28. Divizije to Komandi 2.Korpora, 30/06/95, Str. pov. br. 04-114/95.

¹¹²¹ ICTY (IT-98-33) D60. ABiH 28 Division to Command or 284 IBLbr, 14/06/95, No. 01-102/95.

¹¹²² ICTY (IT-98-33) D66/a. ABiH Command of 28th Division (Asst Commander for Morale Captain Nijaz Masic) to the Command of 2nd Corps Morale Department, 30/06/95, No. 04-113/95.

two VRS trenches. When an unarmed VRS soldier passed, the mine was exploded by pulling a cord: the VRS soldier died from his wounds. Likewise on 23 June, a sabotage team of the 282nd ABiH Brigade 'liquidated' three VRS soldiers outside the enclave in the area of Koprivno (near OP-A).

On 24 June, a sabotage platoon assembled from the 282nd and 283rd ABiH Brigade laid an ambush along the road from Zeleni Jadar to Skelani, near Osmace, approximately six kilometres outside the enclave border. A lorry was stopped and five Bosnian-Serb policemen died. The place was later marked with a memorial stone, where family members of the dead lit candles.¹¹²³

In a radio dispatch, Radovan Karadzic was probably referring to these five killed policemen when he said that the Bosnian Serbs would tolerate no attacks by the Bosnian Muslims from protected areas. Karadzic also said that he would not feed the ABiH that carried out these attacks, which would affect the entire population.¹¹²⁴

All these activities were undertaken in support of the offensive at Sarajevo to tie up the VRS, and so to obstruct the VRS in sending reinforcements to Sarajevo. The actions, which were usually successful, had the effect of raising the morale of the ABiH. After the earlier occupation on 23 June of a number of points on the ridge of hills at Ravni Buljim by an ABiH unit, which then opened fire on the VRS, VRS Colonel Blagojevic, as Commander of the Bratunac Brigade, requested the Drina Corps' permission to deploy his artillery against the most important facilities in Srebrenica in the event of a repetition. According to Blagojevic, the incidents also had a positive effect: they improved the feeling of security within his brigade. Morale also received a boost because conscripts, who lived in Yugoslavia, were called up to rejoin the unit.¹¹²⁵

On 24 June, Mladic wrote to General Smith that, on the previous day, ABiH armed forces had executed various attacks from the Safe Area. According to Mladic, the attacks were from Potocari towards the village of Ludmeri (meaning the hills north of Potocari on the enclave border), from Poljanci to Ravni Buljin (between OP-A and OP-M) and from Pusulici to Zeleni Jadar (in the south). Consequently, six citizens and soldiers had lost their lives, and Mladic pointed out that this represented a serious violation of the status of the Safe Area. He warned that the Bosnian Serbs would no longer tolerate it. Mladic recalled that this was not the first time that innocent Serbian citizens had been killed. He demanded that Smith obstruct attacks from the Safe Areas and inform his superiors and those with political responsibility about the attacks. In addition, Mladic wished to be informed of the measures that Smith would be taking.¹¹²⁶

UNPROFOR in Sarajevo asked Sector North East in Tuzla to provide data, if available, because Mladic should be answered as quickly as possible.¹¹²⁷ The question ended up with Karremans, who reported to Sarajevo on each of the three ABiH attacks.

With respect to the attack in the Ludmeri hills, the local ABiH Brigade Commander had said that a VRS patrol had indeed walked into an ABiH ambush. No one in Dutchbat had observed it, but it appeared to be consistent with the battle noise that had been heard from this direction.¹¹²⁸ However, more was going on in the Ludmeri hills: the VRS Bratunac Brigade was in the highest state of readiness

¹¹²³ Interview Isnam Taljic, 18/05/99; ICTY (IT-98-33) D 160/a, Radinovic Report, para 2.30. Taljic placed the incident in May.

¹¹²⁴ SMG 1004/27. Radio report 24/06/95 15.00 hrs BSA.

¹¹²⁵ ICTY (IT-98-33) D91/a, D92/a, D94/a. Command of 1st Bratunac Brigade to Command of Drina Corps, 23/06/95, No. 03-253-82/1; Command of 1st Bratunac Brigade, 24/06/95, No. 02/415-1; Regular Combat Report to Command of Drina Corps, 26/06/95, No. 03-253-85; ABiH Command of 28th Division (Asst Commander for Morale Captain Nijaz Masic) to the Command of 2nd Corps Morale Department, 30/06/1995, No. 04-113/95. ABiH Tuzla. Komanda 28. Divizije Odsjek bezbjednosti to Komandi 2. Korpusa, Odjeljenje bezbjednosti, 30/06/95, Str. pov. br. 04-114/95.

¹¹²⁶ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Lieutenant General Ratko Mladic to UNPROFOR Command Sarajevo attn Lieutenant General Rupert Smith, 24/06/95 No. 06/17-441, sent by UNMO LO Pale (Interpreter) to BHC 241810B.

¹¹²⁷ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. HQ UNPROFOR FWD to HQ Sector NE, 251130B Jun95, Outgoing Fax No 11971/95. UN Restricted. (with attached letter Headquarters Army of the Republic of Srpska, 24/06/95, No. 06/17-441).

¹¹²⁸ NIOD Coll. Brantz. CO-1(NL) UN Infbat to G3 OPS HQ BHC FWD info COS SNE, 25/06/95, unnumbered.

there, and the brigade had even resorted to mobilization after an increasing number of ABiH soldiers occupied positions in the surroundings.¹¹²⁹

According to Karremans' account, the attack from Poljanci towards Ravno Buljani happened in an area where the ABiH did not allow Dutchbat any freedom of movement. However, an increase in battle noise was observed that could point to an action.

Ultimately, Dutchbat could not confirm the actions from Pusedini. In the morning of 24 June, there was also an unusual increase in the battle noise there, which could be a sign of action, but Dutchbat did not observe what had caused that battle noise. However, an action did take place in this area on 19 June, in which the ABiH stopped a VRS vehicle, and at least two VRS soldiers were wounded.

Karremans ended his report by stating that he had repeatedly warned the Commander of the 28th Division that actions outside the enclave borders would provoke reactions from the VRS and possibly put the population in danger. If the ABiH had indeed undertaken actions outside the enclave, then it would mean - as Karremans wrote - that the VRS had restrained itself. The only response was from the usual posts with the usual weapons. The VRS could have inflicted great damage if that had been ordered.¹¹³⁰

At the end of June, two larger actions also took place, which will now be dealt with in more detail: an attack by the Bosnian Serbs via the Vitlovac tunnel, and an ABiH attack that became known as the Visnjica incident.

The attack via the Vitlovac tunnel

In the night of 23 to 24 June, explosions woke the B company in the compound in Srebrenica town with a fright, and the personnel went to the shelters. It was thought that mortar grenades were involved, but where they came from was unclear. The explosions could also be heard at OP-Q.¹¹³¹ These appeared to be linked with an attack that the VRS carried out via the Vitlovac tunnel. This tunnel ran from the lead and zinc mines at Sase within Bosnian-Serb area under the enclave border to the settlement of Vitlovac, close to Srebrenica town. For the mineworkers, the tunnel once formed a link between the mine and their homes in Srebrenica. However, the mineworkers had not used the tunnel for some considerable time, and some parts were dilapidated.¹¹³²

With the terrain at Sase, the VRS occupied the entrance to the tunnel. In 1992-1993, this area fell for a short time into the hands of the Bosnian Muslims, who had observed that stones were falling down in the tunnel. This led them to believe that the tunnel had collapsed and was blocked. However, no check was made to confirm this. The ABiH also thought that mines had been laid in the tunnel. On the Srebrenica side, the tunnel entrance was therefore not closed. The Bosnian Serbs in Sase were aware of the situation: the commander of a special unit worked as an engineer in the mines before the war.

There were said to be signs of activity in the tunnel. A man who was chopping trees on a hill saw muddy water coming out of the tunnel, which could be a sign that the Bosnian Serbs were in the process of reopening the tunnel. This was reported at the time to Naser Oric, but he paid it no heed. The ABiH unit closest to Sase, Ejup Golic's brigade, paid just as little attention to the warning. The sector where the tunnel was located was not a front line, and there was therefore little surveillance. This made it easy for the Bosnian Serbs to enter Srebrenica from this place.¹¹³³

The tunnel emerged on a hill above Srebrenica hospital. One group of VRS soldiers fired on the hospital and neighbouring apartments. A second group fired on houses near the tunnel. The VRS was

¹¹²⁹ ICTY (IT-98-33) D/unnumbered. 1st Bratunac LPBR to Drina Corps Command, 17/06/95, No. 03/253-77.

¹¹³⁰ NIOD Coll. Brantz. CO-1(NL) UN Infbat to G3 OPS HQ BHC FWD info COS SNE, 25/06/95, unnumbered.

¹¹³¹ NIOD, Coll. Koreman. Diary of Koreman, 37th and 38th week.

¹¹³² Interview Murat Efendic, 30/01/98.

¹¹³³ Interview Damir Skaler and Muharem Mujic, 17/05/99.

armed with shoulder firearms, light anti-tank weapons and light mortars, which caused the explosions that had woken B company. The ABiH showed the empty cartridge cases to Dutchbat, who, according to Commander Ramiz Becirovic, at first would not believe that something had happened, and after that was unsure about the circumstances: 'as the UN often was', said Becirovic.¹¹³⁴ Karremans reacted rather bluntly, according to Becirovic: he said that the attack was organized by the 28th Division. Srebrenica's Police Commander, Hakija Meholjic, also said that Dutchbat laid a suspicion of guilt on the Muslims, 'suggested by the Serbs, who definitely had done it themselves'.¹¹³⁵

Such accusations from both sides were common. Becirovic later thought that there was even a report from Sector North East on attempts by Muslims to make their way to VRS positions with the purpose of luring Dutchbat to fire on them (in military terms: drawing Dutchbat's fire) so that the VRS could then be blamed for firing on Dutchbat. According to Becirovic, this was 'incorrect and an insult'. He wondered how Dutchbat could assert such a thing with certainty, while Dutchbat dared reach no conclusion on the VRS attack through the tunnel. On another occasion - Becirovic had forgotten when - the ABiH was accused of firing a bullet through a room where a Dutchbat medic was working. Becirovic was certain that the VRS had done it: it would have been possible from the VRS positions. Becirovic said that he often asked what would have to happen before the UN really did something. According to him, he never received a satisfactory answer. Dutchbat assured him only that it would do something if the enclave were attacked.¹¹³⁶

Becirovic later stated that Karremans never wanted to hold one of the warring factions responsible for an incident. In spite of all the evidence that the ABiH brought up, Karremans always held both parties equally responsible. Karremans sometimes also withdrew to consider evidence. Dutchbat followed the 28th Division's movements, but behaved completely differently towards the VRS, according to ABiH Commander Becirovic: Dutchbat was thought to be afraid of approaching them.¹¹³⁷

Dutchbat's distrust of the ABiH was indeed fairly considerable, as was also evident from another incident: the local ABiH Commander, Zulfo Tursonovic, came to OP-A to show a tailpiece of an 82 mm grenade. He reported that a village in the surroundings had been hit with five grenades. 'They tried to report attacks and at the same time to pass the buck to the other party', was a typical Dutchbat comment,¹¹³⁸ Dutchbat wanted to be careful not to take sides.

The ABiH considered the attack via the tunnel to be a diversionary tactic. There was another attempt by the VRS on the same day to infiltrate the enclave via Likari to Peciste (behind OP-Q), but the group concerned became embroiled in the ABiH minefields and was forced to return.¹¹³⁹

The residents noticed little of other VRS infiltrations in the enclave. There were said to have been earlier Bosnian Serb activities near the area of the Swedish Shelter Project.¹¹⁴⁰ There was said to have been yet other incident, although the precise date on which it took place was unclear. The details of the incident were that a man and a woman from Cerska were walking with two children around 9 o'clock in the evening, near the 'Guber' sport club football pitch (near the tunnel) when in the dark they chanced upon five - as it proved later - Bosnian Serbs, who said 'dobro vecer', which was strange because everyone in the enclave greeted each other with 'salum aleikum'. The man concerned said something like: 'How can you say that?', after which the Bosnian Serbs opened fire and ran away. The woman was wounded.¹¹⁴¹

¹¹³⁴ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

¹¹³⁵ Interview Hakija Meholjic, 02/02/98 with supplements from 19/04/98.

¹¹³⁶ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

¹¹³⁷ ABiH Tuzla. 2nd Corps, unnumbered. Supplementary statement by Ramiz Becirovic, 16/04/98, based on an earlier statement of 11/08/95.

¹¹³⁸ NIOD, Coll. Koreman. Diary of Koreman, 38th week, p. 20.

¹¹³⁹ ICTY (IT-98-33) D66/a. ABiH Command of 28th Division (Asst Commander for Morale Captain Nijaz Masic) to the Command of 2nd Corps Morale Department, 30/06/95, No. 04-113/95.

¹¹⁴⁰ Interview Hakija Meholjic, 02/02/98 with supplements from 19/04/98.

¹¹⁴¹ Interview Damir Skaler and Muharem Mujic, 17/05/99. The precise timing of the events is unclear.

With the attack through the tunnel, the VRS had penetrated deeper into the enclave than ever. According to Becirovic, the possible purpose of the attack was to create panic and to increase the pressure on the population.¹¹⁴² The British JCO commander thought that the purpose of the attack was to test how the ABiH or Dutchbat would respond.¹¹⁴³

Dutchbat did not witness the attack through the tunnel; for that matter, neither did the ABiH. The Quick Reaction Force of B company was not activated to size up the situation. After investigation it was only possible to establish that nineteen shells had been fired from near the mine entrance.¹¹⁴⁴ A Dutchbat reconstruction of the attack revealed the following.

A group, the strength of which could not be established, had taken up firing positions at two places. The groups fired simultaneously towards Srebrenica. One man was wounded when a missile struck his house; two people fled their home near the mine entrance. They were fired at with a machine gun, and one woman was killed and a man wounded. After the facts were held up to the light, Dutchbat considered it not impossible for the ABiH to have executed the attack with the purpose of influencing Dutchbat and public opinion, although it was actually considered to be more probable that the attack had been executed by the VRS, which could not be proved, however.¹¹⁴⁵ The UNMOs established that remarkably little damage had been inflicted in the attack. Muhamed Durakovic, a Swedish Rescue Service Agency worker, explained that there were so few victims because so few people had left their houses when the firing started. The situation was unsettled every evening around the time of the incident 'because all sorts of idiots started to shoot'. The local population therefore did not immediately assume that they were dealing with a Bosnian-Serb attack.¹¹⁴⁶

The Dutchbat liaison section stated, also after a discussion with Ramiz Becirovic, that it could not be established whether the VRS or the ABiH were responsible for the incidents. It was a day in which the battle noise had increased considerably. Between 23 and 24 June, in a period of 24 hours Dutchbat counted 1587 rifle shots, 228 machine gun shots and 253 artillery or mortar explosions.¹¹⁴⁷

Various Dutchbat members were wrong-footed when they tried to answer the question of which party was guilty of the shelling. Warrant Officer R.J. Geval of the Explosives Disposal Unit also thought that the ABiH was guilty. He came to this conclusion from the fact that when he arrived to carry out the investigation, an ABiH soldier was able to tell him accurately where the mines around the tunnel entrance were. A more detailed inspection showed that the factory safety device fitted as standard to these mines was still intact. If it had been the intention to cover a retreat with mines, than they would have been armed, which was not the case here.¹¹⁴⁸

Lieutenant Caris of the Dutchbat commandos was also convinced that the ABiH had made it appear that it had been the VRS. A fairly short time before that, some of the ABiH had been provided with new footwear, the profile of which he was familiar with. He established that there was no track whatsoever away from the tunnel entrance. In the surroundings, on the other hand, the tracks of obviously new shoes could be seen. According to him, another clue was that there was an ABiH bunker two hundred metres away that was normally always occupied, but not apparently on the evening concerned. The anti-tank weapons were fired from the crest of a hill, which would make a noise and would have been visible to the ABiH from that bunker. Therefore the attack in question made him suspect a deliberate ABiH action.¹¹⁴⁹

¹¹⁴² Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

¹¹⁴³ Confidential information (1).

¹¹⁴⁴ The traces found were: two MRUDs, a Canadian smoke hand grenade, nine M80 rocket launchers, two M79 rocket launchers, 3 rocket tail fins, a rocket launcher of unknown type with a 92 mm calibre, six launchers for 60 mm mortar grenades and twenty-five protective covers for 60 mm mortar grenades. Dozens of 7.62 mm and 54 5.56 mm cartridge cases were also found.

¹¹⁴⁵ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Incident Report 240230B-240245B Jun 95, UN Confi.

¹¹⁴⁶ Interview Muhamed Durakovic, 21/11/99.

¹¹⁴⁷ NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. HQ Dutchbat to Sector HQ North East, Sitrep for period 231700 to 241700B Jun95.

¹¹⁴⁸ Debriefing statement of R.J. Geval, 11/09/95.

¹¹⁴⁹ Interview A.A.L. Caris, 03/03/00.

UNMOs first suspected that a VRS infiltration was involved, that the patrol concerned had walked into an ABiH ambush, and that they had fought a retreat back to the tunnel.¹¹⁵⁰ The Canadian UNMO Bob Patchett thought that everything had been intended to frighten the population, but that the VRS had not committed the attack, because the PTT building (where the staff of the 28th Division were based) had not been fired on, while the compound in Srebrenica had. Mines had been laid at all the entrances to the tunnel; the mines were still there and were fitted with tripwires, the purpose of which was to trigger them if someone came along.¹¹⁵¹

The UNMOs later gave as their assessment that the plan and execution of the operation had been carried out precisely, and that it was striking that so little damage had been inflicted. The manner of the withdrawal and the laying of boobytrapped mines on the escape route moved the UNMOs to the conclusion that this looked too professional to have been carried out by local troops. It was a mystery to UNMO headquarters in Tuzla why this operation had been carried out. It appeared that the ABiH were trying to tie up the VRS, while the VRS were actually aiming to keep matters quiet in northeast Bosnia. The attack could therefore well have been intended to make the ABiH have concerns about its own safety. The most important objective of the action appeared to have been the UNMO headquarters, in order to inflict terror and to attract the attention of the media.¹¹⁵²

In their usual way, the warring factions tried to make capital out of the action. A radio report from a Bosnian-Serb station, which was received in the enclave, said that skirmishes among the Bosnian Muslims had flared up in Srebrenica. That morning, many explosions were heard from the town, which, according to the Bosnian Serbs, signalled the possibility of a confrontation between the 'extremist' Commander Naser Oric and the 'moderate' War President Osman Suljic, where the only possible victims were the Displaced Persons.¹¹⁵³ In turn, the Bosnian radio spoke of a Serbian sabotage unit that had inflicted carnage on the population.¹¹⁵⁴

VRS liaison officer Major Nikolic was nowhere to be found to give a full account to Dutchbat of this attack, for which in reality the VRS really was responsible. Through informal channels, the local UNHCR representative in Srebrenica, Almir Masic, heard that the attack was a reprisal for the ambushes laid by the ABiH in Bosnian-Serb territory. The situation in the enclave after the attack settled down again, although the population was alarmed by statements from Karadzic about access to the enclave for humanitarian aid. This aid was already failing to arrive regularly, and Masic expected that the local authorities would shortly demand to be supplied by air. According to Masic, the ABiH response was what was to be expected: the blame was given to Dutchbat for not guarding the enclave properly and failing to prevent the action.¹¹⁵⁵ ABiH Commander Ramiz Becirovic reproached Dutchbat in a report to the 2nd ABiH Corps in Tuzla that they did not return fire on the VRS, but said instead that Dutchbat was unsure of who the aggressor had been.¹¹⁵⁶

That the ABiH gave Dutchbat the blame was also evident from a meeting between representatives of the 2nd ABiH Corps and Sector North East of UNPROFOR. From the enclave there were complaints about Dutchbat, firstly because Dutchbat had not been to the scene of the incident at the tunnel entrance, and secondly because Dutchbat was patrolling the confrontation line less frequently, as Brantz, who conducted the discussions on behalf of Sector North East, admitted: he said that this was attributable to the shortage of fuel, but also because Dutchbat had become more careful in view of the imminent rotation. Apparently the battalion did not want to run any more risks.

¹¹⁵⁰ SMG 1001. TX to TA info Dutchbat, 240250B Jun 95.

¹¹⁵¹ Interview Bob Patchett, 19/11/99.

¹¹⁵² NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. UNMO HQ Sector NE to UNMO BHC, 25100B Jun 95.

¹¹⁵³ SMG 1004/27. Radio report 24/06/95 15.00 hrs BSA.

¹¹⁵⁴ *AP Worldstream*, 24/06/95, Srecko Latal, 'Serbs Sneak Through Government Lines, Open Fire on Town'. The Dutch media paid no attention to this report.

¹¹⁵⁵ BLS/OPSUNHCR Srebrenica to UNHCR Belgrade 25/06/95 13:40.

¹¹⁵⁶ ICTY (IT-98-33) D67/a. ABiH Command of 28th Division (Maj Ramiz Becirovic) to Command of 2nd Corps, Section for Morale and Political Guidance, 30/06/95, No. 01-114/95.

Brantz promised to contact Karremans on the issue to arrive at an evaluation.¹¹⁵⁷ The 2nd ABiH Corps gave the 28th Division feedback on the discussion with Brantz, in which another interpretation of the discussion was presented: according to the 2nd Corps, Brantz would insist that the Dutchbat Commander patrol the enclave. The 2nd Corps also mentioned the fear of the population that when one battalion left the enclave, the VRS would not allow the other battalion to enter. Brantz, however, said that he would ensure that the new battalion entered first;¹¹⁵⁸ the problems of the relief were dealt with exhaustively in the previous chapter.

The Visnjica incident

What became known as the 'Visnjica incident' was an important catalyst for the later events in East Bosnia. This incident, which was given much publicity, was the final and most extensive of a whole series of incidents in and around the enclave before the attack on Srebrenica, and it was also the one that penetrated the deepest into Bosnian-Serb territory. Whereas in the years 1992 and 1993, raids from the enclave were mainly intended to acquire food, in 1995 the raids had a mainly military objective, which was to tie up the VRS around the enclave. In this way, the ABiH wanted to prevent reinforcements from East-Bosnia influencing the conflict in Sarajevo. In addition, the action was intended to influence the morale of the VRS by creating panic and causing a feeling of uncertainty.

The order for this action was given on 17 June 1995, one week before the VRS attack through the Vitlovac tunnel; the incident itself took place shortly after the Vitlovac attack. There was no connection between the two incidents, even though it could not be ruled out that by tapping the ABiH links, the VRS got wind of the order that led to the Visnjica incident. If that happened, the VRS could have responded by planning and executing the action in the tunnel, to reciprocate by keeping the ABiH occupied.

The Chief of Staff of the ABiH 2nd Corps in Tuzla, Sulejman Budakovic, informed Ramiz Becirovic as Commander of the 28th Division on 17 June that he had been given verbal orders by ABiH Army Commander Rasim Delic to make preparations for offensive activity and to inflict losses on the VRS. Intelligence data had actually shown the ABiH that the VRS were keeping units in reserve at Han Pijesak to be able to intervene in Sarajevo.¹¹⁵⁹

The order from Tuzla was that a sabotage and intelligence action was to be undertaken along the road Vlasenica-Han Pijesak-Sokolac. For the VRS, this road formed the most important supply route to Sarajevo. Becirovic's primary purpose was to attack military transports, to obstruct VRS supplies along this road and to seize weapons.

To this end, Becirovic formed a combat group from the various brigades (known as brigades 280, 281, 284 and 285) of the 28th Division, and placed them under the command of Major Ibrahim (Ibro) Mandzic. Zulfo Tursonovic, the Commander of the 284th Brigade in the south-western part of the enclave, was ordered to escort this newly-formed combat group first to Zepa, where he was to determine the best possible location for the action in consultation with Colonel Avdo Palic, the Commander of 285 Brigade there. Becirovic suggested a place between Mekota and Mrkalji with as objective the regions Vrhovi, Han Pogledi or Debela Medj along the road from Han Pijesak (the site of the VRS headquarters) to Sokolac. According to the plan, Palic was to have the casting vote in selecting the location and he was to supply the guides.¹¹⁶⁰ In addition to this action, a briefing was also given

¹¹⁵⁷ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Memorandum Meeting 2 Corps ABiH Tuzla, 29/06/95.

¹¹⁵⁸ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. Komanda 2. Korpusa to Komandi 28.d KoV, 29/06/95, Str. pov. br. 02/1-676/2.

¹¹⁵⁹ This was concerned with the 65th Protection Regiment (Diversants) that played a major role in the mass murders after the fall of Srebrenica; NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Generalstab Armije to K-di 28.div KoV, 17/06/95, Str. pov. br. 1/825-84.

¹¹⁶⁰ NIOD, Coll. Ivanisevic. ABiH, Headquarters of the 28 Division, No. 01-127/95, Military Secret, Highly Confi. The authenticity of the document was confirmed by its author, Ramiz Becirovic, on 18/04/98. It is notable that the document is

about another action towards Kladanj, which was to have been supported from Srebrenica. The informant concerned did not wish to disclose the purpose of this action.¹¹⁶¹ The latter action was not put into effect.



There was resistance to the plan within the Srebrenica municipal executive. Mayor Salihovic Fahrudin, deputy Hamdija Fezic and Chief of Police Hakija Meholic were against it. The Chairman of the municipal council, the War Presidency, convened the military Commanders in vain to appeal to them to disregard the order because it would be a violation of the demilitarization and so would give the Bosnian Serbs an excuse for a counter-move. Srebrenica was a demilitarized zone and was not intended for the development of military activities, such as carrying out a raid and then returning to the enclave. The voting in the War Presidency was 60% for the action and 40% against, however. Afterwards, the War Presidency did carry out an investigation into who had given the order for the military activities; Becirovic stated then that the orders were from the General Staff in Sarajevo,¹¹⁶² which was correct, because as indicated above, the order came directly from Army Commander Rasim Delic.

The Brigade Commander in Zepa, Palic, after consultation with Brigade Commander Zulfo Tursunovic and the Commander of the combat group to be formed, Ibro Mandzic, and the Intelligence Officer of the 28th Division, Ekrem Salihovic, arrived at a fairly complicated plan. This plan entailed as many as nine sabotage teams with different assignments. Each group was given its own objective, which varied from roads, barracks, an ammunition depot and air defence to fortifications. The approximately 150 men who took part in the attack left in the night of 25 to 26 June 1995. All groups were ordered to attack at intervals of two hours to cause panic. All groups were to reach their destination, but only four of them attacked, so that the centre of gravity was in the area of Crna Rijeka.

The VRS discovered the ABiH infiltrators early on, and were then given reinforcement. Nevertheless, the attack was a moderate success from an ABiH point of view: as the ABiH viewed it, the action yielded the VRS forty dead and wounded. It was possible to seize a considerable quantity of weapons and ammunition, and two radios. In Visnjica, a group happened on a large quantity of ammunition, but fatigue prevented them from taking it away. A few dozen cattle were taken, though.¹¹⁶³ Two groups of ABiH soldiers who had taken part in the attack walked into a VRS ambush on the way back, but managed to escape. A lightly wounded VRS soldier was taken to Zepa as a prisoner of war. The interrogation of this soldier, Velimir Mrdjan, did not produce any data on a proposed VRS attack on the enclave. There were, however, also losses on the ABiH side as a consequence of this attack. There were two dead, one seriously and five lightly wounded.

endorsed with the words 'Engelse vertaling document' (English translation of document), which makes it look like it had been in Dutchbat hands. Dutchbat had no knowledge of the operation, however (interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98).

¹¹⁶¹ Confidential interview (51).

¹¹⁶² Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/99. It is unknown whether the War Presidency had made earlier pronouncements on actions outside the enclave borders.

¹¹⁶³ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. Komanda 28.Divizije to Komandi 2.Korpusa, 30/06/95, Str. pov. br. 04-114/95.

The intelligence organ of the ABiH 2nd Corps could largely follow the progress of its own units by listening in to VRS radio traffic. In this way, according to the 2nd Corps, they could hear that the VRS gave orders to regain control of the situation; roads were closed and helicopters deployed. The 2nd Corps could also listen in to the message traffic of the VRS from Srebrenica in the same way. For instance, orders could be heard, including one from the Drina Corps to the Bratunac and Skelani Brigades to retaliate with an artillery bombardment of Srebrenica. After this, the 28th division reported indignantly from Srebrenica that the VRS was shelling the enclave as if Srebrenica was not a demilitarized zone.¹¹⁶⁴

Palic reported after the operation, back in Zepa, that after this the local ABiH were unable to take on further large-scale actions for the time being: the VRS was fully occupied with strengthening its positions, and Palic also asked for reinforcement 'should we be attacked by the infantry, as all estimates from the field seem to indicate that the Chetniks are up to something'.¹¹⁶⁵

The village of Komnica, at the foot of the Veliki Zep peak, 24 km in a straight line west of Srebrenica town, was the furthest point that was reached in Bosnian-Serb territory. The ordered objective was somewhat further, in the area of Han Pijesak, but the ABiH could no longer reach the area, so that the ABiH was no longer in a position to undertake further action.

The actual Visnjica incident was marginal in this enterprise. Palic did not report on the matter. What happened was as follows: one group passed the settlement of Visnjica, approximately five kilometres from OP-C, on the way back. Visnjica was originally a place where Bosnian Muslims lived; they had fled to Srebrenica. The group concerned consisted of approximately fifty men, without leaders. What happened was that early in the morning of 26 June they returned on their own initiative in the direction from which they came. They were men from the villages of Basca, Misici and Gerovi. This was a pure act of revenge of people from the three villages; deterring people from acts of revenge was not an uncommon problem.

Little organization was necessary for this spontaneous ABiH action. There were no minefields and there were hardly any VRS lines because it was well within VRS territory. A fight nevertheless did take place near Visnjica, although the ABiH command had given strict orders to withdraw to Zepa and to undertake no further action.¹¹⁶⁶ A report from the VRS Milici Brigade spoke of a group of fifteen to twenty soldiers who came from the south, and chanced upon a VRS post above Visnjica. They then attacked the post with hand grenades and rifle fire. One soldier died, one was wounded, and the two others managed to escape.

After that, according to the VRS report, the Muslim group opened fire on a part of Visnjica. An older woman was hit in the leg. In the village itself they set fire to five houses, as was confirmed by an ABiH source.¹¹⁶⁷ Both Muslim and Bosnian-Serb sources indicated further that no one of the local population was murdered.¹¹⁶⁸

This was later presented in the media as a special action, but it would appear from the above that it was not: what happened in Visnjica was more or less a coincidence, and there was no element of

¹¹⁶⁴ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije Odsjek bezbjednosti to Komandi 285. IBlbr n/r PK za bezbjednost Zepa, 01/07/95, Broj. 13-05-101; Komanda 28. Divizije Odsjek bezbjednosti to 2. Korpus Odjeljenje bezbjednosti, 05/07/95, Str. pov. br. 13-05-106; ICTY (IT-98-33) D66/a. ABiH Command of 28th Division (Asst Commander for Morale Captain Nijaz Masic) to the Command of 2nd Corps Morale Department, 30/06/95, No. 04-113/95. ICTY (IT-98-33) D62/a. ABiH, 2nd Corps Command, Assistant Commander for ObP (Intelligence) Dr Esad Hadzic 28th Division Command Intelligence Organ, 27/06/95, No. 02/8/01-998.

¹¹⁶⁵ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH 285 IBlbr Zepa to Komanda 2. Korpusa n/r Nacelnika staba Budakovic, Komanda 28. Divizije Srebrenica n/r majora Ramiz Becirovic, 28/06/95, Str.pov.broj. 08-21-244/95.

¹¹⁶⁶ Confidential interview (51).

¹¹⁶⁷ ICTY (IT-98-33) D93/a. Command of the 1st Milici Light Infantry Brigade to Command of Drina Corps Operations Center, 26/06/95, No. 332-1684; confidential interview (51).

¹¹⁶⁸ Interview Momcilo Cvjetinovic, 11/06/98; confidential interview (51).

an attack in a military sense. Nevertheless, afterwards, the Bosnian Serbs linked the name Visnjica to both the military actions towards Han Pijesak and the one to Visnjica.¹¹⁶⁹

Reactions to the Visnjica incident

The incident received special attention because the *New York Times* devoted an article to it, so that it attracted the interest of the UN headquarters in New York, and a Security Council briefing had to be given. The newspaper wrote that the incident illustrated UNPROFOR's weakness, because the UN troops had not succeeded in keeping the ABiH within the area that had been demilitarized. The article relied heavily on the statement of Colonel Milovan Milutinovic, the VRS spokesman, and a few Bosnian Serbs affected by the attack who, in already needy circumstances, had lost all their worldly possessions and thought that they were safe because the UN was guarding the enclave. It did not escape the author Stephen Kinzer's attention that this was a companion piece to the Bosnian government's accusations towards UNPROFOR when they did not succeed in averting the shelling of the Safe Area. The image of the powerless UNPROFOR could also be detected in the words of a VRS soldier, who said that it was time for UNPROFOR to depart so that both parties could fight the war out among themselves.¹¹⁷⁰

The following day, the *International Herald Tribune* also printed the article. Karremans responded and defended himself in a letter to the Crisis Staff of the Army. In his view, the article illuminated the situation in and around the enclave in a one-sided way. It would be advisable to spend some time in an enclave before writing about the situation there, Karremans thought. There is no doubt that journalists would agree with Karremans, but the Bosnian Serbs just did not allow them into the enclave. Karremans also pointed out that the enclave border was fifty kilometres long. With thirteen scattered OPs, it was impossible to keep the borders completely closed: according to the Battalion Commander, they also leaked like a sieve. The ABiH moreover was more familiar with the territory than Dutchbat, and also kept some areas closed to Dutchbat. It was therefore none too difficult for them to go into and out of the enclave unnoticed. Karremans also pointed out that closing the enclave was not a part of the task. As far as the combatants were concerned: even though they knew better, both of them accused Dutchbat of not acting against infiltration to or exfiltration from the enclave.¹¹⁷¹

The UN headquarters in Zagreb reported on the incident that the two Dutchbat OPs in that corner of the enclave had reported no troop movements before or after the incident, but they did report hearing battle noise and seeing smoke in the early morning. Later that day, the Commander of 28th Division, Becirovic, stated that his soldiers had not been involved in the incident. He suggested that the VRS had staged the incident, so as to lay the blame with the ABiH. Zagreb did not rule this out, but neither did they rule out the possibility that it might have been an unauthorized attack by people looking for food: if aid convoys were unable to reach Srebrenica regularly, this could herald more of such incidents, Zagreb feared. UNPF in Zagreb had apparently been influenced by a press release saying that ABiH soldiers had set fire to houses and taken cattle in a hit-and-run action on neighbouring Serbian villages.¹¹⁷²

Visnjica had hardly any significance in the warfare, but Bosnian-Serb radio used the *New York Times* report for propaganda purposes, and made it the symbol of the suffering of the local Serbian population: the attack was without strategic importance and was a sign of ABiH frustration following the failure of their offensive at Sarajevo. According to the Bosnian Serbs, it was also evidence that UNPROFOR had taken the side of the Muslims, because it had not opposed military activities from

¹¹⁶⁹ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

¹¹⁷⁰ UNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 27/06/95, No. MSC-2093; *New York Times*, 27/06/95.

¹¹⁷¹ MID/RNLA. C-1(NL)UN Infbat to the RNLA Crisis Staff, 28/06/95, No. TK95103.

¹¹⁷² SMG 1001. Interoffice Memorandum G3 Land Ops to FC, 13/07/95. The press release was from *Reuters* of 26/06/95.

the Safe Area.¹¹⁷³ Local VRS officers expressed similar accusations in response to the Visnjica incident: Dutchbat was partial and carried out its duties poorly. The Dutch soldiers were said to have allowed the Muslims past their checkpoints, and to have allowed the Muslims to wreak havoc in Visnjica. The Netherlands should have prevented this action, and it was even more evidence that the UN troops were partial.¹¹⁷⁴

The Dutch Military Intelligence Service also responded to the incident. The service thought that the Bosnian-Serb criticism that UNPROFOR had done too little to demilitarize the enclave, instead even supplying food and military resources to the ABiH in the enclave, was incorrect. It may have been the case that it was impossible for Dutchbat or UNMOs to verify the accusations on the spot, but in the past the Bosnian Serbs had repeatedly accused the UN of bias towards the ABiH. The Military Intelligence Service (MID) considered it conceivable that the VRS had been trying to justify the earlier capture of OP-E, or to use these reports to justify new operations in Bosnia.¹¹⁷⁵ This turned out to be all too true, although the Military Intelligence Service (MID) appeared to have reversed the cause and effect. Both incidents illustrated not only the increase of tension but also how difficult it was for Dutchbat to establish what was going on in and around the enclave in the vast and obscure territory, and certainly at night.

In the ABiH raid to Visnjica, the ABiH estimated that there were more than forty casualties on the VRS side. VRS messages had even been intercepted, which the ABiH happened to consider to be unreliable, that the VRS had lost 71 men. The ABiH Commander in Srebrenica, Becirovic, considered the operations to be a success, because, in other places too, a total of thirteen Bosnian Serbs had been 'liquidated'. The ABiH objective of occupying the VRS in East Bosnia had actually been achieved: the VRS had indeed been unable to continue sending troops to Sarajevo from the areas around Srebrenica and Zepa, but on the contrary had been obliged to transfer troops from elsewhere to Srebrenica and Zepa.¹¹⁷⁶

The fact that the ABiH attack was intended to tie up the VRS in East Bosnia was an illustration that Sarajevo was still the pearl in the Bosnian crown. All other interests were subordinate. This was a familiar pattern: it had also cropped up in the ideas regarding an exchange of territory between Sarajevo and Srebrenica (see Chapter 1 of this part). Another illustration of Sarajevo's importance was given in a meeting of the high command of the ABiH 2nd Corps that was also attended by Izetbegovic. The Commander of the ABiH 2nd Corps, Sead Delic, suggested in the meeting that instead of attempting to lift the blockade of Sarajevo, to concentrate on lifting the blockade of Srebrenica and Zepa. This idea did not go down well, however: As the capital city, Sarajevo was of greater strategic importance, and it was there that the decisive battle with the VRS should be fought. If the ABiH were to lose the fighting around Sarajevo, then there would be losses on all fronts. The ABiH would then be exhausted, and would have to give up on other fronts. In the backs of their minds, Sead Delic and other ABiH leaders still thought that in the battle for Sarajevo the enclaves could be attacked by the VRS, but they were counting on the fact that the international community and UNPROFOR would be able to protect the population.¹¹⁷⁷

The events at Visnjica also led to a comprehensive correspondence with the commanders of both warring factions. The Chief of Staff of UNPROFOR, Nicolai, wrote to Mladic that the ABiH had indeed carried out hostilities. However, he was unable to confirm the details that Mladic had provided.

¹¹⁷³ SMG 1004. SM Bijkerk to Dutchbat Opsroom, Radio message of 29 June BSA. Later, Visnjica appeared to play another small role in the media campaign when the 'Zvornik Seven' (the survivors of the journey to Tuzla who, after many detours, were handed over to the VRS by American soldiers in 1998 and put on trial in the Republika Srpska) were linked with Visnjica. However they had nothing to do with it.

¹¹⁷⁴ *The Inner Circle*, published by the Communication Section of Dutchbat III, Number 47, 3/07/95.

¹¹⁷⁵ MID/CO. MID/CO, Developments in the former Yugoslav Federation, No. 31/95, closed 291000B June 1995.

¹¹⁷⁶ ICTY (IT-98-33) D67/a. ABiH Command of 28th Division (Maj Ramiz Becirovic) to Command of 2nd Corps, Section for Morale and Political Guidance, 30/06/95, No. 01-114/95.

¹¹⁷⁷ Sefko Hodzic, *Otpjecaceni koverat*, p. 246-7.

Nicolai pointed out that, as Mladic was aware, the lack of fuel meant that patrols were impossible and neither could the incident be investigated. In fact, Dutchbat would not have done so anyway, because the incident took place outside the enclave. In recent weeks, Dutchbat had actually requested the local ABiH soldiers to comply, because UN Resolution 836, which led to the establishment of the Safe Areas and gave UNPROFOR the mandate to deter an attack on them, was still in force. On the other hand, Dutchbat should also ask the VRS to comply, in view of the increasing amount of firing on OPs. Nicolai also took the opportunity to repeat the request to Mladic to withdraw his troops from OP-E.¹¹⁷⁸ After the letter from Nicolai to Mladic, General Smith also expressed alarm about the recent incidents, because they could easily lead to further escalation. He also reminded Mladic that Resolution 836 was still in force. In addition to firing on civilians, Smith also referred to an increase in attacks on OPs in Srebrenica, Gorazde and Sarajevo, and added that he would not tolerate it. He wrote that he would not hesitate to respond within UNPROFOR's right to self-defence.¹¹⁷⁹

UNPROFOR also received a letter of protest from the Bosnian Muslim side, addressed to Smith. This was rather unpleasant, in view of the fact that ABiH Army Commander Rasim Delic himself had ordered the attacks outside the enclave. Perhaps it was for this reason that Delic aimed his arrows mainly at the loss of OP-E. He pointed out that Dutchbat no longer carried out its duties, because it no longer patrolled along the borders of the enclave, and therefore did nothing to protect the population. After the withdrawal of OP-E, the Serbian aggressor had been able to intensify its attacks on Srebrenica with impunity, according to Delic. He demanded the recapture of OP-E.¹¹⁸⁰ Nicolai answered from Sarajevo that he was unable to share Delic's view that the cause of the increasing tension was that Dutchbat was no longer performing its duties well. The shortage of fuel did not make it any easier to carry out the patrols. Foot patrols may well have been stopped temporarily, but Nicolai assured Delic that they had been resumed in the meantime. He furthermore pointed out to Delic that in recent weeks Dutchbat had warned the ABiH on several occasions to refrain from attacks outside the enclave.¹¹⁸¹ This letter did not actually state explicitly that Resolution 836 and the agreement of 8 May 1993 to demilitarize Srebrenica were still in force, but the Bosnian Muslims should have been well aware of the fact.

9. The final two weeks before the attack

The limited force of the actions around Srebrenica was completely out of proportion to the fighting power of the thirty thousand men that had concentrated around Sarajevo. The population of the enclave were nevertheless put in danger by them, because, however modest in scale, the military actions were linked with the major offensive at Sarajevo, as described earlier: the ABiH wanted to tie up the VRS around the enclave, and, to a lesser extent, the opposite was also the case.

After the unrest caused by the Pale bombings and the hostage crisis in early June, the humanitarian situation in the enclave had improved somewhat and it was relatively quiet there again. Soon, however, food aid degenerated into an instrument of warfare. There were political motives underlying the denial of aid to the population, but it was also an easy instrument. The VRS reports showed that in the Bosnian-Serb view, firing on the enclave was a direct consequence of the activities carried out by the ABiH outside the enclave. Only when the humanitarian situation in Srebrenica started to assume an extremely serious form (from 27 June), did the ABiH put a brake on military activities outside the enclave.

In the meantime, the ABiH scrutinized the activities of Dutchbat. The ABiH 2nd Corps said that it had secret reports from the UN at its disposal, and sent a message on the subject on 25 June to the 28th Division in Srebrenica. According to the message, a regrouping of the VRS and its tanks had been

¹¹⁷⁸ DCBC, 1019. Letter Brigadier General C.H. Nicolai to General Ratko Mladic, 26/06/95, No. CG/6043/206/95.

¹¹⁷⁹ DCBC, 1019. Letter Lt General R. Smith to General Ratko Mladic, 26/06/95, No. CG/6043/207/95.

¹¹⁸⁰ SMG 1004/5. Letter Army General Rasim Delic to Lt General R. Smith, 25/06/95, Ref. 02/32-40.

¹¹⁸¹ DCBC, 1019. Letter Brigadier General C.H. Nicolai to General Rasim Delic, 26/06/95, No. CG/6042/208/95.

observed in the enclave. The Dutchbat reconnaissance platoon was said to have established where 120 mm mortars had been set up. It was also stated in the report that the VRS expected an attack by the ABiH and that there had therefore been a mobilization in Bratunac: if the worst came to the worst, those who were eligible would have to report to their unit. The ABiH also observed an increase in the number of helicopter flights between the Republika Srpska and Serbia. The report also mentioned the VRS guarantee that everyone, except criminals, would be able to leave Srebrenica unhindered. Whoever wanted to could be escorted to Bosnian territory or to Serbia. At the same time, the report pointed out that it was not so easy in practice to leave the enclave: two people had left Srebrenica through the mediation of the UN in the form of transport. They did have to pay DM 6000 per person to a mediator for the privilege. Moreover, the report mentioned Opstina resolutions on banning the establishment of new objects. According to the report, this could refer to a possible exchange of territory between the two parties. It is unclear on which Dutchbat or Sector North East reports these statements were based.

It was possible to deduce from the correspondence that two Bosnian UN interpreters in the enclave informed the command of the 28th Division not only of the military activities of the VRS but also of that of UNPROFOR.¹¹⁸² The fact that a number of interpreters acted as ABiH informants was known within Dutchbat, because it had been observed that they had moved to the top floor of the PTT building in Srebrenica town. This was the location of the ABiH 28th Division intelligence section, which was taboo for Dutchbat and UNMOs.

Otherwise, it appears that the weight given by the 2nd Corps to the facts mentioned, if this is what they were, was not justified. The fact is that Dutchbat constantly kept track of the positions of the VRS equipment, in so far as it was in view. Statements on an exchange of territory were fixed items on the rumour menu.

With respect to the mediation of the UN in the evacuation of two people: residents of the enclave were not often able to leave the enclave through the mediation of the UN, but, on the other hand, it was not uncommon. In this case it concerned a Dutchbat-organized medical evacuation. However, it did not take place at the end of June: at the time Dutchbat was actually confronted with a refusal for clearance by the VRS for a medical evacuation of a member of their own personnel who needed surgery, which their own dressing station could not offer.¹¹⁸³ Neither did the report indicate which UN organization was involved with the smuggling. It could not have had anything to do with Dutchbat: there was little traffic from the battalion over the enclave border. On 20 June, a supply convoy of six trucks arrived for Dutchbat, to be unloaded at the closed compound in Potocari. For the first occasion in a long time, it was possible on 2 July for some Dutchbat personnel to leave the enclave, and this was after the ABiH report referred to. UNHCR convoys passed the border fairly often, but they remained in the enclave for only a few hours, and were furthermore under the control of accompanying non-Bosnian UNHCR Field Officers and of Dutchbat. For this reason, these vehicles returned to Belgrade, and on leaving the enclave they were also checked by the Bosnian Serbs, precisely because the VRS wanted to know if people were leaving the enclave.¹¹⁸⁴ All the above made frontier-running using UN vehicles fairly improbable. Other traffic that left the enclave on 15 June had to do with the departure of personnel from a Spanish and Swedish non-governmental organization. On 24 June, there was also a personnel rotation of *Médecins Sans Frontières*. It was also usual for this traffic to be checked by the Bosnian Serbs.

In a report on his contacts with Dutchbat, Ramiz Becirovic particularly reproached the Dutchbat liaison officer, Major Boering, for constantly blaming the ABiH as the cause of everything that the Bosnian Serbs carried out against the enclave. In particular, Boering had stated that the

¹¹⁸² NIOD, Coll. Trifunovic. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa, Odjeljenje Bezjednosti to Komanda 28. D. KoV, Odsjek SVB, 25/06/95, broj. SP. 06-401-2/95.

¹¹⁸³ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Commanding Officer 1(NL)UN Infbn (Dutchbat 3) to Commander Bosnia-Hercegovina Command thru Commander Sector North East, 29/06/95, No. TK95104.

¹¹⁸⁴ Interview Jovan Ivic, alias Jovo Rus, 20/10/00.

Bosnian Muslims had put the safety of the Safe Area in danger with their activities. According to Becirovic, Boering had no evidence for his accusations.¹¹⁸⁵

However, the Bosnian Muslims also came to realize that their activity outside the enclave borders did not continue without consequences. This was evident from an order of 27 June from the ABiH 2nd Corps to the 28th Division, to the effect that the activities outside the enclave borders must be curbed. Hostilities could still be planned, but they must not be executed without Tuzla's prior consent. The 28th Division must restrict itself to defence and reconnaissance, and was only to fire on VRS targets when really necessary, because otherwise there could be consequences for the population.¹¹⁸⁶ In any case, they should wait until the problems with the arrival of UNHCR convoys had been solved, to prevent the food situation deteriorating further. For the time being, the most important task was to take measures to prevent departure from the enclave (see Chapter 4). In a certain sense, the VRS also lent a helping hand, according to the report, in preventing departure from the enclave, because the message continued by warning that the VRS were checking the roads to Kladanj and Caparde (between Tuzla and Zvornik), so that a journey from Srebrenica to Tuzla was not without danger. Finally, the 28th Division were congratulated on the successful contribution to the actions for Sarajevo, and for inflicting heavy losses on the VRS.¹¹⁸⁷

After that, the military situation in the enclave remained relatively quiet in the last days of June, even though there were some incidents. There was no longer any question of ABiH hostilities outside the enclave borders, but a considerable number of shots and explosions could be heard every day, both inside and outside the enclave. The VRS fired anti-aircraft guns on the foremost ABiH lines with the purpose, the ABiH assumed, of rendering observation of the activities there impossible. In addition to infantry activity, the ABiH reported that the VRS were increasingly often attacking with artillery, deep inside ABiH territory, with the area around Sucaska in the south of the enclave suffering most. Moreover, the ABiH observed VRS activity near the bauxite mines. According to the ABiH assessment, Dutchbat avoided the VRS, because the battalion was afraid of the VRS.

The ABiH did reinforce its lines with an eye to 28 June, Sint Vitus' day, on which the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 was commemorated, and which was a day of mythical proportions for the Bosnian Serbs.¹¹⁸⁸ However, this day also passed with no activity other than the renewed harassment of the foremost ABiH lines with anti-aircraft guns.¹¹⁸⁹

Dutchbat reported in the last days of June, after the attack through the tunnel at Vitlovac, that the Potocari compound had been hit several times by rifle fire at intervals through the night. There was other activity to report: OP-R in the east of the enclave was also fired on. An exchange of fire took place on the nearby Kvarac peak between the VRS and the ABiH. On the other side of the enclave, in the west, eight mortar grenades fired by the VRS landed to the south of OP-A. A VRS tank fired a number of shots into the enclave. At OP-F, the VRS fired on farmers who were grazing their cattle, in which a number of shots hit the OP defence wall. The VRS fired on a Dutchbat patrol near OP-M, to which the OP responded by firing a .50 machine gun over the VRS positions. Much rifle fire could be heard near the Potocari compound, which narrowly missed a patrolling Dutchbat member. *Médecins Sans Frontières* reported three wounded as a result of the shelling of Sucaska.¹¹⁹⁰ In the night of 29 to 30

¹¹⁸⁵ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH 28. Divizije to Komanda 2.Korpora, 27/06/95, Str. Pov. Broj. 01-146/95.

¹¹⁸⁶ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpora to Komandi 28.d KoV, Komandi 285.lbr, 28/06/95, Str. Pov. Broj. 02/1-670/4.

¹¹⁸⁷ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpora to Komandi 28.d KoV i Zepi, 27/06/95, Str. Pov. Broj. 02/1-604/93.

¹¹⁸⁸ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH 28. Divizije, Odsjek obavjestajnih poslova to Odjeljenje obavjesta poslova 2. Korpora, 27/06/95, Str. Pov. Broj. 02-06-46/95.

¹¹⁸⁹ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH 28. Divizije to Komanda 2.Korpora, 28/06/95, Str. Pov. Broj. 01-148/95.

¹¹⁹⁰ NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. [Dutchbat] Milinfo 26/06/95, period 250600 - 260600; 27/06/95 period 260600 - 270600; 28/06/95, period 270600 - 280600; MSF Brussels. Capsat MSF Srebrenica to MSF Beo, 29/06/95 16:37.

June, the VRS made another attempt to infiltrate the enclave (at Dobra Zena), but the ABiH managed to frustrate it.¹¹⁹¹

The VRS bombardments resulted in one dead and ten wounded. The ABiH reported that the VRS was busy with reconnaissance and re-establishing positions. Excavators were being used near Mount Caus (near Potocari) and to the south of Bratunac, possibly to improve the protection of Bratunac. The VRS was also hard at work laying mines in the vicinity of Buljim. On 29 June, this cost the life of one ABiH soldier, while another was severely wounded.¹¹⁹² The VRS were also said to have laid mines within the enclave to block the passage to Tuzla. In this, with hindsight, the Bosnian Muslims saw a preparation for the attack on Srebrenica: the VRS is said to have known that it would probably become the escape route to Tuzla. But at the time that this happened, there were not yet any orders for the VRS to attack, and the laying of mines appeared to be more intended to keep the ABiH within the enclave.¹¹⁹³

The ABiH 2nd Corps had understood from the intercepted radio traffic that a unit of the Drina Wolves of Captain Dragan Jovic (alias Legenda) had left the area at Srebrenica in support of the Zvornik brigade to the north. The Commander of the Drina Corps, General Zivanovic, had not been informed of this transfer. When he was told, he wanted - at the request of Brigade Commander Vukovic - twenty men to return to the enclave, because the Skelani Brigade had a shortage of men. Ultimately, it was possible to find twenty soldiers for that purpose who were in punishment detention. Neither did this withdrawal of the Drina Wolves immediately point to preparations for an attack on Srebrenica.¹¹⁹⁴

On 29 June, there was again panic after fifty VRS soldiers entered the southeast of the enclave. The B Company Quick Reaction Force made their way in that direction and the Potocari Quick Reaction Force put itself on standby on the compound in Srebrenica. The threat increased a little because a VRS T-54 tank started its engines there. The VRS liaison officer at Yellow Bridge asked why the Quick Reaction Force had been called out, and UNMOs informed the ABiH of the matter. Deputy Battalion Commander Franken informed Company Commander Groen of the Bravo Company that a further VRS penetration must, if necessary, be responded to by firing. Without any further provocation the VRS disappeared again, however. The only incident to take place in the meantime was that the VRS fired on two enclave residents who were one hundred metres away in a tree. The VRS also fired a shot over OP-K.

After that, for the sake of peace, a discussion was held with the ABiH, in which Dutchbat was accused of not being in a position to do anything against the VRS activities in the Bandera Triangle in the west of the enclave. But the fact was that the ABiH had actually denied Dutchbat access to this area in January, and forbidden them from occupying OP-B in the Bandera Triangle (see Chapter 6 of Part II). This was precisely where the ABiH received direct hits from the VRS. In order to come into action in the area itself, the ABiH then demanded all the weapons from the Weapon Collection Point, which was rejected by the Dutchbat liaison team.¹¹⁹⁵

The daily report of the ABiH of 3 July indicated that measures had been taken to resort to the highest state of readiness, to prevent VRS reconnaissance teams approaching the ABiH lines. Attention was also extended to the humanitarian situation, which was assuming the form of a catastrophe. Hunger meant that an increasing number of ABiH soldiers were no longer able to carry out combat

¹¹⁹¹ ICTY (IT-98-33) D67/a. ABiH Command of 28th Division (Maj Ramiz Becirovic) to Command of 2nd Corps, Section for Morale and Political Guidance, 30/06/95, No. 01-114/95.

¹¹⁹² ICTY (IT-98-33) D66/a. ABiH Command of 28th Division (Asst Commander for Morale Captain Nijaz Masic) to the Command of 2nd Corps Morale Department, 30/06/95, No. 04-113/95.

¹¹⁹³ Interview Hazrudin Kistic, Tuzla, 17/05/99 and 18/05/99.

¹¹⁹⁴ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa to Komandi 28.divizije n/r obavjestajnom organ, 29/06/95, Str. Pov. Broj. 02/8-01-1026.

¹¹⁹⁵ NIOD, Coll. Koreman. Diary of Koreman, 39th week, p. 7-25; SMG 1004/38. Capsat Maj Franken to Cap Groen, undated.

duties. There would soon also be no more food for the ABiH. The 2nd Corps in Tuzla asked the General Staff of the ABiH to make all possible efforts to alarm all relevant international organizations and to put pressure on the VRS.¹¹⁹⁶ On 3 July, there was still no sign of alarming messages about an imminent attack by the VRS.

10. The motivation for starting the attack

Even now, there are no reliable sources for the precise motivations of the Bosnian Serbs to start the attack on Srebrenica around the time that it happened. All explanations are with the wisdom of hindsight, and at the moment are little more than the rationalized hypotheses of relative outsiders. It is therefore difficult to draw a distinction between convenient arguments, explanations with hindsight after the attack had been started, and the actual reasons for starting the attack. If, however, one looks behind the rhetoric of the Bosnian-Serb side, there nonetheless seems to be a reasonably consistent line from various spokesmen in the motives for the attack on the enclave.

Alongside military-strategic layers there are also economic reasons underlying the attack on the enclave. The Podrinje, the area around Srebrenica, because of its position on the Drina, was an area of geo-strategic importance for both Muslims and Bosnian Serbs. The links with Serbia and the economic prospects of the Podrinje, with its mines, industry and agriculture, played a role, even though it has to be said that the importance of Gorazde far surpassed that of Srebrenica in this regard.¹¹⁹⁷ A memo addressed to Akashi indicated that there could be little doubt that gaining possession of the area west of the Drina was 'a primary strategic Serb objective', and that this was of great importance to the leaders in Pale.¹¹⁹⁸

Just as for the Bosnian Muslims, Srebrenica had no priority for the Bosnian Serbs because of political-strategic factors. The offensive started in mid June by the ABiH to break the siege around Sarajevo demanded all attention. At the same time, this offensive actually focussed attention on Srebrenica again, through the ABiH action towards Han Pijesak that was associated with it, which, among other things, culminated in the Visnjica incident. The question is then whether this action, and the above mentioned increase in the number of skirmishes between the combatants in the spring of 1995, played a role in the ultimate Bosnian-Serb decision to attack the enclave. A list is presented below of what was known to UNPROFOR on the attack on the enclave. This is followed by miscellaneous extracts and an analysis of the Bosnian-Serb points of view, followed by the points of view of the Bosnian Muslims. The majority of the points of view are retrospective, but a number provide an explanation for starting the attack on Srebrenica even before the fall of the enclave.

The motivation for starting the attack according to UNPROFOR

There are no well-founded UNPROFOR points of view, also with hindsight. UNPROFOR had no view of the actual motives of the Bosnian Serbs to attack the enclave. When asked, General Smith said that on 16 July, after the fall of Srebrenica, Mladic said to him that the VRS had attacked Srebrenica because of the sustained hit-and-run operations from the enclave. Smith himself saw the attack as a local event with no direct link to any strategy elsewhere.¹¹⁹⁹ Also given as a reason in Mladic's biography is: 'each day we had ten dead. They call that a Safe Area. Therefore we resorted to the attack in July 1995.' According to Mladic, Dutchbat would be able to confirm that the ABiH undertook attacks from the enclave.¹²⁰⁰

¹¹⁹⁶ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Koanda 2. Korpusa to GSS ARBiH KM Kakanj, 03/07/95, Str.pov.br. 02/2-13-489

¹¹⁹⁷ Borislav Durdevic, in *Srpska Vojaska*, 25/08/95.

¹¹⁹⁸ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 88041, File 4-4 Notes on Meetings, 4 Jul - Dec 95. Interoffice Memorandum T. Colborne-Malpas to SRSG, 06/07/95.

¹¹⁹⁹ Interview R. A. Smith, 12/01/00.

¹²⁰⁰ Ljiljana Bulatovic, *General Mladic*, p. 101.

Karremans said that, on Dutchbat's departure from Srebrenica, he asked Mladic what would have happened if the Muslims had been unarmed, and if there had been no soldiers in the enclave. Karremans asked whether the enclave would then still have existed. Mladic's answer was 'yes'.¹²⁰¹ Mladic later also said to journalists that what had happened in Srebrenica and Zepa could have been prevented if those areas were disarmed in accordance with the agreements signed in 1993.¹²⁰² It is difficult to establish to what extent a distinction has to be made here between a politically correct and a genuine answer. Nevertheless, all these statements point in the same direction, that the attack took place as a response to the ABiH sorties to Bosnian-Serb territory. Immediately after the raid to Visnjica had become known, Janvier had also expressed the fear that it would lead to reprisals.

Western intelligence services were also cautious in drawing conclusions. Little is known from Western or UN sources about the motivation for an attack on Srebrenica. According to a Western intelligence service statement on 10 July, the ABiH raids in the previous weeks certainly contributed to the VRS decision to attack.¹²⁰³ According to another Western intelligence service too, the raids from the Safe Area were the probable reason for the VRS attack on Srebrenica.¹²⁰⁴

The motivation for starting the attack according to Bosnian-Serb sources

The actual plan for the attack on the enclave, Operation 'Kravija '95', will be discussed in the following section. Attention is given here to the explanations to the question of why the attack took place, and why it took place at that time. From the available Bosnian-Serb sources, a consistent line can be detected in the thinking of the VRS, but there is no precise description of the motives for attacking the enclave.

In this, two types of explanation can be distinguished. Explanations can be sought in Srebrenica as part of a larger strategic whole, in which the reasoning for the attack would be that the Bosnian Serbs were at a disadvantage in the war as a whole, which forced them to concentrate their resources and to consider political solutions, such as the changes to the map of the Contact Group for the division of Bosnia. In this explanation, the fate of Srebrenica is closely linked to that of the Zepa enclave. Explanations can also be sought in the enclave as an isolated problem, in which the VRS started the attack as a response to earlier events, in which it wished to test what might happen next. In this explanation, the attack on Srebrenica must be seen as separate from that on Zepa. Both levels of explanation will be discussed.

In the more comprehensive explanations, the Bosnian Serbs are assumed to have identified two phases in the military-strategic thinking of the ABiH. In the first phase, the VRS thought, the ABiH wanted to conquer all the territory that would devolve to the Muslims on the basis of the Contact Group plan. This meant that the ABiH wanted to break the siege of Sarajevo and wanted to cut the Posavina Corridor at Brcko, to separate the eastern and western parts of the Republika Srpska. In a second phase of the offensive, the Drina would have to be reached along a wide front, such that the eastern enclaves would be linked with Central Bosnia. In addition to the offensive at Sarajevo, the ABiH would initiate offensives from Tuzla and Kladanj towards Srebrenica and Zepa. The VRS feared that this could lead to enclosure of its own territory. The VRS also recognized the danger of activities from the enclaves in support of ABiH actions elsewhere, the ultimate result of which could be that the eastern enclaves would become larger and would be linked with Central Bosnia.¹²⁰⁵

It is also clear from this analysis what the dangers for the VRS were. The Bosnian Serbs were then wrestling in East Bosnia with two main problems, which meant that the Drina Corps were hardly

¹²⁰¹ SMG 1007/13. Statement of LCol T. Karremans, Camp Pleso press conference (Zagreb) 23/07/95.

¹²⁰² ANP, 'Mladic wil onderhandelen met autoriteiten Gorazde' (Mladic wants to negotiate with authorities in Gorazde), 270523 Jul 95.

¹²⁰³ Confidential information (5).

¹²⁰⁴ Confidential interview (48).

¹²⁰⁵ ICTY (IT-98-33) D 160/a, Radinovic Report, para 1.6-1.11.

in an enviable position. Firstly there was a great lack of troops, and in addition the Drina Corps, which was partly formed from territorially organized military units, was engaged on two fronts. On the outside lines this concerned defending the line Tuzla-Zvornik, Kladanj-Vlasenica, Olovo-Sokolac and Gorazde-Visegrad. On the inside lines, there were defences around Srebrenica, Zepa and a part of Gorazde. This explains Mladic's fear for the establishment of a corridor between the Muslim-Croat Federation and the enclaves: if this should be created, then the area that was under the Drina Corps' responsibility would be split in two, and the undermanned corps could be attacked from the rear. The Drina Corps had no reserves, and there would be no way open other than to give up the Podrinje, the area around Srebrenica.

The fact that in the meantime the balance of forces around Srebrenica was favouring the ABiH - there were calculations of 1 VRS soldier to 2.8 ABiH soldiers - was less relevant: within the ABiH, not everyone had a weapon, and, with respect to heavy weapons, the VRS again had superior power. VRS sources stated that the ABiH therefore drew up a plan as early as November 1994 to overpower the Dutchbat bases and weapons,¹²⁰⁶ which indeed proved to be the case.

If the actions against the eastern enclaves are taken into consideration - not to be confused with the conquest of the entire enclaves - then it can be established that had been on the Bosnian-Serb agenda for a considerable time. In early March 1995, Karadzic had already ordered a separation between Srebrenica and Zepa, to prevent traffic between the two enclaves and to create an intolerable situation in which there would be no hope of survival for the residents. Mladic had determined in an ensuing directive that the VRS must prepare operations against the enclaves. In East Bosnia, however, the priority was fighting the ABiH in the area to the east of Tuzla: Kalesija, Simin Han and the regions Teocak and Sapna. At an early stage, the VRS took account of the possibility of a departure of UNPROFOR from the enclaves, which Boutros-Ghali and Janvier would indeed propose at the end of May 1995 (see Chapter 1 of this part). In that case, it would be easier for the VRS to deal with the ABiH in the enclaves and to gain possession of the Drina valley, where the eastern enclaves were situated.¹²⁰⁷

Many VRS sources mention a link between the ABiH actions and the attack on the enclaves. In an interview at the end of August with the army newspaper *Srpska Vojska*, General Radislav Krstic, who led the actions against Srebrenica, and in the meantime had become the Commander of the Drina Corps, likewise indicated that the motivation for the VRS attack must be sought in the fact that the ABiH had undertaken a number of offensive actions from Srebrenica and Zepa in the previous six months. Serbian villages such as Osmace, Kotijevac, Visnjica and Podravanje had been set on fire (not all these villages were actually completely Serbian). UNPROFOR had failed, because it had done nothing to stop these actions, whereas it would have known everything about them. According to Krstic, UNPROFOR had failed in the demilitarization of the enclaves, but instead had only put up a smoke screen behind which the Bosnian Muslims could attack Bosnian-Serb territory.

The VRS appeared to assume that UNPROFOR and Dutchbat were informed of the military activities of the ABiH outside Srebrenica. The VRS therefore concluded that UNPROFOR was prejudiced, partly because warnings from the Security Council and from UNPROFOR were mainly directed against the Bosnian Serbs, while in Bosnian-Serb eyes the Muslims also rode roughshod over the resolutions on the Safe Areas.¹²⁰⁸ Krstic concluded that the Safe Areas were no longer *safe*, and that there was a danger of actions on an increasingly large scale deeper into Bosnian-Serb territory, in which Bosnian Serbs could be killed. For this reason, the VRS found it necessary to take measures in the short term to call a halt to the threat from Srebrenica and Zepa.¹²⁰⁹

¹²⁰⁶ ICTY (IT-98-33) D 160/a, Radinovic Report, para 2.12, 2.13, 2.15.

¹²⁰⁷ ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 425/a. Karadzic, Directive No. 7, 8/03/95, No. 2/2-11. General Pukovnik Ratko Mladic, Directive No. 7/1, 31/03/95, No. 02/2-15.

¹²⁰⁸ ICTY (IT-98-33) D 160/a, Radinovic Report, para 2.12.

¹²⁰⁹ Borislav Durdevic, in *Srpska Vojska*, 25/08/95.

The VRS units destined for the attack on Zepa were told that ABiH sabotage units had penetrated deep inside Bosnian-Serb territory, so that the VRS were suffering constant losses.¹²¹⁰

Colonel Milovan Milutinovic, the head of the army information service of VRS headquarters, also drew a direct line between the ABiH actions and the VRS attack. He pointed out that the Safe Areas Srebrenica, Zepa and Gorazde had been misused in the last month to attack VRS positions.¹²¹¹ According to him, in 1995 alone, ABiH fighters committed arson in approximately fifty Bosnian-Serb settlements around the enclave. Every couple of days houses would go up in flames and several people would be murdered, which had led to a flight from the villages around the enclave. In the months of May and June 1995, and even before then, the General Staff of the VRS had issued warnings to UNPROFOR that the 28th Division was not disarmed. Because the UN was not prepared to do anything about it, the VRS started the operation against the enclave, according to Milutinovic.¹²¹²

It was correct to say that there had been warnings from the VRS to UNPROFOR. However, Milutinovic's statements are somewhat too firm, because, as stated above, the Bosnian Serbs had already taken the decision in March to reduce the size of the Srebrenica enclave.

This shifts the perception of the complete military-strategic situation in East-Bosnia, via a possible attack on the eastern enclaves, to the attack on Srebrenica itself. What then comes to light in the first place is the question why Srebrenica was not attacked earlier, while Mladic had set down in a directive that this had to happen 'as rapidly as possible'. The Serbian journalist Zoran Petrovic-Pirocanac answered this question in an article in the Belgrade weekly *Intervju*. From 13 July he was in the area around Srebrenica and he was the one who filmed the famous pictures of the surrender of the Muslim men on the journey to Tuzla.¹²¹³

According to this journalist, the reason that Srebrenica was temporarily pushed to the background as an objective was that the conflict surrounding Teocak in the Majeveca hills flared up in the spring; the VRS attempted to cut off the ABiH's path there (see Chapter 1). This would later be admitted by the VRS as a tactical error: already at the start of the year, the fall of Srebrenica could have brought about a change on the Bosnian field of combat for the Bosnian Serbs, because trampling the enclave underfoot would have released the brigades that could be well used elsewhere.

According to Petrovic-Pirocanac, the high command of the Republika Srpska - which included Karadzic, the Generals Mladic, Gvero, Tolimir and the politicians Krajisnik, Plavsic and Koljevic - had talked about Srebrenica on various occasions. Already at the beginning of January, the command of the Republika Srpska was said to have come to the decision to step up the pressure on the eastern Safe Areas. Part of this pressure was limiting the freedom of movement of UNPROFOR from and to the enclaves, and imposing restrictions on the access of convoys. As early as February 1995 Karadzic is said to have had a clear picture of plans for conquering Srebrenica, but only in early July would Mladic be given the green light by the leaders of the Republika Srpska to start the operation.¹²¹⁴

An explanation for the attack on Srebrenica during the attack itself came from the information service of the VRS General Staff, which distributed a press release through the press agency *Tanjug* on 9 July stating that the Bosnian Muslims were using the Safe Area as a base for starting attacks, where particular mention was made of the incident in Visnjica.¹²¹⁵ On 10 July, VRS General Gvero attempted to remind the world that in 1993 the Bosnian Serbs had halted their advance against Srebrenica after the UN promised that the area would be demilitarized. According to him, the Bosnian Muslims had done everything, however, to prevent that, and had later even brought weapons into the enclave. Gvero

¹²¹⁰ ICTY, (IT-98-33) D96/a. Command of Drina Corps to Commands of 1st and 5th Podrinje Light Infantry Brigade, 05/07/95, No. 04/156-4.

¹²¹¹ *The Ledger* (Lakeland, FL), 10/07/95.

¹²¹² Interview Colonel Milovan Milutinovic, 20/03/00 and 23/03/00.

¹²¹³ Discussions Zoran Petrovic-Pirocanac, 31/03/98 and 02/04/98.

¹²¹⁴ Zoran Petrovic-Pirocanac, *Intervju*, 21/07/95; ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex.499/a. ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 403/a, Butler Report, para 1.11.

¹²¹⁵ *Politika*, 10/07/95.

pointed to the hundred dead and the more than two hundred wounded that had fallen on the Bosnian-Serb side as a result of ABiH actions. Gvero also mentioned Visnjica in this regard, in addition to the death of woodcutters, the laying of ambushes for VRS vehicles and the killing of policemen at Osmace.

Where Gvero subsequently resorted to false rhetoric was in his statement that the ABiH had launched a military action to link Srebrenica with Zepa.¹²¹⁶ VRS General Tolimir also mentioned this to Janvier on 10 July.¹²¹⁷ This reasoning emerged on other occasions, but no grounds for it can be found.

The link between ABiH actions and the VRS attack on the enclave Srebrenica was also laid by Jovan Zametica, an advisor to Radovan Karadzic. He pointed out that the Bosnian Muslims had misused the status of the Safe Area, and: 'we are determined to put a stop to these acts of terrorism'.¹²¹⁸ Mladic wrote likewise to Smith on 10 July: misuse of the Safe Area was the reason why the 'Muslim terrorists' had been neutralized.¹²¹⁹ On 11 July, Akashi was also told by Milosevic that the VRS military action was a response to that of the ABiH.¹²²⁰ That the Bosnian Serbs were completely fed up with the misuse of the Srebrenica Safe Area was clear; the various numbers of dead civilians did not appear to be devoid of a propaganda element. We will return later in this section to the question of how many victims there had been on the Bosnian-Serb side around Srebrenica.

Among the Bosnian-Serb population, the constant casualties as a result of raids from a Safe Area, which was deemed to be demilitarized, also led to great indignation and fear. The residents of Bratunac could not easily forget the events of 1992 and 1993, when the town was surrounded on two sides and many civilians lost their lives. For this reason there was also much pressure from the Bosnian-Serb population to do something against the ABiH sorties, because many feared becoming a victim.¹²²¹

The former Chief of the General Staff of the VRS, later Minister of Defence of the Republika Srpska, General Manojlo Milovanovic, thought likewise that the attack was a response to the ABiH sortie towards the VRS headquarters in Han Pijesak, which culminated in the Visnjica incident.¹²²² The historian Milivoje Ivanisevic indicated that the ABiH raids were the reason for the attack: to prevent repetition, the ABiH lines must be taken.¹²²³ When asked, the journalist Zoran Jovanovic, at the time employed as information officer of the Drina Corps, confirmed that the murder of the five VRS woodcutters at Rupovo Bdro near Milici on 28 May and the raids on 26 June at Visnjica, followed by an attack on a VRS liaison patrol at Crna Rijeka, three kilometres from the Drina Corps headquarters - in which, as well as two dead and two wounded, Jovanovic's son had been wounded - brought Mladic to the decision to finally disarm the enclave.

According to him, the reason for the attack on Zepa was hardly any different: there too, the ABiH troops were under the command of the 28th Division, and in some actions the VRS did not know whether the opponents came from Srebrenica or from Zepa.¹²²⁴

This again raises the question of to what extent the events in Srebrenica and later in Zepa must be seen as inextricably linked together. General Krstic was quoted above, and he spoke in an interview in August 1995 of ABiH raids from Srebrenica and Zepa as an explanation for the attack on Srebrenica. But why then attack Srebrenica and not Zepa? In his trial, Krstic stated that the decision to attack Srebrenica was actually isolated. According to him it rested on two points. The first was that there was

¹²¹⁶ CRST. Telex Banja Luka (UNHCR) 11jul95 1102Z

¹²¹⁷ ABiH Tuzla. Komanda 2. Korpusa za Odbranu Republike Vojna Tajna Strogo Povjerljivo, 11/07/95, Str. pov. br. 02/8-01-1215.

¹²¹⁸ *Associated Press*, 11/07/95; Tuesday 18:46 Eastern Time.

¹²¹⁹ SMG 1004/84. HQ Army of the Republic of Srpska to UNPROFOR Command, 10/07/95, No. 06/17-455, sent by UNMO liaison officer Pale 11113B July 1995. SMG 1002/10. Capsat UNHCR Srebrenica to UNHCR Belgrade, Sarajevo, Zagreb, 10/07/95 17:05.

¹²²⁰ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. UNPROFOR/NATO Close-Air Support to Dutch Battalion at Potocari, 11/07/95, Chronology or Events.

¹²²¹ Interview Momcilo Cvjetinovic, 25/06/98.

¹²²² Interview Manojlo Milovanovic, 18/11/98. In mid 1995, Milanovic was a Corps Commander in the Bihac.

¹²²³ Interview Milivoje Ivanisevic, 17/09/99.

¹²²⁴ Interview Zoran Jovanovic, 13/09/99.

a directive from the General Staff of the VRS from March 1995 that prescribed the separation of Srebrenica and Zepa - which was discussed in Chapter 1 of this part. According to him, the other point, and the actual decision to resort to the attack, was in fact the attacks by the 28th Division from the Srebrenica enclave and the persistent infiltration into Bosnian-Serb territory from the enclave.¹²²⁵ Srebrenica therefore presented the VRS with more problems than Zepa.

The motivation for starting the attack according to Bosnian Muslim sources

On the Bosnian Muslim side there was less insight into the motivation for the VRS attack. In so far as it can be established, they were never aware of the directives issued by Karadzic and Mladic in March for the separation of Srebrenica and Zepa, which were the basis for the attack. By way of completing the quest for the motives for an attack, it is nonetheless desirable to investigate the associated views from the Bosnian side.

Brigadier-General Sead Delic, the Commander of the ABiH 2nd Corps, thought that the attack on Srebrenica had everything to do with the ABiH offensive from Sarajevo. The ABiH had carried out raids from the enclave, to lure the VRS away from the surroundings of Sarajevo. For Delic, breaking the siege subsequently meant the start of the attack on Srebrenica. For Sead Delic, this offensive was also the reason why the attack did not take place until July 1995, and why after rolling up OP-E on 3 June the VRS could not continue the attack on Srebrenica: all the VRS' energy was needed at Sarajevo.

An additional explanation for the attack, in his opinion, could be found in the tactics that the VRS followed: they had first wanted to see how Dutchbat responded to the attack, and whether Close Air Support would follow. In this way, the VRS wanted to explore the state of the defence of Srebrenica by the ABiH.¹²²⁶

The Bosnian military intelligence service gave a slightly different explanation of why the attack did not start until July. The ABiH thought that an attack really had been planned for the spring of 1995. After the ABiH offensive in the Majevisa hills at the end of March had been halted, an attack on Srebrenica immediately came back into prospect. From intercepts (intercepted message traffic) and Human Intelligence (spying) the ABiH had got wind of the fact that on 5 and 6 May there had been a meeting of the top of the Drina Corps, including such attendees as: General Krstic, the VRS brigade commanders, and protecting and special units from elsewhere that did not belong to the Drina Corps. It would have been clear to the ABiH then that the VRS' intention was to start the attack on the eastern enclaves, initially with Srebrenica.¹²²⁷ The ABiH thought then, in May, that it had also seen signs of a build up of armed forces around the enclave.¹²²⁸ According to a source in the Bosnian military intelligence service, however, the VRS had again postponed the execution at the last moment, because there appeared to be shortages of lorries and buses, which were necessary for bringing in reinforcements. According to this source, the plan then remained on the agenda, because the attack would be necessary for the VRS for two other reasons, which will be dealt with below: firstly to free up troops for reinforcing the men in the Krajina, and secondly to improve morale.¹²²⁹

The Croatian attack in the Krajina was started on 4 June 1995. The question is therefore whether the strategy followed there by the Croats had any influence on the decision of the VRS to start the attack against Srebrenica. This attack would actually mean that troops would be freed up in East-Bosnia to be able to cope with the Croatian attack in the Krajina. According to ABiH Corps

¹²²⁵ ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 399/a bis; interview of Radislav Krstic, 18/02/00.

¹²²⁶ Interview Sead Delic, 10/03/99. In an interview Sefko Hodzic in July 1998, Sead Delic gave the same motivation and added that the Bosnian Serbs were convinced that the international community would not respond and that in his opinion the international community had given something of a 'nod' to making an end to the problem of the eastern enclaves. (Sefko Hodzic, *Otpacaveni koverat*, p. 249).

¹²²⁷ Interview Semsudin Murinovic, 17/05/99.

¹²²⁸ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 08/02/98.

¹²²⁹ Interview Hazrudin Kistic, 17/05/99 and 18/05/99.

Commander Sead Delic, this could have played a role.¹²³⁰ The Bosnian-Serb leaders, according to him, would have had the choice of giving preference to operations in East or in West Bosnia. The fact was that there was a risk that if the VRS were to find itself at a disadvantage in West Bosnia, they would still be confronted with the East Bosnian enclaves. Mladic was said to have shown more interest in the defence of West Bosnia, but Karadzic decided that East Bosnia had priority.¹²³¹ It is impossible to establish to what extent such perceptions played a role and how probable they were.

It was also clear for the ABiH that the morale of a part of the VRS was poor, and a victory at Srebrenica would be an opportunity to give it a boost.¹²³² The ABiH considered that it had evidence of this after a number of VRS documents had fallen into ABiH hands in the Bihac. For instance, a document from 21 June - therefore from before the ABiH actions towards Visnjica - indicated that the VRS were faced with a morale crisis, which would have to be stopped by means of a rapid and brief action.¹²³³

ABiH officer Semsudin Murinovic also thought that, alongside tactical considerations, feelings of revenge also played a role in the decision to attack Srebrenica. Because of the murders of Bosnian Serbs outside the enclave by ABiH troops, and especially in Kravica at the start of the war, feelings of revenge prevailed in the Republika Srpska, according to him.¹²³⁴ These feelings of revenge should possibly be categorized on two levels: firstly as a general theme of revenge in the conflict in the light of the events in the preceding years, and secondly as a specific trigger in the decision actually to trample the enclave underfoot.

On the Bosnian side, on the other hand, not everyone appeared to be convinced of a link with the events in Visnjica. Army Commander Rasim Delic did not think that it was a pretext for an attack: 'The Serbs would have clutched at *everything*, as soon as they decided to attack. They then had great problems, were losing territory and becoming disoriented. In their eyes, one large victory could reverse that process.' The Division Commander in Srebrenica, Ramiz Becirovic, also thought that there was no direct link with the later attack on the enclave.¹²³⁵ The Police Commander Hakija Meholic thought that the decision to take Srebrenica had already been made before the events in Visnjica.¹²³⁶ The local SDA politician Ibran Mustafic said that the raid that culminated in the incident in Visnjica was the only action of the local ABiH to have proceeded reasonably well, although it did not amount to much. He did think that that it had resulted in the Bosnian-Serb attack, however.¹²³⁷ The assessment of the last three must be treated with some caution, however, because it concerns the suspicions of residents of the enclave, who had little visibility of what was going on outside the enclave.

Implicitly, the Bosnian temporary Charge d'Affaires at the UN, Ivan Mistic, also made a link between the Bosnian-Serb attack and the events in Visnjica, although he did not identify this place by name. Mistic stated in the Security Council on 12 July, one day after the fall of Srebrenica, that the strategists in Pale themselves had initiated an attack against an ostensibly Serbian village. This village was said to be populated by actors who made out that they were being terrorized by Muslim Special Forces. It may be true that television teams and reporters were there immediately, but the foreign press could not have known that in reality it was a Bosnian village had been ethnically cleansed by Karadzic's hordes. These were methods that Goebbels used to use, Mistic said.¹²³⁸

Finally, the NATO bombing of Pale on 25 and 26 May was also thought by the ABiH to have influenced the VRS decision to attack the enclaves. After all, more bombings could lead to further

¹²³⁰ Interview Sead Delic, 10/03/99.

¹²³¹ Interview Makar, 23/03/01.

¹²³² Interview Sefko Tihic, 08/03/99.

¹²³³ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Command 2nd Corps to all divisions, 18/07/95, No. 04/1-105-618. This referred to a document from the General Staff of the VRS of 21/06/95 No. 02/2.

¹²³⁴ Interview Semsudin Murinovic, 17/05/99.

¹²³⁵ Interview Rasim Delic, 21/04/98.

¹²³⁶ Interview Hakija Meholic, 19/04/98.

¹²³⁷ Interview Ibran Mustafic, 16/04/98.

¹²³⁸ ABZ, PVVN. Security Council 3553rd meeting (S/PV.3553) of 12/07/95.

erosion of the VRS military infrastructure and could accentuate VRS ideas to settle the Bosnian crisis by military means.¹²³⁹

Making up the balance of the motivation for starting the attack

Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Muslims appear in general terms to agree that losses on the Bosnian-Serb side as a result of actions of Bosnian Muslims were a bone of contention for the VRS that had a strong influence on the motivation for the start of the attack on the enclave. There can be no complete answer to the question of how great these losses outside the territory of the enclave were precisely. This seems to be partly the consequence of the definition of the period and the size of the area, and of the question of whether soldiers or civilians were involved. They could refer to the number of victims from the start of the war, or from the period when Srebrenica was designated a Safe Area. With respect to the size of the area being referred to: it could be concerned with the area of the Podrinje with the Opstinas adjacent to Srebrenica, such as Bratunac, Skelani and Milici, or a wider area.

For these reasons, there are different estimates in circulation of the total number of victims on the Bosnian-Serb side around Srebrenica. Karadzic, for example, said as early as 26 January 1994 that there had been 1260 Serbian deaths as a result of ABiH raids.¹²⁴⁰ The pathologist Zoran Stankovic, who performed many post mortems in the area, thought that in the course of the entire war there had been approximately 1600 deaths on the Bosnian-Serb side around Srebrenica.¹²⁴¹ The historian Milivoje Ivanisevic likewise indicated that prior to the fall of the enclave 1600 Bosnian Serbs had died in and around Srebrenica.¹²⁴² The journalist Zoran Jovanovic even thought that in the regions around Vlasenica, Bratunac and Srebrenica during the entire war approximately three thousand Serbs had died, ninety per cent of which were civilians.¹²⁴³ VRS Major Zoran Malinic indicated in July 1995 that in the two previous years there had been seven hundred casualties.¹²⁴⁴ On 10 July, Mladic wrote to Smith that because of the misuse of the Safe Area, one hundred Serbian civilians had died and two hundred had been wounded.¹²⁴⁵ Jovan Zametica, advisor to Karadzic, asserted on 11 July: 'We have had 30 killed civilians in the past 45 days'.¹²⁴⁶ Where purely military losses were concerned, Milosevic informed Akashi on 11 July that in the preceding weeks as a result of ambushes and attacks, 150 VRS soldiers had died.¹²⁴⁷ It can be deduced from data originating in the VRS that, after the demilitarization of Srebrenica, 35 soldiers of the Bratunac Brigade were killed and 25 of the Zvornik Brigade, while 13 were missing.¹²⁴⁸ The ABiH estimated that the attack towards Han Pijesak and the incident in Visnjica had cost the VRS more than forty casualties, and possibly even 71. Furthermore, in the days prior to the raid, another thirteen VRS soldiers died.¹²⁴⁹

A military-strategic reason for the General Staff of the VRS to start the operation was to free up troops. These troops were greatly needed around Sarajevo and elsewhere on the sparsely occupied front line of the Drina Corps.¹²⁵⁰ The thought arose within the ABiH too that the VRS needed the brigades

¹²³⁹ Interview Semsudin Murinovic, 17/05/99.

¹²⁴⁰ *The Toronto Star*, 26/6/94.

¹²⁴¹ Interview Zoran Stankovic, 28/05/00.

¹²⁴² Interview Milivoje Ivanisevic, 13/12/99.

¹²⁴³ Interview Zoran Jovanovic, 13/09/99.

¹²⁴⁴ Interview V.B. Egbers, 02/09/99.

¹²⁴⁵ SMG 1004/84. HQ Army of the Republic of Srpska to UNPROFOR Command, 10/07/95, No. 06/17-455, sent by UNMO liaison officer Pale 11113B July 1995.

¹²⁴⁶ *Associated Press*, 11/07/95; Tuesday 18:46 Eastern Time.

¹²⁴⁷ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. UNPROFOR/NATO Close-Air Support to Dutch Battalion at Potocari, 11/07/95, Chronology or Events.

¹²⁴⁸ ICTY (IT-98-33) D 160/a, Radinovic Report, para 2.28 and 2.33.

¹²⁴⁹ ICTY (IT-98-33) D67/a. ABiH Command of 28th Division (Maj Ramiz Becirovic) to Command of 2nd Corps, Section for Morale and Political Guidance, 30/06/95, No. 01-114/95.

¹²⁵⁰ ICTY (IT-98-33) D 160/a, Radinovic Report, para 3.3.

that were tied up at Srebrenica elsewhere. Sefer Halilovic, the former ABiH commander, even thought that Mladic's lack of troops largely determined the Bosnian-Serb strategy.¹²⁵¹ It is possible to haggle about the importance of the VRS troops around Srebrenica, because they were local and certainly not first class troops. On the other hand, the three eastern enclaves were tying up six thousand VRS men, and that was no insignificant number.

In any case, reducing the size of the Srebrenica enclave was consistent with a political-military framework previously established by the VRS. This was discussed in the introductory chapter of this part: the objective of the Bosnian Serbs was to return to the first demilitarization agreement of April 1993, when the size of the enclave was only four by one and a half kilometres. The Bosnian Serbs therefore wanted to deliberately create intolerable conditions for the population. Although the Bosnian Serbs had not said so, this was intended to lead to a mass evacuation, as was also envisaged in 1993, but which then encountered resistance from the Bosnian government.

The cynical side of all this was that Srebrenica was not a priority for the Bosnian Muslims in the war, and the same applied to the Bosnian Serbs. The area to the east of Tuzla, the Majevisa hills, and Sarajevo in particular, were of considerably greater interest. But it was precisely the importance that the Bosnian Muslims attached to Sarajevo that led to Srebrenica also being involved in the conflict: the ABiH carried out diversionary manoeuvres outside the enclave territory, so as to tie up the VRS around the enclaves and to prevent them from sending reinforcements to Sarajevo. This focused the attention of the Bosnian Serbs on the Srebrenica enclave, which was deemed to be demilitarized, as they did not hesitate to emphasize because of the losses they suffered there.

During the war in Bosnia, it was not unusual for the ABiH to throw a stone in the pond and arouse the anger of the VRS, which then struck back disproportionately and with an excess of heavy weapons. The former ABiH army Commander Sefer Halilovic also pointed out that Srebrenica and Zepa should never have been involved in the conflict surrounding Sarajevo if there had not been assurances that the enclaves were secure.¹²⁵²

The primary reason for the attack on Srebrenica must then also be sought in the activities carried out by the ABiH outside the borders of the enclave. General Krstic called this the basis for the attack on Srebrenica.¹²⁵³ Neither can it be ruled out that Mladic's fear for corridors to be opened by the ABiH to the eastern enclaves played a role.

In addition, the elimination of the enclave offered a number of additional benefits, although they were not motives as such. The freeing up of troops around the enclaves was to the benefit of the infantry-weak VRS, because the troops could then be deployed elsewhere. A victory was also useful as a boost to the sagging morale. Furthermore, the attack forced the enclave to new political negotiations, because it thoroughly turned the map for the division of Bosnia on its head.

11. VRS plans for the attack on Srebrenica

The two concluding sections of this chapter discuss the developments of the plans for starting an attack on the enclave by the VRS. In this it will be demonstrated that these plans were created at a very late stage and in a short time. Even if the idea of reducing the size of the enclave had existed since March, as described above, there was *no* question of months of preparation for this operation: the preparation was a matter of days. Neither was it the intention at the start of the attack to occupy the enclave in its entirety; this decision was taken only on 9 July, a few days after the start of the attack, which will be covered in the following chapter.

Attention will also be given to which signs could have alerted Dutchbat and the 28th Division to a possible attack. For a more extensive study into the signs at higher military and political levels,

¹²⁵¹ Interview Sefer Halilovic, 17/04/98.

¹²⁵² Interview Sefer Halilovic, 17/04/98.

¹²⁵³ ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 399/a, Interview of Radislav Krstic, 18/02/00, p. 10.

please refer to the separate Appendix to this report: *Intelligence and the war in Bosnia 1992 - 1995 - The role of the intelligence services.*

The military-technical planning of the attack

The first signs that the VRS was about to start an action at Srebrenica consisted of the arrival of a group of staff officers from the Drina Corps in the Bratunac Brigade area to the north of the enclave. This group was led by the Chief of Staff of the Drina Corps, Major General Radislav Krstic; and after 13 July he became Commander of the entire Drina Corps. With the arrival of this group, the planning of what would become known as operation 'Krivaja 95' started.¹²⁵⁴

On 2 July, this resulted in an operational plan issued by the Drina Corps. The objective of 'Krivaja 95' was to separate the enclaves Zepa and Srebrenica from each other as rapidly as possible, to reduce their size to their urban areas, and to create the conditions for their elimination. This should be achieved with a surprise attack. Units around the enclave were ordered to conduct an active defence, while separate attack units were to reduce the size of the enclaves.

The plan for Srebrenica involved two directions of attack. The main axis ran from the south east of the enclave, from Zeleni Jadar to Srebrenica. Two secondary axes ran from the Derventa in the west via Suceška to Srebrenica, with an intermediate axis from the Podravno area to Vijogor (see map in this section). An advance on these secondary axes proved to be unnecessary, and the associated units remained passive until 11 July.¹²⁵⁵

A battalion of the Zvornik Brigade was given the task of monitoring the high ground and the southern access to Srebrenica via Bukova Glava (near OP-F in the southeast), Puzulici and Bojna (likewise the southeast of the enclave). A combat group (of battalion strength) of the 2nd Romanija Brigade was allocated a parallel and somewhat more western advance route starting in Jasenova and via Bujakovic and the area near Orahovica to Stupine, with which the western access to Srebrenica could be controlled. A combat group (likewise of battalion strength) with a platoon of tanks of the Birac Brigade was given as line of departure the area around Podravno and an advance route via the Alibegovac hill to the Bajramovici area to close the accesses to Srebrenica to the west of the Romanija Brigade at Stupine.

In addition to the Zvornik Brigade, the following three units had to carry out the attack: the Bratunac Brigade, the Milici Brigade, and the Skelani battalion.

The Bratunac Brigade's task was to attack the ABiH from the already occupied positions on the heights of Predola (near OP-Q), Divljakinja, Crni Guber and Olevine. The Bratunac Brigade subsequently had to occupy the Gradac height (between Srebrenica and Potocari) to prevent the ABiH reserves being brought in from Potocari to Srebrenica.

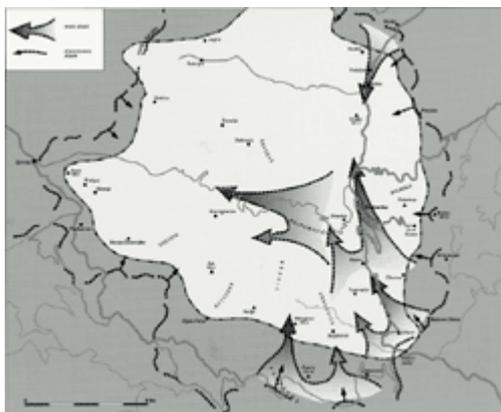
The Milici Brigade had to break through the lines with a company from the south to take the Kak peak and then to proceed to the north to control the road at Staroglavice. The Milici Brigade units had to perform diversionary actions to tie up the ABiH to the west of the enclave including at Jaglici (OP-M), Ravni Buljin, Osoje (former OP-B), Podgaj and Zedanjsko (OP-C).

The Skelani battalion was given the role of Corps reserve. This battalion was to advance through behind the other units to Osredak in the heart of the enclave. The artillery was to be positioned around Pribecevac, to prepare to fire on military targets. An introductory bombardment was also planned. Should NATO aircraft be deployed in support of UNPROFOR, they must be attacked. The security organs of the Drina Corps and the military police were intended to pick up and guard

¹²⁵⁴ ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 403/a, Butler Report, p. 6 and 15.

¹²⁵⁵ ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 428/a. Command of the Drina Corps to Commands of 1Zpbr, 1Bpbr, 2Rmtbr, 1Brlpbr, 1Mlpbr, Map, 02/07/95, No. 04/156-2.

prisoners of war. The orders indicated that: 'In dealing with prisoners of war and the civilian population, behave in every way in accordance with the Geneva Conventions'.¹²⁵⁶



On 2 July, the Drina Corps issued a warning order to the various brigades of the Corps to prepare the troops. In this, the Bratunac Brigade was responsible for the eastern and northern sector around the enclave, the Milici Brigade for the western sector, and the Skelani battalion for the southern sector. The Bratunac and Milici Brigade and the Skelani battalion had received some reinforcement after the call up of reservists in mid June, but in spite of this these units were too poorly equipped, too predominantly manned by older reservists and too little trained to take part in an attack.

The 1st Zvornik Infantry Brigade and the 1st and 5th Podrinje Light Infantry Brigade were ordered each to prepare a lightly armed battalion. The 1st Birac Infantry Brigade, the 2nd Romanija Motorized Brigade and the 1st Vlasenica Light Infantry Brigade must each prepare a reinforced company as part of a battalion or for independent assignments. In addition, the 5th Mixed Artillery Regiment was to supply the weapons for the support of the operation.¹²⁵⁷

These smaller units were placed in a tactical group. Such a formation of temporary units into a tactical group, and adjustment of the command structure for operations in a specific area, was not unusual in the VRS. Neither was it unusual for the VRS to select the best and youngest units to be able to carry out an attack. The older conscripts who manned the trenches - and often got involved in all manner of trading with the other party - were deemed unfit for that work.

The newly formed tactical group came under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Vinko Pandurevic, the Commander of the Zvornik Brigade. This brigade also supplied a platoon of tanks and motorized (in military terms: self-propelled) artillery. It was the movement of these units that had been observed on 5 July by Dutchbat and UNHCR.

The deputy commander of the new unit was Captain 1st Class Milan Jolovic, alias 'Legenda', who also commanded the Podrinje detachment, better known as the 'Drina Wolves': they were experienced, well equipped and well trained groups who would lead an attack.

Other secondary units were the 65th Protection Regiment (Diversants) and the 10th Sabotage Detachment. The 65th Diversants were stationed in Han Pijesak to guard the military installations there and on the Veliki Zep peak. It was one of the strongest military units of the VRS and was normally directly under the orders of the General Staff. Its Commander was Lieutenant Colonel Milomir Savcic. The 10th Sabotage Detachment consisted of two platoons from Vlasenica and Bijeljina and was under the command of Lieutenant Milorad Pelemis. This unit was used for sabotage actions and was directly

¹²⁵⁶ ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 428/a. Command of the Drina Corps to Commands of 1Zpbr, 1Bpbr, 2Rmtbr, 1Brlpbr, 1Mlpbr, Map, 02/07/95, No. 04/156-2. See also ICTY (IT-98-33) D 160/a, Radinovic Report, para 3.8.

¹²⁵⁷ ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 403/a, Butler Report, p. 6 and 15; ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex.427/a. Drina Corps Command (Major General Milenko Zivanovic) to Commands 1ZPBR, 1BPBR, 2RMTBR, 1VLPBR, 1PLPBR, 5PLPBR, 1BRLPBR, 1MLPBR, 5MAP, Skelani SPB, 2/07/95, No. 01/04-156-1.

under the Drina Corps. A battalion of Military Police, under the command of Major Zoran Malinic, came from Nova Kasaba.

Units of the police, who belonged to the Ministry of the Interior, were also made available to the VRS; after declaring a state of siege or a state of war, provisions for this measure had been carried over from the old Yugoslavia. Such units could be classified as Municipal Police and Special Police. The first were organized along military lines and were responsible for law enforcement and security in their area. These units could be deployed by military commanders for operations agreed in advance. The units came from Vlasenica, Milici, Bratunac, Skelani, Visegrad and Rogatica. Within their own structure, these paramilitary units came under the control of the regional Centar Sluzbe Bezbednost (the security service) in Zvornik. Its head there was Dragomir Vasic, and his deputy was Mane Duric. A unit of Special Police under police Lieutenant Colonel Ljubisa Borovcanin, later operated in Potocari. It was not unusual for battalions of the Special Police to take part in hostilities.¹²⁵⁸

The composition of the battalions and reinforced companies was to be complete on the same day that this order was given, 2 July; plans to be worked out by the fighting units had to be complete on 3 July. The preparations for offensive operations were to be complete on 4 July, and the transfer of the designated units to the operational area on 5 July. On 3 and 4 July, Drina Corps Commander General Milenko Zivanovic and a group of commanding officers were on the advance command post of the Bratunac Brigade in Pribicevac, which had a view of Srebrenica. In the afternoon of 4 July the advance command post of the Drina Corps at the same place opened. The expectation of the VRS was that the ABiH would defend the enclave by force, and that it would be supported in this by UNPROFOR.¹²⁵⁹ A supplementary order was concerned with air defence: the VRS assumed that NATO air power would be called in for assistance.¹²⁶⁰ On 6 July at 02.00 hours radio communication should be established. The idea was for the operation to be complete within three to five days.¹²⁶¹

In addition, in support of the operations at Srebrenica, all units of the Drina Corps would be instructed to go from defence to attack, and to perform offensive actions along the entire front up to and including Kladanj and Olovo. The attacks on Srebrenica and Zepa therefore also led to fighting at Tuzla, Zvornik, Kladanj, Vlasenica, Olovo and Sokolac. According to General Krstic, the VRS managed to beat off the ABiH counter-moves in these areas, so that the troops at Srebrenica and Zepa could carry out their duties unhindered. Because the reporting concentrated on Srebrenica, such hostilities and those at Zepa were hardly mentioned in reports, however.¹²⁶²

On 5 July, General Zivanovic reported to the General Staff that all units of his Corps had completed their preparations. He reiterated the order: an offensive operation against Srebrenica with the objective of separating Srebrenica and Zepa and reducing the size of Srebrenica to an area in agreement with the original demilitarized zone of April 1993.

To prevent units from Zepa attacking the VRS from behind, Zivanovic asked the General Staff to ensure that the 65th Diversants attacked Zepa early on 6 July. The 1st and 5th Podrinje Brigade had already been given such an order.¹²⁶³ These units destined for Zepa were told by way of an explanation of their objective that a corridor between the two enclaves had been established for the exchange of goods, and that from the enclave various terrorist sabotage groups penetrated deep inside Bosnian-Serb

¹²⁵⁸ ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 429/a. 1 Zvornik pbr to the Command: Chief of Security, 2/07/95, No. 01-244. ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 403/a, Butler Report, p. 11-15.

¹²⁵⁹ ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 427/a. Drina Corps Command (Major General Milenko Zivanovic) to Commands 1Zpbr, 1Bpbr, 2Rmtbr, 1Vlpbr, 1Plpbr, 5Plpbr, 1Brlpbr, 1Mlpbr, 5Map, Skelani SPB, 02/07/95, No. 01/04-156-1.

¹²⁶⁰ ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 403/a, Butler Report, p.16, para 3.8.

¹²⁶¹ ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 428/a. Command of the Drina Corps to Commands of 1Zpbr, 1Bpbr, 2Rmtbr, 1Brlpbr, 1Mlpbr, Map, 02/07/95, No. 04/156-2. See also ICTY (IT-98-33) D 160/a, Radinovic Report, para 3.8.

¹²⁶² ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 744/a. Vuk Kovacevic in an interview Major General Radislav Krstic in *Drinski*, November 1995, p. 7-9.

¹²⁶³ ICTY (IT-98-33) D76/a. Drina Corps Forward Command Post to General Staff VRS, 05/07/95, No. 04/156-4-1.

territory, so that the VRS was constantly suffering losses and damage.¹²⁶⁴ In this, not only was a link made with Karadzic's strategic directive of March 1995 to separate Srebrenica and Zepa, but also with the ABiH sorties from Srebrenica.

The military tactics behind the attack

The striking feature of the operation plan is that it was created in a very short time. Neither was there much time for the preparation. Nevertheless, the gathering together of battalions and companies from different brigades, placing these in ad hoc structures under unfamiliar staffs, and the movement of these units, entailed the necessary coordination problems.

Nearly all effort was oriented to the southern part of the enclave, which was consistent with the order: to separate Srebrenica and Zepa. It was also the least risky direction of attack of the three possibilities: from Derventa in the west, from Bratunac in the north, or from Zeleni Jader in the south. Advancing from Derventa meant that the longest route to the town of Srebrenica would have to be used, which furthermore went through difficult terrain, and where there were no metalled roads. The route from Bratunac was the most direct, but had the disadvantage that it emerged directly on the Dutchbat compound in Potocari. This route had furthermore fairly open terrain, which could entail the use of heavy equipment in the event of a timely discovery by the Bosnian Muslims, and also involved the risk of losses. The southern part of the enclave was relatively poorly defended, and offered the shortest route to the town via reasonably covered terrain.

The plan had no provisions to stop a wholesale flight of the population to the north, to Bratunac or from there to Yugoslav area: there was no mention of closing the enclave in a northerly direction. The one company of the Bosnian Serbs that was designated to occupy the high ground at Gradac, which dominated the road between Srebrenica and Potocari, would only have been able to reach that point, after the capture of intermediate objectives, only after some considerable time.

The VRS therefore also made it none too difficult for the men to break out to the north for their later journey to Tuzla, although this breakout was not expected. There were no instructions that this was a deliberate tactic or that a corridor had been opened deliberately.

Another striking feature was that UNPROFOR was non-existent as far as the VRS was concerned. The operation plan took absolutely no account of the presence of Dutchbat. The VRS possibly expected that UNPROFOR would remain neutral. At least the VRS had made no provisions to isolate the Dutchbat compounds. On the VRS maps for the operation, neither the compounds nor the OPs were drawn in. Account was only taken of the deployment of NATO aircraft or Airmobile units.

The strength with which the VRS carried out the attack is not accurately known. The three units that were around the enclave had a total of 1700 men in June 1995. These units had tanks, eighteen field artillery pieces and a number of MRLS rocket launchers. The VRS supplied reinforcements of 2000 to 3000 men, including special troops that did not belong to the Drina Corps. The attack itself would be carried out with 1500-1700 men.¹²⁶⁵

The West was only aware that special troops had been involved in the attack after the event. Then too, only the existence of the 10th Sabotage Detachment was clear, with a strength of one hundred to two hundred men.

Moreover, a detachment of Greek volunteers formed part of the Drina Corps. There were possibly also two to three hundred Arkan Tigers involved, who were under the control of the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A *Médecins Sans Frontières* worker was certain that she saw Arkan together with Mladic after the fall in Srebrenica. Mladic had taken the opportunity to ask Arkan if he wanted to

¹²⁶⁴ ICTY (IT-98-33) D96/a. Command of Drina Corps to Commands of 1st and 5th Podrinje Light Infantry Brigade, 05/07/95, No. 04/156-4.

¹²⁶⁵ Interview Zoran Petrovic-Pirocanac, 31/03/98 and 02/04/98.

introduce himself to *Médecins Sans Frontières*. Unlike in 1992, however, she saw no actions of Arkan Tigers.¹²⁶⁶

The objective of the operation was therefore not the capture of the Safe Area Srebrenica, but a reduction of its size, as well as cutting the link with Zepa. The operation was consistent with the directive issued by Karadzic in early March 1995 as described above. From a military standpoint, this directive was hardly clear, however: it did not indicate precisely which military objective was to be achieved, and went no further than to state that an intolerable situation must be created for the population, and that the enclave must be made smaller.

In Mladic's view, the Safe Area comprised an area no larger than 4.5 by 1 kilometre around the town. He would not respect an area any larger. The packing together of 35,000 people in such a small area could indeed create an intolerable situation for the population. Although not one directive said what was to happen to the population in such circumstances, it was apparently intended to lead to the displacement of the population through the malicious organization of a humanitarian catastrophe. In this, UNPROFOR would be obliged to take charge, and not the Bosnian Serbs. It was to turn out otherwise.¹²⁶⁷

12. Signs of an impending attack?

UNPROFOR and the Bosnian Muslims were unaware of the VRS plans outlined above for an attack on the enclave. There was also little that pointed to preparations for an attack. In the first days of July, in spite of an increase in the battle noise, it was quiet in the enclave.

On 2 July a resident reported that a woman had been shot near OP-Q. When the OP commander and the medical orderly arrived she had already died. On the same day the VRS fired a machine gun on a Dutchbat patrol. The only other matter of note was that positions on Mount Caus were permanently occupied, which had not been the case earlier. Relative to earlier days, the battle noise on 2 July could still be called low and it was quiet in the area.

The tensions appeared to be greater in Gorazde and Zepa. In Gorazde, the ABiH surrounded the Ukrainian battalion, and would allow them to leave only after the battalion had been relieved. In Zepa the VRS performed various shelling operations with 120 mm mortars.

In the Majevisa hills and around Mount Vis (from where VRS artillery harassed Tuzla) it was only a 'generally quiet week' and the ABiH operations, after losses probably amounting to three thousand dead and wounded, had been brought to a standstill. The UNPF in Zagreb did deduce from troop movements that the ABiH would be resuming offensive operations in the near future. The objective appeared to be to shell the Posavina corridor, the link between the western and eastern part of the Republika Srpska at Brcko. Troop movements that pointed to a possible ABiH offensive in the Majevisa hills appeared to be related only to the relief of troops.¹²⁶⁸

Assistance from the Yugoslav army to the VRS?

It is not impossible that the Yugoslav army, the Vojska Jugoslavia (VJ), as the ABiH asserted, already brought equipment from Serbia to Bosnia in June as preparation for the attack (especially artillery),¹²⁶⁹

¹²⁶⁶ Interview Emira Selimovic, 21/10/98.

¹²⁶⁷ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 215, File BHC95 7 Mar-14 Mar 95. Meeting Gen Smith and Gen Mladic 7 March 1995, Ref 8594. BHC FWD to DOKL. 091100A Mar 95. Outgoing fax No. 122/95. UN Confi. See also part IV. See also ICTY, (IT-98-33), Dannatt Report, OTP Ex. 385/a, para 38-41.

¹²⁶⁸ NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. [Dutchbat] Milinfo 3 July 1995, period 020600 - 030600; UNMO HQ Sector NE to UNMO BHC, 021000B Jul 95; NIOD, Coll. Theunens.G2 UNPF HQ, Daily Military Information Summary from 02001B to 022359B Jul 95 and 04001B to 042359B Jul 95; MID/RNLA. DOKL, Afd I & V, Sect Information: Weekintsum No. 26/95, 27/06 - 3/07/95. NIOD, Coll. Sitreps. HQ Sector NE Daily Milinfosum from 041700B to 051700B Jul 95.

¹²⁶⁹ Interview Hazrudin Kistic, 18/05/99 and 19/05/99.

but it is improbable that this happened in large numbers. At the bridges over the Drina, such as at Ljubovija opposite Bratunac, international observers of ICFY (the International Conference on the former Yugoslavia) were present day and night. Furthermore, the VRS had no immediate shortage of artillery.

Other reports of signs of the attack came from ABiH circles after the attack: the ABiH 2nd Corps spoke of the arrival of an artillery regiment of the Yugoslav army from Kraljevo.¹²⁷⁰ In later days, ABiH-sources and residents of the enclave reported VJ artillery fire on the enclave from the opposite side of the Drina,¹²⁷¹ but Dutchbat reports do not support this assertion. Moreover, the VRS orders otherwise make no mention of coordination with units from outside the Drina Corps. During the attack too, no signs were found for direct support from the VJ, including from VRS documents. The five Western attachés that were accredited in Belgrade (Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy) coordinated their activities with each other and had considerable freedom of movement; they also reported no VJ shelling of Srebrenica. Neither did Canadian observers who were located opposite Bratunac on the other side of the Drina at Ljubovija report it. The VJ did not go into action across the Drina and there were also no special units from Serbia involved in the operation against Srebrenica.¹²⁷²

Bosnian sources on assistance from the VJ must be treated with caution. From the Bosnian side few concrete examples were brought forward of violation of the embargo along the Drina. However, there were many generalized or propagandist statements without any form of evidence, such as the assertion that engineers of the VJ 25 had built pontoon bridges over the Drina for the support and supplying of the VRS. The reports on Yugoslav support for the attack on Srebrenica also state that they were executed by four motorized and two armoured brigades of the VJ and were led by the Chief of Staff of the VJ, General Perisic, from a command post (on Mount Tara) on the opposite side of the Drina.

All these reports detract from the possible truthfulness of other reports. Where these were concerned with more concrete examples of assistance to the VRS with respect to the region around Srebrenica, there was the report of a truck with ten or twelve tons of ammunition that passed the bridge at Ljubovija to Bratunac on 5 April. There was also a report that nine trucks stolen from UNHCR had crossed the Drina at Zvornik loaded with ammunition on 10 April.¹²⁷³

What in fact came over the Drina in terms of military equipment was small scale. Beer and cigarettes were more important contraband than military equipment. The negotiator Carl Bildt said that he constantly received lists from the Bosnian Minister Sacirbey that stated how many troops and how much equipment was being supplied from Serbia across the Drina. He had personally ascertained whether it was true. According to him, it could not be proved, and he believed nothing of it. Posts of the ICFY mission supervised the traffic that passed the bridges over the Drina, and neither could intelligence services prove that equipment was reaching Bosnia via pontoon bridges from Serbia. The VRS had enough equipment in his possession.¹²⁷⁴

The media also referred to secret UN documents that were alleged to indicate that in the weeks prior to the attack on Srebrenica 'high-level military support' was given to the Bosnian Serbs and personnel and equipment crossed the Drina, but they were not found in the UN archives.¹²⁷⁵ The UN

¹²⁷⁰ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Command 2nd Corps to all divisions, 18/07/95, No. 04/1-105-619.

¹²⁷¹ Interviews Semsudin Murinovic, 17/05/99; Almir Ramic, 06/11/99.

¹²⁷² Interview Dennis Snider, 17/11/99.

¹²⁷³ APVVN New York. Letter of offer Ivan Z. Misic to Nicolaas H. Biegan, 04/09/95, with report 'Military Assistance of so called Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) to the Rebelled Bosnian Serbs from August 1994 to July 1995'; confidential interview (52).

¹²⁷⁴ Interview Carl Bildt, 13/12/00.

¹²⁷⁵ See *ANP English News Bulletin*, 'Documentary alleges Serbian Arms Used to Invade Srebrenica', 30/05/95 and *Reuter*, 29/05/96.

headquarters in Zagreb did hear constant rumours about support from the VJ, but hard evidence was never given.¹²⁷⁶

From the American side it was confirmed that no evidence was ever given that weapons crossed the Drina to the Bosnian Serbs. The road via Croatia was open, however. The conclusion was that the embargo along the Drina was 'fairly effective', although there were leaks.¹²⁷⁷ Another Western intelligence service had also never seen hard evidence that the VRS had received weapons from the JNA in the period prior to the fall of Srebrenica, but they could not rule it out completely.¹²⁷⁸

At the same time, it is clear that there definitely was support from the Yugoslav army to the army of the Bosnian Serbs along a more indirect route: the military infrastructure of the old Yugoslavia was still largely intact, and assistance came in the form of logistics support, components, the payment of officers' salaries and a liaison unit at the headquarters in Han Pijesak. General Smith's conclusion was therefore that there was some involvement of the VJ in the war in Bosnia in 1995, but not in a direct way.¹²⁷⁹ In general it was true that, even without reinforcement from the VJ, the VRS was more than capable of defeating a weak and poorly armed opponent in Srebrenica without outside assistance.¹²⁸⁰

The previous day: 5 July 1995

From the Dutch side, no information came about a possible VJ involvement. A briefing of the Military Intelligence Service (RNLA) on 5 July again focussed attention on the situation around Srebrenica, in particular with a view to the probability of an attack by the VRS on the eastern enclaves. The question was raised as to what advantages and disadvantages such an attack might have for the VRS. The conclusion was that a reason to attack the enclaves could lie in the fact that success could not be achieved anywhere else. Furthermore, it could be achieved with relatively little effort and with few victims on their own side. After that, the VRS, according to this briefing, would have their hands free in East-Bosnia and could shorten the confrontation line considerably. A disadvantage could be that the Bosnian Serbs would be held guilty and that the American media would insist on retaliation.

There might have been a variety of reasons not to attack. In Gorazde, a place with an arms industry, there was a strong and well-organized ABiH army. Zepa would deliver, unlike Gorazde, no improvement in the road and river links. As far as Srebrenica was concerned, the Army intelligence people believed that it may have been possible to take Srebrenica in a reasonably short time, but that the VRS would have to make too many sacrifices to achieve it. It was easier for the VRS to aim for a deterioration from the inside. Furthermore, the enclave could be taken a bit at a time. After the capture of OP-E the east-west link was already in the hands of the VRS. A similar tactic could be applied to gaining possession of the bauxite mines. The capture of the enclave did appear to be attractive in order also to gain a good north-south link.

If the VRS were to aim for the dismantling of the enclave bit-by-bit, then many problems could be expected with the ABiH: in that case the Bosnian Muslims would want to isolate the OPs, and use the UN troops as a shield, and possibly kill a number of UN personnel and then blame the Bosnian Serbs. The ABiH could also attack Dutchbat to acquire weapons with a heavier calibre, or to isolate Dutchbat by surrounding it with civilians. That could be organized in a couple of hours, so that Dutchbat would be paralyzed.¹²⁸¹

This briefing therefore gave no indication of an attack, although it cannot be said that it had no predictive value. The question of to what extent within the UN organization or outside knowledge

¹²⁷⁶ Interview Tony Banbury, 11/05/00.

¹²⁷⁷ Confidential interview (14).

¹²⁷⁸ Confidential interview (8).

¹²⁷⁹ Interview R.A. Smith, 12/01/00. Smith did not base his conclusion on non-UN information reports.

¹²⁸⁰ Confidential information (3).

¹²⁸¹ MID/RNLA.[Note] for briefing dated 5/07/95. No author named.

existed of the imminent attack, is raised in an Appendix to this report: *Intelligence and the war in Bosnia 1992 - 1995 - The role of the intelligence services.*

Within UNPROFOR, the closest that came to a suspicion that heavy weather was on the way came from the intelligence staff (in military terms known as the G-2) of Sector North East in Tuzla. Dutchbat reported to them that a convoy of five armoured tracked vehicles, four tanks (type T-55) and five trucks had been seen. Dutchbat also saw the movement of five pieces of artillery from Bratunac to the south. In addition, a UNHCR worker reported that five tanks had been seen on the road to the south of Zvornik (possibly the same ones as in the Dutchbat report). This led Sector North East to comment:

‘It is not known what the final destination is for the convoy or the arty [artillery] pieces, but it may be a show of strength to keep the pressure on the enclave or to stop the movement of arms between the two enclaves of ZEPA and SREBRENICA. This may mean an increase in WF [Warring Faction] activity around the enclaves in the very near future. The tks [tanks] were not reported as being on low loaders so it is assumed that they will not be going too far remembering that DUTCHBAT will shortly be in the process of rotating and the BSA may wish to test the new boys out.’¹²⁸²

By way of explanation of this quotation it can be said that low loaders are usually only used to transport tanks over large distances, because they consume a great deal of fuel, they need much maintenance, and they cause damage to the roads.

The test for - the still not relieved - Dutchbat was coming even sooner than ‘the very near future’, but Dutchbat suspected nothing. The last situation report that Dutchbat sent on 5 July, hours before the start of the VRS attack, stated only: ‘the situation is calm and stable. We expect no major changes for the next 24 hrs’.¹²⁸³

It was indeed quiet in the enclave. At OP-K, 43 men and women left in a southerly direction at the end of the afternoon. The only other report pointing to military activity was that the ABiH had occupied many positions near the confrontation line, and that at OP-C a low loader with a tank had been observed.¹²⁸⁴

In Bratunac, there was nothing to see of the build-up of an attack on the enclave. The Commander of the VRS post at Yellow Bridge, Jovan Ivic (Jovo), had to learn via the hotline of the Dutch that the attack had started.¹²⁸⁵ The commander of the British Joint Commission Observers (the JCOs) reported to his headquarters that reports had also reached him in which VRS troop movements were mentioned. He also stated that he did not believe that Karremans considered the VRS to be a serious threat. As recently as June, Karremans, according to this British commander, had told a *Médecins Sans Frontières* doctor that the ABiH could hold their positions for at least seven days and was strong enough to prevent the fall of the enclave.¹²⁸⁶

Although on 5 July there was another discussion between Sector North East and the ABiH 2nd Corps, neither was there any indication from the side of Chief of Staff Budakovic that something was

¹²⁸² SMG 1002. HQ Sector NE Daily Milinfosum from 031700B to 041700B Jul 95. UN Confi. The report of the tanks south of Zvornik came from a UNHCR Field Officer. (SMG 1001. LO-Team to UNMOs Srebrenica, Milinfo, 05/07/95 16:4?)

¹²⁸³ NIOD Coll. Sitreps. HQ Dutchbat to Sector HQ North-East, Sitrep for period 041700 to 051700B Jul 95. The report of the tanks south of Zvornik came from a UNHCR Field Officer and that of the artillery at Bratunac from the Dutchbat LO Team. (CRST. Supplement to Daily Milinfosum 4/07/95).

¹²⁸⁴ SMG 1001. Fax S2/3 Dutchbat to A-Cie (Simin Han), 1 (Netherlands/BE) Logtbat, Logbase Zagreb, Comcen Crisis Staff, Milinfo 040600 - 050600B Jul 95.

¹²⁸⁵ Interview Jovan Ivic, alias Jovo, 20/10/00.

¹²⁸⁶ Confidential information (1).

brewing.¹²⁸⁷ Only the following day, after a large number of missiles had landed in the enclave, did the Commander of the 2nd Corps, Sead Delic, call in the assistance of Sector North East for a UN intervention. Delic then also referred to the reinforcements that the VRS had brought in in the afternoon of 5 July.¹²⁸⁸

Even so, the 28th Division had said to the 2nd Corps as recently as 5 July that they were aware of the possibility of an operation against the enclave. For some time the population had seen troop movements, and reconnaissance had shown that, in the afternoon of 5 July, VRS units had arrived in the area around Zeleni Jadar.¹²⁸⁹ The War President in the Opština, Osman Suljic, said that he had personally taken stock of the situation. He had seen that the Bosnian Serbs were moving in soldiers in buses.¹²⁹⁰ Ekrem Salihovic, the intelligence officer of the 28th Division, also mentioned large numbers of buses with VRS soldiers. He considered it incomprehensible that Dutchbat or the UN had not seen the attack coming.¹²⁹¹ Whether he also felt this on 5 July, however, is doubtful, because he did not provide information to Dutchbat on that day.

What is striking is that the 28th Division reported only on the morning of 6 July that a large column of armoured and mechanized units were moving from the direction of Zvornik to Bratunac. This had been heard on 5 July from a UN interpreter.¹²⁹² The movement of the VRS heavy equipment that was brought in mainly from Zvornik, had escaped the notice of the ABiH and was also not revealed by listening in to the radio traffic. This was the main indicator of an attack on Srebrenica. A passing UNHCR convoy only noticed these transports by coincidence.

From the departure lines that were occupied on 5 July around Srebrenica, the Bosnian Serbs were to complete the last act in what would be the drama of Srebrenica, although no one yet knew what this last act would involve, and especially how it would end:

‘Judge not the play before the play is done;

Her plot hath many changes; every day

Speaks a new scene; the last act crowns the play.’¹²⁹³

¹²⁸⁷ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Memorandum [Meeting] HQ 2 Corps, 05/07/95.

¹²⁸⁸ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. ABiH 2nd Corps Command to BHC Sector North East, 06/07/95, No. 02/1-700/1.

¹²⁸⁹ ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 403/a, Butler Report, p. 17. 28th Division Combat Report 5/07/95, No. 01-161/95 Also in a report of 6 July, the 28th Division indicated that on the previous day a strong concentration of armour and artillery had been seen. (NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. Komanda 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa, 6/07/95, Str. pov. br. 01-163/95.)

¹²⁹⁰ Interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98.

¹²⁹¹ Interview Ekrem Salihovic, 02/12/98.

¹²⁹² NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH 28. Divizije to Komanda 2. Korpusa, odjellenje bezbjednosti, General Stab ARBiH Uprava bezbjednosti, 06/07/95, Str. Pov. Broj. 13-05.

¹²⁹³ Francis Quarles 1592-1644.

Chapter 6

The Fall of Srebrenica: 6 to 11 July 1995

1. Introduction

This chapter primarily concerns the operational activities of Dutchbat and the warring factions. The humanitarian aid provided by Dutchbat and *Médicins Sans Frontières* (MSF) in the days of 6 through 11 July, along with a number of related subjects that later played a role, were compiled in the Appendix, 'Dutchbat III and the Local Population: Medical Affairs'. This chapter will primarily attempt to track, where possible from day to day, the operational activities in those crucial days between 6 and 11 July. This chronological description will be followed, in the subsequent chapter, by another look at a number of issues; however, this time in a more contemplative form. For that reason no conclusion, only two recaps (about numbers of victims and also the ABiH's vision of those six days), will be drawn from this chapter. The following chapter will however close with a number of conclusions.

A substantial amount of this chapter is also dedicated to the issue of Close Air Support. After all, this was the method, which, from the acceptance of the UN Resolution 836 and the imposition, in 1993, of the Safe Areas, played a special role in deterring attacks. Air support was the principal means of defence of the lightly armed peacekeepers in sometimes perilous situations.

A number of factors that emerged in the discussions around Close Air Support in Srebrenica compel thorough consideration of that issue in this chapter. A crucial element in the discussions is the fact that Dutchbat believed that NATO, on 11 July, was planning a massive air strike in a last ditch effort to keep control of the enclave. The ultimate result was no more than mere Close Air Support with a few aircraft. This was generally considered too little and too late to keep hold of the enclave.

In a more general sense this chapter will attempt to provide some answers to the following questions:

What efforts did Dutchbat make to halt the Bosnian-Serb advance?

What was the vision of this in the higher echelons of UNPROFOR/UNPF?

Was it possible from a military perspective for the ABiH or Dutchbat to defend the enclave against the Bosnian-Serb advance and thereby to protect the local population? What role did ABiH and Dutchbat play in that context?

How did Dutchbat call in air support, and how were those operations executed?

What role did the UNPROFOR mandate play in this, what were the Rules of Engagement and the care for the safety of its own troops?

How exactly was The Hague kept up to date of the events, and what role did the Ministry of Defence play in relation to the role of the UN headquarters in Zagreb and Sarajevo?

2. Investigative problems related to the period of the fall and thereafter

Based on the logbooks and notes of the applicable headquarters it is possible to follow the events around Srebrenica in the period of 6 to 11 July meticulously, and at times almost minute by minute. It is however, less simple to distil the broad outlines of the activities of Dutchbat and the warring factions, and relate that to what happened in the headquarters in Zagreb, Sarajevo, Tuzla and Srebrenica.

Analyses based on the logbooks over the period 6 to 11 July raise a number of specific problems. One objection is that the entries in a logbook are often quite brief, cryptic or incomplete, and that some periods are not covered at all. Moreover, some sources are written in long hand, which further exacerbates the difficulty of interpretation. A further disadvantage of the logbooks is that only the facts stated are represented in concise form; not the motivations for actions or decisions taken. There is also not always a balance between the 'logging' of incoming and outgoing reports. This applies equally to the Dutchbat logbooks and those in The Hague. On the whole, incoming reports dominate and it is not always possible to determine the decisions or measures that those reports culminated in. In some instances, there is only mention of contact between officials without providing any insight into the substance of the communication. What is notable is that the NATO headquarters were well-informed regarding the situation in as far as it was relevant to the organisation. The NATO liaison officers in Zagreb and Sarajevo thereby fulfilled an important role. The logbooks of the Zagreb and Sarajevo headquarters could not be found in the UNPROFOR archives in Geneva and New York. Consequently, in that regard, the investigator must make do with the few extracts from a later date. In the Zagreb extracts, however, the subject of Close Air Support is a central issue.

The UN never made an analysis or synthesis of the events immediately after the fall of Srebrenica. This was due to the fact that the applicable headquarters were fully occupied with the problem of providing aid to deportees and the looming fall of Zepa and Gorazde. It was only in the autumn of 1995 that the fall of Srebrenica again enjoyed some attention in New York and Zagreb as a consequence of the parliamentary debate in the Netherlands. The attention in New York and Zagreb, however, only resulted in the determination of a chronology of events.

New York did order a 'comprehensive follow-up report on Srebrenica', which was to have been coordinated between UNPF in Zagreb, the UN Refugee Organisation UNHCR, ICTY (the Yugoslavia Tribunal) and ICRC (the International Red Cross). General Janvier thereby demanded that his staff have accountable drafts ready within three days. Janvier's aim was to make as much use as possible of code cables in the archives in Zagreb that had previously been sent to New York.¹²⁹⁴ This assignment could explain why almost all of the situation reports, from the period around the fall of Srebrenica, had disappeared from the UNPROFOR archives in Sarajevo. New York sent an administrative official from Zagreb to Sarajevo to track down relevant documents. Situation reports from, for example, Dutchbat and Sector North East were sent to Sarajevo, but were not sent on to Zagreb in their complete form. The data provided to Sarajevo by the various sectors within UNPROFOR were summarised and sent to Zagreb in the form of a situation report from Bosnia-Herzegovina Command.¹²⁹⁵

At the time of the NIOD investigation, the UN archives were in a poor state. They were hardly organised at all and were full of gaps. Large sections of the archives had already been removed in Sarajevo and Zagreb; partially due to ignorance, partially out of neglect, and partially due to the fact that some individuals had an interest in the archived pieces, either for their own use or to sell them.¹²⁹⁶

The results of Janvier's assignment from New York could not be found in the UN archives. It did yield, at the end of January 1996, a document entitled Force Commander's End of Mission Report. This document is of a very general character and does not deal specifically with Srebrenica.

There is a Srebrenica Report that was compiled under the instructions of the Secretary-General of the UN; however, it was dated significantly later, viz. November 1999. This report too, reveals limited detail about operational issues, such as questions concerning Close Air Support, and primarily views the issues from the perspective of New York and Zagreb. This report does however reveal that the office of the Secretary-General of the UN was not aware of requests from Dutchbat for Close Air Support submitted prior to 9 July. This, as well as the fact that much confusion continues to prevail in Dutch circles, is ample reason to dedicate attention to the question of air support in this chapter.

¹²⁹⁴ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87299, File 3061/3, 07/97-11/95. Interoffice Memorandum, FC to CMO, DFC, COS, CMNAT, info SRSG, HPU, 01/11/95, File 3300-SRE(DFC).

¹²⁹⁵ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87299, File 3061/3, 07/97-11/95. Memorandum, MA/DFC to DFC, 30/10/95.

¹²⁹⁶ Confidential interview (46).

When weighing up the value of the various sources, it is essential to keep in mind that the various parties concerned represented different interests, and that the circumstances that contributed to the formation of an overall picture of the events could therefore vary between the parties concerned. This applies to the UN officials in the various headquarters, Dutchbat, and the Bosnian Muslims: the population of the Srebrenica enclave lived in their own world and were forcibly cut off from the rest of the world. The population of the enclave relied primarily on news provided by the Serbian and Bosnian-Serb radio and TV stations. News provision from both sides could hardly be described as impartial. There was almost no printed press available in Srebrenica.

Most of the intelligentsia, the original leaders and the city dwellers left the enclave at the start of the war. Their place was taken by self-styled militarists, a new generation of local leaders and refugees from surrounding villages that were not always highly literate. As a rule, rumours were able to flourish in that type of environment. Another important factor is that most of the impressions of what actually happened were coloured by later discussions in the refugee camps, third-party perspective and rumours. Quite often, personal perceptions are masked by those of others. When interviewing Bosnian Muslims an endeavour was always made to find witnesses who had experienced events first hand, and not to focus interviews, wherever possible, on personal perceptions.

The situation of the survivors of Srebrenica was certainly extraordinarily serious; more so because almost half a generation of men had simply been exterminated. It is also true that the indignity inflicted upon the survivors in the days after the fall and in the preceding years could easily be reinforced by subjective factors. In a certain sense the survivors from Srebrenica also have an interest in emphasising their extraordinary situation. As a result, the reports of offended survivors (as understandable as their indignation might be) did and still do not always contribute to the objectivity of descriptions of events to which they had fallen victim.

The risk of a comparable but reverse distortion is presented in the accounts of the politicians and military leaders from outside the enclave. After all, in hindsight, they could possibly have a personal interest in underplaying their role in the big picture. Obviously they do not, in retrospect, like to be confronted with the question as to whether they could or should have done more for the enclave at the time. For the inhabitants of Srebrenica, the enclave was a central issue, but for the politicians and military leaders this issue was secondary to the problems of larger populated centres such as Sarajevo, Mostar and Tuzla.

Very few are inclined to lay the blame for the fall of the enclave primarily on Dutchbat. The general pattern is as follows: The higher the status of the interviewee in the Bosnian social strata, the smaller the blame apportioned to Dutchbat, and the greater the blame for the fall on the UN or even the Bosnian Government. The latter is a fixed theme in many of the conspiracy theories doing the rounds in Bosnia, and is partially based on half-truths and unverifiable accounts. In many instances issues are unjustifiably or causally related, and prior events used as proof in subsequent developments. The problem with these types of conspiracy theories is that, while they sometimes do command certain logic, they are rarely based on solid evidence.

There are various instances of such conspiracy theories. A few examples were described in the chapter titled 'The Mood in the Enclave: May – July 1995' (*stemmingsbeeld*), the most notable of which are the following:

The Bosnian Government committed treason with respect to Srebrenica with the aim of exchanging the enclave for the outer Bosnian-Serb suburbs of Sarajevo; the episode around the departure of the military leader of the Bosnian Muslims, Naser Oric, from the enclave, and the reasons for his failure to return; questions around the downing of a helicopter between Srebrenica and Zepa in May 1995; and the inadequate aid to the columns of refugees en route to Tuzla in July 1995 due to the fact that other interests were at stake (see the chapter, 'The Journey from Srebrenica to Tuzla' in Part IV).

In a country at war, with no tradition of independent media, where suspicion against authorities thrives, and where the authorities are accustomed to arriving at important decisions in small circles and without the need for accountability, the investigator researching conspiracy theories enters a veritable

minefield. Here too a marked incongruence exists between the former population of the enclave and the leaders on the outside. In some instances explanations abound in which the uninitiated could easily inflate certain issues into mythological proportions. In other instances the initiated contradict one another, for example in the case of land exchange around the eastern enclaves - the leaders deny this, while some of the initiated have provided testimony to that effect.

The investigator would have to find as many reliable sources as possible and would have to test and weigh them up to the greatest extent possible. This has transpired to be more easily said than done. Language barriers have brought about problems and have slowed down the investigation. A great deal of effort has been put into researching reports about Srebrenica published in local periodicals in Bosnia and in the Republika Srpska. Local historical writing and the publication of sources about the Bosnian war appear to be underdeveloped and, where they do exist, appear to be profoundly tainted by interpretation.

During many interviews it was essential to win the confidence of the interviewees and to invest time to build relationships. In some instances, interviewees had had bad experiences with the journalists who had shown only a fleeting interest in their stories or failed to publish documents that were made available. One investigative method that did appear to be valid has been to return to the same source a number of times. In many cases this has yielded supplementary information and an increasing willingness to delve into other resources or provide introductions. This method was used to find both leading figures in the enclave and people with a 'good memory' of the events. One person might for example remember a host of details with limited coherence, while another would only be able to relate the bigger picture in situations where the investigator needed to penetrate deeper into the prevalent issues.

No amount of effort could prevent the number of sources from remaining limited due to the fact that, ultimately, not everyone was prepared to talk to the investigators. Some people refused to be interviewed and attempted to shield themselves from re-experiencing the emotional distress. Others fear that once exposed, the issues might be turned against them. The consequences of the war appear to be far from fully processed.

Another notable experience for the investigators was the fact that witnesses in the Republika Srpska or Serbia were significantly less willing to talk or testify than the Bosnian Muslims. Most (Bosnian) Serbs were extremely suspicious. The investigation was further hampered by the fact that the investigators originated from the Netherlands, the seat of the Yugoslavia Tribunal.

In the course of the investigations various attempts were made to interview leading politicians and military leaders in the Republika Srpska. While contact was established with parties concerned via indirect routes, and questionnaires were provided, no further progress was made with respect to interviews about the questionnaires. All of those contacts were established via private channels. Collaboration on the part of the Serbian authorities was initially limited and was at times influenced or terminated by arrests for the Yugoslavia Tribunal. The war in Kosovo in 1999 also played an important role - the fact that no visas were issued in that period caused appointments, that had been hard to set up, to be cancelled and it proved impossible to re-establish them at a later stage. Only after the changeover of power in Yugoslavia and the arraignment of former president Slobodan Milosevic by the Yugoslavia Tribunal, did a more promising climate of greater openness arise.

This led to the establishment in Belgrade in the summer of 2001 of the 'Truth and Reconciliation Committee' and contacts between the NIOD and that committee. The committee aims to launch investigations at three levels:

- the disintegration of Yugoslavia from a political and economic perspective;
- the war as a product thereof and the incrimination of the community;
- violation of human rights and the law of war.

Its contact with the commission offered the NIOD the promise of many benefits of the archive research that was to be conducted by the commission. Practise however proved more stubborn than anticipated. For example, archived documents in Yugoslavia may not be accessed for a period of 30

years. Although President Kostunica was obliging at the time, the legal problems associated with this issue appeared insurmountable in the short term. The absence of an archive inventory also did not make matters easier. Currently, it is estimated that some 20,000 dossiers exist for the period of 1980 to date, with an estimated breadth of approximately two kilometres. The archives contain documents related to the president and the military, as well as the Ministry of the Interior, Foreign Affairs, and a number of institutions. Additional archives exist containing documents from a number of refugee associations and non-government organisations (NGOs). Limited information is available concerning the actual state of these archives. No central authority exists with an overview of the archives and the locations where they are kept. Archives of the Defence Force were destroyed during the NATO bombings, and sections of the archives were relocated or wilfully damaged. As a result, it will take a significant amount of time to reorganise the archives. The military archives have, in the short term, not yielded any material about Srebrenica. The initial optimism about the possibilities of finding information in the Yugoslav archives has thus far been frustrated.¹²⁹⁷

The realization of the need for a clean slate is slow in coming, in the Republika Srpska. The rest of Bosnia (the Muslim-Croat Federation) only offered cooperation at the highest level at a later stage of the investigation by offering documents originating from the military archives and the possibility to obtain information from currently serving officers – a privilege not previously granted to investigators (including Bosnians). Documents were issued based on questionnaires provided by the NIOD. Investigators were however not able to research the Bosnian archives in person.

The NIOD investigators were specifically interested in information and debriefing reports of the Bosnian Muslim army (the ABiH). It is notable that a variety of documents were issued that showed the former leaders in Srebrenica in a bad light. Beyond that, the investigators were told time and again that knowledge of the factual situation in Srebrenica was limited in the administrative centres of Tuzla and Sarajevo. Moreover, it transpired that there was a limited availability of reports and other documents on events in Srebrenica over the period from 1992 to 1995 in the Bosnian Muslim army. It was only in the course of 1994 that more tightly organised command structures allowed more regular reportings. Concrete obstacles in the investigation consisted of damage due to fire and flooding in the central military archives in Sarajevo.

Army archives of the Bosnian Muslims and the city council of Srebrenica came into Bosnian-Serb hands after the fall of the enclave. The archives were not safeguarded. After the fall, many former Bosnian Serbs freely browsed the archives and claimed sections of it. With the support of the current inhabitants of Srebrenica it was nevertheless possible to obtain access to some of the documents. Of the documents that were restored to safety, some came into the possession of the Intelligence and Security department of the Bosnian Serb Army or under the control of the Ministry of the Interior and were stored in the regional archives in Zvornik. The documents under the control of the army are not even accessible to the 'new' Bosnian Serb administrators who greatly rely on pre-war administrative data of, for example, the infrastructure in Srebrenica to manage the region.

An important source of military documents was from a computer seized by the Bosnian-Serb army during the taking of Zepa; all reporting by the ABiH in Tuzla to Srebrenica went via Zepa. The Bosnian Serbs made documents recovered from this computer available to the investigators. The authenticity was confirmed by means of a random check conducted by Ramiz Becirovic, former Chief of Staff and Deputy Commander of the 28th Division of the ABiH in Srebrenica. Eventually the SFOR Peacekeeping Force made available a sizeable collection of documents that had been collected in Bosnia and recorded on CD-ROM. This also included documents about Srebrenica.

Dutchbat is an important additional resource alongside the Bosnian-Serb and Bosnian-Muslim sources; however, that resource too has its limitations. Fearing that the data would fall into Bosnian Serb hands, Dutchbat incinerated the archive prior to their departure from the enclave. As a result a great deal of unique material, such as situation reports from the companies to the battalion staff was

¹²⁹⁷ Interview the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Belgrade, 15/06/01.

destroyed. While battalion and company logbooks did keep a record of reports from OPs and units in the field, this only related to the days around the fall of the enclave. There is a notable absence of interpretation of the facts recorded in the logbooks. Moreover, much of what happened between the ABiH and VRS in July 1995 and in the preceding months was not open to the observations of Dutchbat. This applies to various skirmishes outside the borders of the enclave in the months preceding the fall, as outlined in the previous chapter.

The actions of the warring factions will be presented extremely concisely. In fact, hardly any written sources exist with respect to the actions of the ABiH. An account of these actions is mainly based on interviews and documents provided by the ABiH for the purposes of the investigation. With respect to the VRS this creates an unbalanced situation. It was only possible to a limited extent to conduct interviews in the Republika Srpska. Consequently investigators had to rely mainly on written sources, such as those compiled by the Yugoslavia Tribunal during the trial against the VRS general, Krstic, as well as on the experts' reports compiled for the trial and by witnesses of the court. In as much as information was available about the actions of the warring factions, it was fitted chronologically into the sequence of events.

Most of the attention will however be focused on the operational activities of Dutchbat and the actions that took place in the UN headquarters. To that end several sources were available to the investigators:

Extract from the UNPROFOR Operational Logbook (in military terms: the G-3 Logbook) over the period 4-21 July 1995 in Sarajevo with supplementary notes by Brigadier General C.H. Nicolai and Lieutenant Colonel J.A.C de Ruiter;¹²⁹⁸

Extracts from the logbook of the Air Operations Coordination Center of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo of 9-11 July 1995;¹²⁹⁹

'short Overview of Recent Events' compiled by Lieutenant Colonel Karremans, dated 17 July 1995;¹³⁰⁰

'Monthly Register' with overview of reports that entered the Dutchbat Ops Room, current for the period 8 to 13 July 1995;¹³⁰¹

The Journal of the Commander of B Company, Captain J.R. Groen, current for the period 6 July through 11 July 1995. A number of reports are absent for the period 6 July 10.17 hours to 8 July 11.26 hours;¹³⁰²

Notes on radio reports made by Major Otter (Commander of the Staff and Medical Company) on 6 and 10-11 July at Potocari;¹³⁰³

'Firing Close Reports' by Dutchbat at Sector North East in Tuzla and Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo;¹³⁰⁴

¹²⁹⁸ SMG, 1004/59. Fax Lt. Col. J.A.C. de Ruiter to DCBC and Netherlands Army Military History Section, 12/08/95. The notes were written in English.

¹²⁹⁹ *Ibidem*. The extract was written in Dutch.

¹³⁰⁰ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. C-1(NL)Infabat Dutchbat 3, 'Kort overzicht van de gebeurtenissen van de afgelopen periode', 17/07/95, No. TK195118.

¹³⁰¹ SMG, 1004/61.

¹³⁰² SMG, 1004/56.

¹³⁰³ SMG, 1106/18.

‘Chronological Summary of incidents occurring between 060300B Jul 95 and 061700B Jul 95’;¹³⁰⁵

‘Chronological Summary 11 July 95’, attached to the ‘HQ Sector North East Sitrep for period 101700B to 111700B Jul 95’;¹³⁰⁶

Situation reports by Colonel Brantz to the Situation Center of the Commander of the Royal Netherlands Army. In the days around the fall of Srebrenica those (telephonic) situation reports were the primary source of information for the Crisis Staff of the Royal Netherlands Army. The written version was sent by fax to the Defence Crisis Management Centre in The Hague (DCBC);¹³⁰⁷

‘Logbook/Journal’ (Defence Crisis Management Centre);¹³⁰⁸

Situation reports of the Netherlands Liaison Officer to the headquarters Allied Forces Southern Europe, in Naples (in military terms: ‘CINCSOUTH Sitreps’), sent by the Dutch liaison officer in Naples via the Headquarters of the Royal Netherlands Airforce to the Defence Crisis Management Centre;¹³⁰⁹

‘situation Reports Srebrenica Enclave’;¹³¹⁰

Some hand-written notes found at the Defence Crisis Management Centre, including notes marked ‘FC [Force Commander]’ Jim Baxter’ (Military Assistant [of] Commander B-H Command, General Smith), minutes secretary unknown;¹³¹¹

‘sitreps [Situation reports] Netherlands Army Crisis staff Morning Edition’;¹³¹²

Various reports originating from the UN Headquarters, Department of Peacekeeping Operations Situation Center, forwarded to the Defence Crisis Management Centre by the military advisor of the Dutch Permanent Representative to the UN;¹³¹³

‘Chronological Overview of Srebrenica’, compiled by the Army Military History Section ;¹³¹⁴

Handwritten extract marked ‘Logbook CAOC 5ATAF, 7-11 July 1995’;¹³¹⁵

Extract ‘Air Desk Log’ 5 ATAF in Vicenza, 9-11 July 1995;¹³¹⁶

¹³⁰⁴ DCBC, 595.

¹³⁰⁵ DCBC attached to 595.

¹³⁰⁶ DCBC, 693.

¹³⁰⁷ DCBC and CRST

¹³⁰⁸ DCBC, 652. The document consists of three pages of hastily scribbled hand-written text that relates exclusively to 11/07/95.

¹³⁰⁹ DCBC, various.

¹³¹⁰ DCBC, various. (Dutch) compiler and origin unknown.

¹³¹¹ DCBC, 674.

¹³¹² CRST, various.

¹³¹³ DCBC, various.

¹³¹⁴ SMG 1004.

¹³¹⁵ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number

Sitreps from Sector NE in Tuzla and B-H Command in Sarajevo;¹³¹⁷

Daily reports from the Defence Crisis Management Centre (handwritten);¹³¹⁸

Situation reports from the various UN organisations and reports;

Journals and notes from staff officials, such as Generals Ashton, Smith, Kolsteren, Nicolai, Colonel Brantz and civilian employees of Akashi;

Debriefing statements;

The Factual Account of the Debriefing.

The investigative value of the various sources is extremely diverse. While the statements compiled during the debriefing of Dutchbat in Assen in September 1995, as released to the NIOD by the debriefed soldiers concerned, do contain substantial information, their value to the investigation is at times relative. The information varies significantly in scope, quality and meticulousness. Few debriefing reports offer a meticulous reconstruction of the events, in time and otherwise, and few of the debriefing officers offer in-depth treatment of subsequently important details. In retrospect it appears that the debriefing officers neglected to deal with certain issues in sufficient depth, which could be the result of a dearth of knowledge about the circumstances in Srebrenica and time limitations during debriefing (also see the chapter on large-scale debriefing in Assen in Part IV).

That notwithstanding, the debriefing statements do, to a great extent, supplement the reports and descriptions of events around the observation posts and turned out to be of significant interest. The fact that not all debriefing statements could be accessed was a loss; however, not such a loss as to leave blank spaces in this precise-as-possible reconstruction.

On the whole, the journals of UN officials consist of brief notes taken during briefings. Only in rare instances did the journals present the course of any actual discussions. The remaining Dutchbat journals more generally contain descriptions of the circumstances under which Dutchbat had to do its work than detailed descriptions of the operational activities. Incidents and observations dating to the days around the fall were neither compiled systematically nor analysed. Dutchbat also made no efforts to that effect in the week between the evacuation of refugees from Srebrenica and their own departure. It was never organised into a 'First Impression Report' or 'After Action Report' as is normal for military personnel in a NATO environment. As mentioned before, the Dutchbat archives were destroyed prior to the evacuation of Srebrenica. In retrospect Major Franken regrets not having faxed some of the more sensitive documents to Tuzla instead of having destroyed them.¹³¹⁹ Additional interviews were extremely important for the latter reason, as well as to be able to establish the necessary relations between events and circumstances.

3. A closer look at the headquarters and chain of command

The structure of the UN organisation in Yugoslavia was outlined in detail earlier in Part III. The bottom-up structure can be represented as follows: Dutchbat in Srebrenica —> Sector North East in Tuzla —> UNPROFOR (formerly known as the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command) in Sarajevo —> UNPF (formerly known as UNPROFOR) in Zagreb. This fell under the authority of the UN Headquarters in New York. To obtain deeper insight into the events that occurred in the period

¹³¹⁶ DCBC, 623.

¹³¹⁷ UNGE, UNPROFOR.

¹³¹⁸ DCBC, 528.

¹³¹⁹ Interview R.A. Franken, 31/03/99.

between 6 through 11 July 1995, it is both useful and necessary to analyse the mutual relations and practical communication problems that arose between those headquarters.

The Zagreb headquarters featured the most prominently in the UN organisation in the former Yugoslavia. This is not primarily because it was in charge of the UN's political and military operation in Croatia, Bosnia and Macedonia, but mainly because it had the final say in the deployment of air power. Any decision for Close Air Support required the permission of Akashi, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the UN (in the period around the fall, the ultimate decision for air strikes lay in New York with Boutros-Ghali; see Chapter 2 for more detail). This put the headquarters in Zagreb in a special position. At the same time, there was a world of difference between the various headquarters: while Zagreb was not in a state of war, the headquarters in Sarajevo and Tuzla did operate under war conditions. The level of tension under which those headquarters operated could not really be compared to the situation in Zagreb. Zagreb was mainly confronted with political pressure, while Sarajevo was under the pressure of the warring factions and the consequences of war. Due to its location, the contacts in the Sector North East Tuzla were limited to mainly Bosnian Muslims.

UNPF in Zagreb

Cooperation between the headquarters in Zagreb and Sarajevo left much to be desired. There were clear differences of insight into a wide variety of issues. As was also explained in the introductory chapter, this was partially due to the personal attitudes of the commanding generals, the French General Janvier in Zagreb and British General Smith in Sarajevo. In addition, London had greater influence on Sarajevo than did Paris. In Zagreb the reverse situation applied.

It was only in Zagreb (in contrast to Sarajevo and Tuzla) that the normal chain of command remained intact and where Force Commander Janvier and, for the greater part of the July period, deputy Force Commander Ashton remained at their posts. In Zagreb staff input was channelled via Chief of Staff Kolsteren, but it was also customary for the heads of the sections of staff to speak for themselves on relevant points. The Deputy Force Commander only expressed his view when and where required. In many instances Janvier made on-the-spot decisions, partially due to the fact that the staff had to work out the decision afterwards. The consultation circuit had an open structure and it was not common for the Force Commander, the deputy Force Commander and Chief of Staff to deal with issues separately.

Only officers of the NATO alliance countries were involved in decisions concerning Close Air Support. While Zagreb sometimes questioned the quality of the officers from non-NATO countries, there were definite exceptions, such as the officers from Pakistan and Bangladesh that had been trained in the United Kingdom or well-trained officers from the Ukraine and Russia (even though they were inclined to be pro-Serbian).

The collaboration between Janvier's military staff and Akashi's civilian staff (consisting mostly of young diplomats and pen pushers) was good. The practical quality of the relationship was generally subject to the military-political assessment of the situation at any given time. The collaboration was particularly useful whenever it was necessary to report to New York; this served to prevent Janvier from sending separate Code Cables.¹³²⁰

The Zagreb headquarters also hosted a number of inner circles from the various countries represented in Zagreb. In total, UNPF was represented by seventy-seven nationalities, which translated in an abundance of personnel of limited actual value. All of the countries that sent military forces had to be represented (in military or civilian capacity) in the highest echelons. One third was really excellent, one third was useful and one third was superfluous according to the Dutch Chief of Staff in Zagreb, Major General A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren. Even Janvier, who originates from a country that is not militarily integrated in NATO, routinely suggested that 'It would have been much better if we only

¹³²⁰ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

represented NATO staff.¹³²¹ One consequence of that was the establishment of national lines whereby commanding officers brought Military Assistants along from their own countries. In many instances that had a negative impact on the decision-making process. The British generally prefer to deal with Britons, the French with French and so on. Another sign of the establishment of national lines was the fact that quite a few issues in Janvier's office were dealt with in French; which created problems for officials, such as the Chief of Staff and the NATO liaison officer, even when it proved functional. In many of those instances the Dutch served as a kind of linking pin.¹³²²

The reasons why commanders relied so heavily on their Military Assistants, with the accompanying danger of breaching normal staff procedures, was largely due to the poor quality of the staff. The multinational character of the UN staff made the situation extremely difficult. For example, in 1994, the UNPROFOR headquarters in Sarajevo (also known by its 'old' name of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command) hosted more than 182 officers originating from 23 different countries. It was customary in UN operations to assign staff functions based on the size of the contingents provided by the member states. This resulted in large staffs of limited practical value, burdened with language problems. Some officers spoke almost no English, had followed no staff courses and originated from small countries where the battalions were under the direct command of the ministry and therefore had no higher staff positions. This resulted in the establishment of parallel staff structures in which only competent officers played a role, and thereby managed to hold matters together. Under the best of circumstances a UN staff was burdened with problems of language, culture, quality and education/training.

The problems were further complicated by the fact that, unlike Navies and Airforces, Land Forces are generally not accustomed to collaboration with other nations. A further complicating issue was the difference between the equipment of the various battalions, even mutually between Western nations, and their military capabilities. There was absolutely no question of collective doctrines and procedures outside the NATO countries. Moreover, many of the contingents would only follow instructions from their own capitals. Of the 20,000 troops stationed in Bosnia, UNPROFOR effectively had no more than four battalions that were well-equipped and that responded to orders from the UN headquarters with the permission of their capitals.¹³²³

The Force Commander in Zagreb was not the de facto commander in chief, as he routinely had to negotiate with national governments to assign specific tasks to the national troops. He was not in a position to issue orders. This resulted in a degree of national control that was exploited to a greater or lesser extent by some countries. Moreover, due to the fact that many countries sent troops to the UN under specific conditions, the national influence on troop contingents was generally a significant factor.

Despite all of the above, the Western nations in UNPROFOR were generally able to cooperate satisfactorily. The real problem arose from troop contingents from Russia, the Ukraine and other Asian countries. Generally their equipment was inferior and they were almost undeployable.¹³²⁴

Zagreb expressed a great deal of criticism of the UN management from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York. Force Commanders were constantly required to provide feedback to New York, but there was no effective General Staff in charge. The leadership of that Department was primarily politically orientated, sometimes questioned executive details in the mission, and it was not always clear exactly what New York wanted. Officials, such as Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali, his chef de bureau, Iqbal Riza and Director of Communications and Special Projects, Sashi Tharoor, were inclined, according to Chief of Staff Kolsteren in Zagreb, to make more opportunistic and politically tainted decisions, while Under Secretary-General Kofi Annan was generally

¹³²¹ Interview A.M.W.W. M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

¹³²² Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

¹³²³ Interview Lord Owen, 23/06/01.

¹³²⁴ Interview F.H. van Kappen, 21/06/95.

inclined to adopt a more objective and realistic position.¹³²⁵ This was largely due to unclear directives issued by the UN Security Council – quite often due to compromises that rarely lent themselves to unambiguous interpretation at executive level. Moreover, on the whole, the Security Council adopted a reactionary rather than a proactive orientation, whereby, based on the absence of a long-term political strategy, ad hoc basic decisions were sometimes taken, that either did not yield the desired effect or were counterproductive in the mission area. This was also why efforts by the UN headquarters in New York to provide the Force Commanders with directives were not always successful. One side effect was that the headquarters in Zagreb and Sarajevo had no clear strategy; which created massive practical problems for the commanders in the field.¹³²⁶

Zagreb had a so-called ‘theatre level command’ status. This was very important due to the fact that the problems and operations in the former Yugoslavia extended across international borders. For military, cultural and economic reasons the new neighbouring countries (the republics of the former Yugoslavia) were closely involved in each other’s domestic affairs. This compelled the UNPF to integrate public counselling, as well as diplomatic and humanitarian efforts. In addition, it was essential to maintain a centralised logistical system to maintain the 40,000 strong peace-keeping force and to keep control of the planning and contact with NATO.¹³²⁷

The extensive influence of the civilian officials in Zagreb created major problems for the military officials. Civilian officials remained in the mission zone for longer periods and were in charge of the financial management, which enhanced the scope of their influence. Their influence was further enhanced by the continuity of their positions and superior knowledge of the not-always-logical UN rules and regulations. As a consequence, the military staff was compelled to coordinate at length with the political and civilian managers. Military staff supported the notion of preparing decisions, while the final decisions would ultimately be taken by the commanders. There was also a fair amount of mutual friction; the military would accuse the civilian staff of a lack of flexibility, of being unwilling to deal with the military, of being unable to make quick decisions, and often, that they confused career decisions with strategic ones. There was also little consideration for the general cost effect; for example, the military were disturbed by the fact that civilians were well-paid and were issued UN cars down to secretarial level.

Compared to Zagreb, those relationships were inversely proportional in the significantly smaller headquarters in Sarajevo where the military section of the staff outnumbered the civilians. One disadvantage of the besieged city of Sarajevo was that UN personnel and logbook keepers fell victim to what General Smith called a ‘siege mentality’. As result, Akashi sought increased interaction between Sarajevo and Zagreb, as well as personnel rotation between the headquarters.¹³²⁸ Unfortunately, his idea came too late to have significant effect.

The Sector North East Headquarters in Tuzla

While the quality differences between officers were manifest at all levels, the effect was greater on small staffs than on large ones. This was felt most strongly in the staff of Sector North East in Tuzla, which included Dutchbat. In practise, this staff was far removed from events determined at the higher levels in Sarajevo (let alone in Zagreb). The Sector Commander in Tuzla, the Norwegian Brigadier General Hagrup Haukland, had no insight into the results of discussions held by the top echelons of UNPROFOR, mainly with the VRS. Although he had contact on an almost daily basis with General

¹³²⁵ NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. Chief of Staff HQ UNPF, ‘End of Tour Report Major General Ton Kolsteren’, 31/0196. Also see ‘Evaluation Report of Key UN Officials’, 26/04/96, No. OPS BLS/3651.

¹³²⁶ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

¹³²⁷ NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. John Almstrom to SRSG, ‘SRSG Presentation to ICFY Steering Committee’, 14/06/95 sent by fax AMA COS UNPF-HQ to DCBC, 101600 Jul 95.

¹³²⁸ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Banbury Diary. SRSG’s Meeting 10/07/95.

Smith in Sarajevo, the latter was reluctant, for security reasons, to divulge really important information over the telephone.

In Tuzla there were no problems in the cooperation between civilian and military sections of the staff; however there were problems in areas where there were significant differences in the quality of the staff. There were 41 officers in the Sector North East staff. While this was a small contingent as such, the problem was that the effectiveness of the staff left much to be desired. The cooperative climate between the various troop-contributing nations represented in the headquarters in Tuzla was equally questionable. The cadres consisted of clans of Norwegian, Pakistani and Dutch military that were incapable of adequate mutual cooperation. The quality of the reporting from Tuzla to Sarajevo could also have been better in some areas. For example, in one instance the Sector Commander in Tuzla received a message from the Intelligence Section (in military terms, the G-2 Section) in Sarajevo to the effect that it no longer wished to receive reports from Tuzla due to the low quality of the reporting. The Netherlands too provided some examples of how training and position are not always well synchronised. One such example was of a Dutch major with a medical background that was assigned a position in the Intelligence Section.¹³²⁹

Staff problems in Tuzla had direct consequences in the days of the fall of Srebrenica. The so-called Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo was manned by personnel from NATO countries with the aim of, among other things, coordinating requests for Close Air Support between the UNPROFOR battalions, the UN headquarters in Sarajevo and Zagreb, and NATO. Contact with Tuzla was coordinated via an Air Liaison Officer for the Sector North East. This Canadian official was however withdrawn one week before the fall of Srebrenica and was never replaced. The troop-contributing nations were asked for a successor, but none obliged. This not only terminated the communications with the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo, but with it the possibility of proactive actions in situations where air operations appeared desirable. Requests for Close Air Support thus went to the Operational section (in military terms, Section 3) in Tuzla. This section consisted almost entirely of Pakistanis, and when it became necessary during the attack on Srebrenica, it transpired that the Pakistanis were unfamiliar with the format of a request for Close Air Support to NATO. It is understandable that this could create discontent in Dutchbat, more so as, at midday on 11 July, the complete Pakistani section had abandoned the office for routine religious activities in the local mosque.¹³³⁰

A further contributory factor for the small contingent in Sector North East was that the fall occurred on the weekend (Saturday 8 and Sunday 9 July). At that time twenty officers out of a total staff of forty were on leave. Only eight members of the policy staff remained. At one point the local Chief of Staff and Deputy Commander, Colonel Brantz, was recorded saying to his interpreter, Nadia Skokic; 'Nadia, imagine, I cannot find anybody - everybody is on leave or off for the weekend'.¹³³¹

All that notwithstanding, Sector Commander Haukland in Tuzla considered the Pakistanis to be excellent officers. According to him they never disappointed, were loyal and generally compiled good reports.¹³³² Haukland was however not witness to the hectic days around the fall of Srebrenica – he too was on leave and only returned to Tuzla on 15 July. Brantz called him about the situation on 9 July. Brantz found Haukland to be rather laconic under the circumstance, and asked whether Brantz could resolve the situation on his own. Brantz replied in the affirmative. Brantz did however make a statement to the effect that he found it strange that commanders are not required to return to their

¹³²⁹ Interview Hagrup Haukland, 03/05/99. Also see NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. 'Evaluation Report on Key UN Officials', 26/04/96, No. OPS BLS/3651.

¹³³⁰ Interview M.P. Wijsbroek, 10/12/97. Wijsbroek claimed to have noted this with Major Kooij of the Netherlands Army Engineer's Corps.

¹³³¹ Interview Nadia Skokic, 04/02/98; DCBC, 1281. Memos of meeting dated 01/11/95 regarding the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995.

¹³³² Interview Hagrup Haukland, 03/05/99.

posts when the principle of the Safe Area was violated.¹³³³ Haukland stated there against that he had asked whether his presence was required, but that Brantz had replied to the contrary.¹³³⁴

Colonel Brantz

Due to Haukland's absence of leave during the fall of Srebrenica, his deputy, Brantz, enjoyed substantial prominence during that period. In the days around the fall of Srebrenica, Colonel Brantz formed an important link in the chain of information provision with the The Hague concerning Dutchbat. Brantz was however more of a source than a player in that process.

Thanks to his former position as Chief of Staff of the Royal Netherlands Crisis staff, Brantz had succeeded in arranging a satellite connection - something his predecessor, Colonel Engelen, had expressed jealousy about (he only had a UN telephone that was connected via an exchange in Zagreb). This allowed Brantz to easily contact Srebrenica, Sarajevo and The Hague. On 11 July, he was on the phone all day.¹³³⁵

The contact between Brantz and the Defence Management Control Centre (DCBC) of the Dutch Ministry of Defence was a one-way contact – it was rare for the DCBC to call him. Most of the questions that did arise were posed to General Kolsteren in Zagreb or General Nicolai in Sarajevo.

Brantz was in a difficult situation. He attempted to mobilise the understaffed and moderately functional staff into a fully functioning whole, but was routinely by-passed. At the time of the fall of the enclave, Sarajevo did almost no business via the staff of the Sector North East and often dealt directly with Dutchbat. Brantz felt responsible for whatever was or was not happening via the 'national line'; but he was never involved in it. This was one of the reasons why he made frequent calls to The Hague. He felt he was better able to get his message across to the Central Organisation of the Ministry on '*Het Plein*' (in this instance, the Defence Crisis Control Management Centre) than to the Royal Netherlands Army (in this instance the Royal Netherlands Army Crisis staff), which, according to a source in the Centre, was also due to the confidence Brantz had in his contacts there.¹³³⁶

Brantz had access to three sources of information to establish what was happening in the enclave. The first was a staff in Tuzla with a number of Joint Commission Observers (the JCO staff). While they had no formal affiliation with the staff of Sector North East, they had their own communication with the Joint Commission Observers (JCOs) in the enclave, and they also communicated with Sarajevo. They exchanged news with the staff of Sector North East and thus formed an important source of information for Brantz.¹³³⁷ The JCOs in Tuzla were rather meticulous in passing on information and often advised Brantz on the current situation. Brantz was able to listen to the communication traffic between the JCOs in the enclave and those in Tuzla from a vehicle in the staff building. He was warned by the JCOs in Tuzla whenever there was an imminent threat. Secondly, Brantz obtained information from the UNMOs in the enclave and, finally, via Dutchbat's own lines.

Brantz endeavoured to put all the information together, but discovered that there were blank spaces between the reports. Both the interpretation of the situation and the meticulousness of reporting varied, whereby the reports from the JCOs appeared most professional due to their superior experience.¹³³⁸

¹³³³ Interview C.L. Brantz, 11/06/99.

¹³³⁴ Interview Hagrup Haukland, 03/05/99.

¹³³⁵ Interview C.L. Brantz, 11/06/99.

¹³³⁶ Interview C.G.J. Hilderink, 11/08/00.

¹³³⁷ Interview M. Wijsbroek, 10/12/97.

¹³³⁸ Interview C.L. Brantz, 11/06/99.

The Headquarters of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo

Communications with the JCOs in Srebrenica and the local UN headquarters (Bosnia-Herzegovina Command) were also of great importance to Sarajevo for fast and accurate reporting. Lines of communication were also available between the commander of Dutchbat and the staff in Sarajevo, and between the group in the enclave responsible for guiding aircraft on their targets (the Forward Air Controllers) and the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo; although the latter was of limited importance for combat purposes.¹³³⁹

In terms of daily practise in Bosnia, the UN headquarters in Sarajevo (Bosnia-Herzegovina Command, which was formally known as 'UNPROFOR Headquarters' (after 1 April 1995) was of great importance. The powers of those headquarters were otherwise rather limited; for example, Zagreb (Akashi) and not Sarajevo had decision-making power with respect to summoning Close Air Support.

As Commander Bosnia-Herzegovina Command (after 1 April Commander UNPROFOR), General Rupert Smith left a clear mark on those headquarters. However, neither he was at his post during the fall of the enclave, as he had been asked by Boutros-Ghali to attend a meeting in Geneva on 8 July. After that he spent some time on the Dalmatian coast before returning to Split on the evening of 11 July. As in the case of Haukland, he too did not return because of Srebrenica. Smith had not deputised his Pakistani replacement, Shaheed, who had been based in Split as Commander of the Sarajevo Sector (one of the other two sectors apart from Sector North East), but the French officer, Major General Gobilliard.¹³⁴⁰

Personnel allocation: Dutch and French officers in key positions

As of July, the Dutch had an important say in local current affairs. All three layers of command, Zagreb, Sarajevo and Tuzla had a Dutch Chief of Staff, respectively Kolsteren, Nicolai and Brantz. Moreover, Van Kappen, the military advisor of the Secretary-General was also Dutch. Due to the absence of Haukland, Brantz was also Deputy Commander. Nicolai in Sarajevo was not an Deputy Commander, but Chief of Staff. Due to the fact that Gobilliard, as Commander of the Sarajevo Sector, spent much of his time in his own headquarters, Nicolai held substantial sway in the sector.

Consequently, much of the decision-making around the enclave was done in Dutch circles. Decision-making concerning proposals for approval of Close Air Support by Akashi was however in French hands.

The strength of the Dutch representation was not always beneficial to the work in the headquarters, as the rest of the staff were immediately at an information disadvantage when the Dutch treated matters in their own language. In those situations the use of the Dutch language facilitated mutual communication and contributed to crossing of the formal lines of the command structure. This also applied to information traffic between Ministry of Defence in The Hague and the staffs in the former Yugoslavia and the military advisor of the Secretary-General of the UN. Resentment was invariably the result in Tuzla when the Dutch in Sarajevo bypassed those headquarters to contact Dutchbat directly. Conversely, Tuzla expressed resentment of the fact that Sarajevo showed too little interest in the isolated compatriots in Srebrenica. Life in Sarajevo was however significantly more complicated than in Srebrenica and Tuzla, and because much more happened there at staff level, it was not possible to keep the attention focused on Srebrenica at all times.

¹³³⁹ Debriefing statement Lieutenant-Colonel J.A.C. Ruiter, 27/09/95.

¹³⁴⁰ Interview Hagrup Haukland, 03/05/99.

4. Procedures for the request of Close Air Support

The consequences of requesting the Close Air Support procedures

The application procedure for Close Air Support was known as Blue Sword. Zagreb played a decisive role in the procedure, which entailed that the application for Close Air Support had to be initiated by a battalion commander. The application, when issued, went via Sector Headquarters (in the case of Dutchbat, via Sector North East in Tuzla) to Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo. In Sarajevo, the Headquarters Bosnia-Herzegovina Command Close Air Support Committee was responsible for initiating the application. The committee was made up of senior staff officers and civilian staff. The commander of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command (later known as the UNPROFOR Commander) subsequently provided a recommendation for the application and sent it through to the headquarters in Zagreb where it was assessed by the Crisis Action Team¹³⁴¹ under the command of the Chief of Staff (during the fall this was the Dutch officer, Kolsteren). Subsequently, the Force Commander (the Frenchman Janvier during the fall) proposed the application with his recommendation to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the UN, Akashi, who was empowered by the Secretary-General to issue a decision with regard to the application. All of the aforementioned procedures occurred under the strict regime of a double-key procedure that entailed that NATO too had to approve an application (see Chapter 2 for further detail on this subject). The decision at the UN only applied to the first application by a battalion commander. Subsequent applications could go directly from Sarajevo to the NATO command post (in Vicenza), and the Special Representative could intervene at any time.¹³⁴²

Request went through a fixed checklist procedure, whereby the UN considered very different issues than NATO, which saw the target as the enemy and was responsible for the execution of the operation. For the UN, the purpose of air power was to serve as a potential means of deterrence for as long as possible. In the case of the actual use of air power, the overriding concern was for the safety of its personnel on the ground. The use of air power as retribution was not permitted – the action had to bear a direct relationship to a violation by one of the warring factions.¹³⁴³

In the case of Close Air Support, the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo considered the purpose of the request as one of the main criteria. Did the request comply with UN preconditions? Was there a direct threat to own troops? Was there a chance of collateral damage, for example to buildings, schools, or hospitals within range of the target? After all, if a school or hospital were to have been hit it could have spelt the end of the mission. It was also necessary to check where UN troops were posted to avoid them being hit by misses, for example when various nations were involved in bombing operations, they had to be prevented from bombing troops of other allied nations. Such actions could lead to strife between the participating Western capitals, and it was essential to keep UNPROFOR together as a coalition. It was also necessary to check for the presence of a Forward Air Controller in the vicinity who could 'talk' aircraft to their targets. All of this entailed military considerations.

¹³⁴¹ The Crisis Action Team formally consisted of fourteen members: Chief-of-Staff (Chairman), Head of Civil Affairs, Chief Military Observer, Military Assistant to SRSG, NATO Liaison Officer, Chief G3, Chief G3 Air, Chief Military Information Officer, BH Liaison Officer, Chief Press and Information Officer, Commissioner CIVPOL, UNHCR Military Liaison Officer, European Community Monitoring Mission Representative, International Committee of the Red Cross Representative. In addition there was an SRSG Advisory Group to study and evaluate the information accompanying the Release Authority. (UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 79, File 2.5.4, Air Support 17/08/93- 06/02/95. UNPROFOR Operations Order 14/94, 15/07/94).

¹³⁴² *Subsequent use* is viewed as an extension of time and location of *first use* within the same tactical situation. Re-authorisation was required in the case of a changed situation. (UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 79, File 2.5.4, Air Support 17/08/93-06/02/95UNPROFOR Op Order 14/94 of 29/06/94).

¹³⁴³ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 79, File 2.5.4, Air Support 17/08/93- 06/02/95. Force Commander's Concept of Employment of Air Power, 05/09/94.

The results were immediately signalled through to NATO in Italy as an early report. NATO military forces were in charge of the communications with the headquarters in Italy and the secure communications with Sarajevo.

The Force Commander in Zagreb was then briefed regarding the purpose of the action, the reason for the request, and the extent to which it complied with the preconditions. The Force Commander was then required to sign the application, after which it was forwarded to Akashi for yet another explanation. Akashi would then consult his political advisors, as bombing operations could have political implications.¹³⁴⁴

After obtaining Akashi's approval, the Force Commander would send the request to the NATO Commander in Southern Europe (in military terms: the Commander in Chief Allied Forces Southern Europe or CINCSOUTH) in Naples, the American Admiral Leighton Smith. He then followed the NATO chain of command, and sent the order via his Air Force commander (in military terms: COMAIRSOUTH) to the Air Force in charge of the attack, the Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force (or 5ATAF) in Vicenza. That unit then assigned the order to aircraft currently located in Bosnian airspace or above the Adriatic Sea, or aircraft located in Italian bases or on aircraft carriers in the Adriatic Sea. An airborne command post above the Adriatic Sea (in military terms: an Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center or ABCCC), in collaboration with the pilots and Forward Air Controllers with the battalions then executed the order. The purpose of the Forward Air Controllers was to talk the aircraft to their targets.

After verification of the order (with the ABCCC), the commander of the attacking force contacted a Forward Air Controller who gave permission to attack the target (see below). In addition, there was the question of the flight time to the target. This complicated procedure also took a substantial amount of time, and completion of the UN procedure took more time than the NATO procedure. In the case of a more predictable situation it was also possible to execute several actions at once. In those instances Akashi and the Force Commander had to join the Crisis Action Team. The line of communication was normally shorter within NATO – the battalion commander normally applied directly for Close Air Support and not, as in the case of the UN, to a three-star general.

In practise it transpired that many hours could pass between the time of request and the time of the attack. When, on 25 November 1994, Close Air Support was requested in the Bihac region, exactly 60 minutes passed before the report of a bombardment from the field resulted in the dispatch of an application by Sarajevo to Zagreb. The Crisis Action Team in Zagreb then needed 45 minutes to evaluate the application and to have the Force Commander sign it. Akashi only needed one minute to give his permission (in military terms: to sign the release authority). It was only one and a half hours later that the NATO aircraft finally flew over Bihac. In other words, a total of approximately three hours.¹³⁴⁵

However, this extremely stratified request procedure was not the end of the story. There were further problematic aspects. Close Air Support was only permissible under very strict conditions. As stated above, all operations had to be guided by a Forward Air Controller, who had to be capable of indicating the target on the ground to the pilots and had to ensure that friendly forces and areas were spared. The payload could then only be released once the pilot had positively identified the target, and the Forward Air Controller had authorised the attack.

The aircraft crew and the Forward Air Controller were required to maintain constant two-way communication, and both parties were required to positively identify the target. The intensity and duration of the use of the aircraft was not allowed to exceed that which was strictly required to reach

¹³⁴⁴ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

¹³⁴⁵ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Only Cable De Lapresle to Annan, 25/11/94, No. Z-1803. The mission was terminated due to poor weather. Before that the Bosnian Serbs had fired two Surface-to-Air missiles at the aircraft.

the set goal, and third-party damage had to be avoided to the greatest extent possible.¹³⁴⁶ All of this was severely hampered by the long-winded procedures: Even if the aircraft were capable of reaching the target fast, the unavoidable passage of time could make it possible for soldiers, vehicles or artillery equipment to be moved, alternatively artillery equipment could have ceased firing, leaving no smoking guns to attack.

Political considerations too could be problematic. Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo also refused permission for Close Air Support once or twice out of fear of the consequences for the humanitarian mission or of fear of disruption of negotiations. This inevitably and increasingly corrupted the credibility of threats to use air power. The deployment of fighter aircraft against ground positions and to protect the Safe Areas was therefore fraught with problems and quite unsuccessful. In short, Close Air Support in the Bosnian theatre had many limitations and was subject to too many conditions to be considered truly effective.

Collaboration between UN and NATO: liaison

NATO support of the UN, as in this instance, made it essential to coordinate and lead requests for air strikes and Close Air Support. This demanded the establishment of an Air Operations Coordination Center (AOCC) in Sarajevo. There was also a so-called liaison cell at UNPF level in Zagreb to manage contact with NATO's Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force in Vicenza, and a NATO liaison officer was made available for contact with Naples. The British provided the lion's share of the personnel required for the establishment of the coordination centres. The matter of the establishment of the centre was settled by July 1993, but there were many problems at the operational level.

The problems were based on the fact that non-NATO countries participated in UNPROFOR. NATO communication resources were needed, but guarantees were needed regarding the security of the accompanying cryptographic systems.

As a UN organisation, the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo had no powers. It did however form an important communication link between the UN and NATO - in this case with the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) of the Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force in Vicenza. The Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo was responsible for ensuring, meanwhile, that requests for Close Air Support entered the NATO channels to obtain that organisation's permission and to provide an early warning to aircraft due to execute the operation. After approval of the request in Zagreb and Naples, the Air Operations Coordination Center was responsible for the briefing of the applicable Tactical Air Control Party of which the Forward Air Controller was a member, and issued permission for the attack.

In addition to its role in the line of communication with NATO, the Air Operations Coordination Center also played a role in the evaluation of the suitability of the target for purposes of an air attack. After all, the peacekeeping concept demanded a minimal use of force, meticulous identification of the target to prevent collateral damage (unintended damage), and use of the appropriate weapons for the target.

Collaboration between UN and NATO: the Forward Air Controller

UNPROFOR had twenty Tactical Air Control Parties (TACP) available to guide aircraft to their targets. A TACP with a Forward Air Controller received its instructions from the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo but remained under the command of the battalions to which it pertained.

The names, Tactical Air Control Party and Forward Air Controller were sometimes interchanged. In the case of Dutchbat, a Tactical Air Control Party consisted of a Forward Air

¹³⁴⁶ DCBC, 2506. Secure fax BDL/Sitcen Klu to DCBC, 181315ZJul94. Defence Briefing, mid February 1994; UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 79, File 2.5.4, Air Support 17/08/93 – 06/02/95. UNPROFOR Operations Order 14/94, 15/07/94; DCBC, 2516. Fax RNLAf to DS/SCOCIS, 071019Z Jul 95.

Controller and a driver of a APC (A Personnel Carrier) who also acted as signalman, and a gunner for the APC's .50 gun, who could also act as a signalman. In the case of an alarm, the six-man unit could be augmented to protect the Forward Air Controller. Tactical Air Control Parties were particularly conspicuous once there were aircraft in the air and the moment they were spotted, quickly attracted enemy fire. The Tactical Air Control Parties were issued with a secure military satellite connection to the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo, as well as a non-secure high-frequency radio and a civilian satellite as back up. The Tactical Air Control Parties had their own APC to enable them to quickly reach their observation posts.¹³⁴⁷

Whenever a target was announced in the field, it was the duty of the Forward Air Controller to locate it. Forward Air Controllers were preferably found in the front line own troops in elevated positions that commanded a good view of the terrain. The Forward Air Controller marked the target on his topographic map and used it to determine the best access route for the pilot via points that are easily identifiable from the air. As soon as the target was marked on the map, the Forward Air Controller could seek cover. He only needed to leave his cover every now and then to make sure that the target was still located in the original position. He communicated directly with the pilot by means of an UHF radio.

The local Forward Air Controllers kept daily contact with the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo to pass on the weather report and temperature for training flights. The Forward Air Controller was then informed as to whether training aircraft were expected, how many, at what time, and the call signs to be used by the aircraft. The Forward Air Controller then took up a position in the terrain a half hour in advance. When the aircraft arrived, the Dutch Forward Air Controllers reported their presence with the call sign (Windmill), while the pilots identified themselves with their call signs based on nationality - in the case of the Dutch this was Kurt. The Forward Air Controllers then found out how long the aircraft were available and reported the target. In the case of training flights, those targets were sometimes small Bosnian Serb bunkers (which, on a number of occasions, led to fire from the VRS after a bombing dive), or a recognisable house in the enclave, such as the one belonging to Naser Oric.¹³⁴⁸

As far as the Forward Air Controllers were concerned, Dutchbat was in an unfortunate position in July 1995. Due to flight restrictions over Bosnia no training flights had been permitted for some time. After a period of leave the lieutenant of the Forward Air Controllers team could not return to the enclave. The two remaining Forward Air Controllers were NCOs, and when they were finally called upon to act, were found not to be fully employable for the task. One of them collapsed under the burden of fear and anxiety and was rendered completely incompetent. The other was apparently even less competent. As the commandos and Joint Commission Observers (JCOs) in the enclave could also be used as Forward Air Controllers, it was possible to improvise with the result that the battalion actually did not have a shortage of manpower in those crucial skills. This will be dealt with in more detail later on in this chapter.

5. Combat action and Close Air Support from day to day: 6 July

The development of the VRS plans for an attack on Srebrenica were sketched in the previous chapter. The first indications of impending disaster came on 5 July. However, the indications did not lead either Dutchbat or UNPROFOR to the conclusion that an attack was imminent. The disaster was manifested in the early hours of the morning of 6 July, when, quite unexpectedly, the enclave was shelled.

¹³⁴⁷ SMG/Debrief. Standing Order 1(NL) VNInfbat, Annex 12 Close Air Support.

¹³⁴⁸ Interview R. Voskamp, 08/10/98.

The UN was slow in recognising the attack

It took a while for the higher echelons in NATO to recognise the reality of the Bosnian Serb attack on the enclave. On 6 July 1995, Deputy Force Commander Ashton gave Akashi a briefing and stated the following: 'Overall a quiet day militarily'. Janvier was in Paris for discussions about the Rapid Reaction Force and access to Sarajevo, but in Paris, too, Srebrenica was not a point of discussion on that day - it only became an issue on 10 July.¹³⁴⁹

At that point Zagreb was not even aware of the attack, as most reports had been based on the preceding 24-hour period. Akashi's daily reports to New York also made no mention of an attack on Srebrenica. Instead, all attention was focused on the situation in Croatia where the Republika Srpska Krajina was being mobilised, the Croatian offensive in the Livno valley, and the increasing number of skirmishes in the Bihac region.

As before, the situation in Sarajevo was on the morning agenda in Zagreb, along with the statement of the French Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral Lanxade, to the effect that he wished to deploy the Rapid Reaction Force to create a corridor through which to withdraw the French troops from the city where they were exposed to excessive risk. The French president, Chirac, did not however approve the proposal.

Srebrenica was in fact discussed in the briefing in Zagreb, but only because the UNHCR representative mentioned it based on a report by the Bosnian Muslims to the effect that thirty people had died of starvation. UNHCR could not confirm the news. At the same time the local UNHCR representative reported that seven people had died there, probably not due to disease, as they had received ample food.¹³⁵⁰ In a telegram to New York, Akashi stated that in June only around thirty percent of the required food had reached the enclave.¹³⁵¹ The supplies in the UNHCR Warehouse in Srebrenica were almost depleted and it was thought that local families would only be able to prepare one or two meals a day for a few days more. Dutchbat only had about 450 litres of diesel in stock and *Médecins Sans Frontières* 200 litres. The scope of UNHCR's fuel supply in the compound in Potocari was kept secret.¹³⁵²

These conditions favoured the Bosnian Serbs during their attack, as it undermined the morale of both the population and the ABiH. This subject was discussed in the chapter titled, 'The Mood in the Enclave: May-July 1995'. The morale of Dutchbat had suffered based on the perceived futility of maintaining a presence in the enclave without proper supplies and without clear prospects of relief.

The attack is launched

The 6th of July also dawned peacefully at the headquarters of Sector North East in Tuzla. Local reports marked the day as 'very quiet'. However, on that day in Srebrenica hostile activities were not limited to the usual terrifying nocturnal exchanges of fire, as, in Potocari, missiles had begun to fly over the compound. The compound took a direct hit as well as a number of stray projectiles, and personnel were forced to retreat to shelters. The day started early with skirmishes between the VRS and ABiH in the Bandera triangle where the VRS launched two assaults on ABiH positions. Further skirmishes were reported in the northern areas of the enclave, but the focus of the battle was in the south-eastern sector of the enclave at OP-F. The VRS fired at ABiH positions with tanks and artillery based a hundred metres in front of the OP. Two tanks fired grenades at the OP-F, resulting in two direct hits and

¹³⁴⁹ *Mission d'Information commune sur les événements de Srebrenica*, Audition de M. Jean-Claude Mallet, 05/04/01.

¹³⁵⁰ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Banbury Diary, 06/07/95; UNNY, DPKO, UNPROFOR. Code Cables Akashi to Annan, 06/07/95, No. Z-1104 and Janvier to Annan, 06/07/95, No. Z-1111.

¹³⁵¹ UNNY. DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 06/07/95, No. Z-1106.

¹³⁵² UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 434, File UNMO HQ SNE Srebrenica. UNMO HQ UNPROFOR to UNMO HQ Zagreb, 081330B Jul 95.

substantial damage. During the course of the morning all of the OPs in the southern regions of the enclave reported attacks.¹³⁵³

The Chief of Staff and Deputy Commander of the 28th Division, Major Ramiz Becirovic, reported to the 2nd Corps of the ABiH in Tuzla that, on that day, three VRS infantry assaults had been warded off in the south-eastern corner of the enclave at the cost of two dead and two wounded on the ABiH side.

After 04.25 hours the VRS began preparations for an infantry attack in the sector of the 282nd Brigade of the ABiH (in the south-eastern sector of the enclave). The VRS continued its siege of that brigade with tanks for the remainder of the day. At 12.15 p.m. the VRS launched a second infantry assault, followed at 13.00 hours by a third, which was also warded off. After that the VRS intensified its fire and hundreds of projectiles rained down on the ABiH lines. Twice more during the course of the day the VRS moved in infantry by means of a total of nine truckloads, and at around 14.00 hours the VRS launched an unsuccessful attack on the ABiH lines at Mount Kvarac to the east of the city.¹³⁵⁴ Becirovic has no explanation as to why the VRS did not follow up those attacks.¹³⁵⁵

The local population panicked. The humanitarian situation was already dismal and a convoy that had been announced previously failed to arrive due to the fighting. Four fuel trucks destined for Dutchbat were forced to turn back. The others went to Belgrade hoping to be able to complete their mission at a later stage.¹³⁵⁶

Ramiz Becirovic reported to the 2nd Corps in Tuzla that Dutchbat continued to man the OPs, but that no movement was visible amongst the other units of the battalion and that they were staying put. He requested a meeting with the commander of Dutchbat but could only establish contact with the liaison section. During the meeting with the Dutchbat liaison section and the UNMOs, Becirovic asked Dutchbat to return fire, and – based on UNMOs reports – also for a NATO air strike. Becirovic was assured that Dutchbat would return fire, but that it would only make a final decision pending their own analysis of the situation. Becirovic further reported to Dutchbat that his units had spotted two buses and two trucks dropping VRS troops at Zeleni Jadar on the afternoon of 5 July. Another truckload of VRS soldiers had also been spotted at Zalazje, in the vicinity of OP-R. According to Becirovic, troop concentrations had been observed in the enclave throughout the day of 5 July. In their report, the UNMOs expressed amazement at the failure of the ABiH to report those preparations (those were not observed by Dutchbat).¹³⁵⁷

Becirovic again requested that the weapons in the Weapon Collection Point be returned, something he had failed to report to the 2nd Corps in Tuzla. Karremans however dismissed the request after due consideration.¹³⁵⁸ He decided only to issue the arms once the VRS crossed the enclave borders.

The ABiH request for the return of the weapons also kept Akashi busy. He proposed the request to New York as a problem that ‘may well need to be resolved in the near future given the inability of UNPROFOR to defend the Safe Area’. There is however no indication that that point had ever been discussed in any detail either in Zagreb or New York. The offensive against Srebrenica also prompted Akashi to ask New York what the point was of maintaining troops in a situation where they were incapable of defending themselves.¹³⁵⁹ No reply to that question was ever received from New York.

¹³⁵³ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Letter Commanding Officer 1(NL)UN Infbn to Commander Sector North East, 07/07/95, No. TK95112.

¹³⁵⁴ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. Komanda 28. Divizije aan Komanda 2. Korpusa, 06/07/95, Str. pov. br. 01-163/95.

¹³⁵⁵ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

¹³⁵⁶ SMG/1004/62. LOGTBAT to Sitcen BLS, 06/07/95 14:39.

¹³⁵⁷ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. Komanda 28. Divizije aan Komanda 2. Korpusa, 06/07/95, Str. pov. br. 01-163/95; CRST. UNMO Srebrenica to TX 061700B Jul 95; NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. UNMO HQ Sector BH-NE to UNMO HQ BH COMD, 06/07/95.

¹³⁵⁸ SMG,1004/62. Coll. Brantz to Sitcen BLS, 06/07/95, 07:28.

¹³⁵⁹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPRF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 07/07/95, No. Z-1112.

Discussions on Close Air Support

After the start of the VRS attack, Karremans wrote a letter of protest to VRS liaison officer, Major Nikolic, regarding the shelling of civilian and UN objects.¹³⁶⁰ After the start of the Bosnian-Serb offensive, the War Presidency of the Opstina was desperate and attempted to get in touch with President Izetbegovic.¹³⁶¹ War President Osman Suljic did establish contact with Izetbegovic and appealed to him to salvage whatever they could. Suljic also claims to have spoken to Karremans on that morning and to have asked him to inform the UN on the offensive on the enclave. Suljic stated that Karremans had initially considered the VRS offensive a mere provocation.¹³⁶²

Karremans did however sound the alarm. After the shelling, Karremans made an effort to eliminate most of the VRS weapons systems around the enclave. Their positions were known and, in his view, the shelling provided a unique opportunity to attack those systems. To that end he put in a request for Close Air Support at 13.50 hours; however, only Karremans considered this a formal request – it was apparently not viewed as such by the hierarchical line (see below).

This request was preceded by a telephone conversation between Karremans and Nicolai regarding the possibilities and impossibilities of Close Air Support in relation to the shelling of OP-F. In that conversation with Karremans, Nicolai discussed the criteria and instructions of the Force Commander as they applied after the bombardments at Pale at the end of May, as well as the smoking gun principle. Only targets that were actually currently engaged in an assault on UNPROFOR could be targeted, and the VRS had subsequently stopped the shelling. The request for Close Air Support submitted by Karremans therefore did not comply with the directives. According to Nicolai, as long as the option of withdrawing UNPROFOR personnel from the area existed and the lives of UNPROFOR personnel were not directly threatened, Zagreb would not agree to Close Air Support. Apparently that was what had happened at the end of May and at the beginning of June in Gorazde. Karremans countered with his own vision of the situation by saying that, ‘One has to grab every opportunity or do nothing at all’.¹³⁶³ Karremans maintained his view to the effect that the shelling had provided a unique opportunity to eliminate an extensive number of weapon systems.¹³⁶⁴ That was the basis of his application at 13.50 hours, and he continued to expound that vision over the days that followed.

The 2nd Corps in Tuzla reported in a letter to Sector North East in the same city that on that day a thousand projectiles had hit the enclave, with seventeen striking the city itself. ABiH General Sead Delic issued an urgent appeal to Brantz for implementation of measures ‘to protect the disarmed population and their territory’. Delic further reported that the 28th Division had learnt that Karremans had asked for Close Air Support, but that he had received no reply from his superior officers.¹³⁶⁵ On the same day Sector North East also established verbal contact with the 2nd Corps. In a conversation with Brigadier General Sulejman Budakovic, Chief of Staff of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH, Brantz stated that Dutchbat had asked for ‘NATO Air Strikes’, but did not know whether Zagreb had issued orders to that effect. Brantz promised to ask Sarajevo for more detailed information and directives. It was up to the politicians to decide what to do; however, Brantz expected the authorities to opt for a ‘stay put’ policy for the UNPROFOR units in Srebrenica and the use of air power. Brantz emphasised the need for effective data exchange with the 2nd Corps.

¹³⁶⁰ SMG, 1005. Komandant 1 (NL) UN Pjbat Dutchbat za Major Nikolic, 06/07/95.

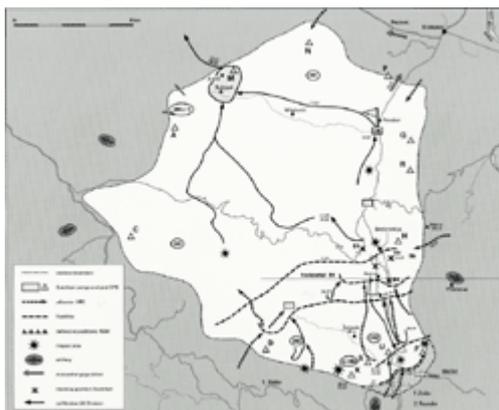
¹³⁶¹ Interview Hakija Meholjic, 02/02/98, 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

¹³⁶² Interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98. It was not possible to determine with certainty whether the interview had occurred on 6 July. Suljic did talk to the Dutchbat Liaison Section on 7 July.

¹³⁶³ Debriefing statement Lieutenant Colonel J.A.C. Ruiter, 27/09/95; interview C.H. Nicolai, 09/07/99.

¹³⁶⁴ Karremans, *Srebrenica, Who Cares?*, p. 160.

¹³⁶⁵ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Letter 2nd Corps Command to BHC Sector North-East, 06/07/95, No. 02/1-700/1.



Up to that point, the data concerning the progress of the offensive still coincide.¹³⁶⁶ A number of other points that emerged from the discussions however did not coincide with the actual state of affairs. Some of the ABiH soldiers were armed, which means that, in contrast to the position maintained by the ABiH, the entire population of the enclave was not unarmed. Furthermore, Brantz' reply to Budakovic's question concerning Close Air Support was incorrect – there had never been a formal application. Moreover, the reply to the request had not come from Zagreb as Brantz had assumed, but from Sarajevo. Based on that, Nicolai explained to Karremans that the request would probably not be fulfilled.

The Dutchbat liaison team, during a meeting with the president of the Opstina, mentioned that an application for Close Air Support had been submitted to Sarajevo, but that it had been refused due to a shortage of aircraft. That report reached Tuzla via ABiH channels and, in Brantz' view 'fell out of the air' and could therefore not be considered credible.¹³⁶⁷

What was true was that at 13.50 hours, Karremans, in spite of Nicolai's negative advice, had submitted a request for 'Presence Close Air Support' (a non-existing concept), which had indeed been turned down based on a shortage of aircraft.¹³⁶⁸ That report also reached the Netherlands, as a result of which it also appeared in Dutch reports.¹³⁶⁹ No formal request had however been submitted for Close Air Support. It is an established fact that the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo submitted a request to NATO for air presence (sending NATO aircraft into Bosnian airspace as a deterrent without an actual decision as to specific actions) above Srebrenica.¹³⁷⁰ The reasons remain unclear. Most probably it was due to the fact that peace had largely been restored to the enclave, partially due to recent heavy rains.¹³⁷¹

It would appear that the aim of the VRS shelling had been to get Dutchbat to run for cover, to terrorise the local population and to force them to leave the scattered villages to build up the concentration in the city. This coincided with the VRS objective to reduce the enclave in size in the enclave and cut the communication with Zepa. However, it had obviously not stopped at that, as the city too had been shelled. The UNMOs were amazed at the relatively low number of victims and limited damage to buildings. According to the UNMOs there was a clear pattern in the shelling. The VRS fired off ten grenades, only to stop the shelling for a period of one to two hours. As soon the

¹³⁶⁶ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Memorandum Meeting COS 2 Corps ACOMDR SNE, 06/07/95 15.00 hrs.

¹³⁶⁷ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary (August Version 1999), p. 114-115, 121-122.

¹³⁶⁸ DCBC, 595. Dutchbat Firing Close Report, 06/07/95.

¹³⁶⁹ DCBC, 581. Weekintsum No. 27/95 from 4 thru 10 July from DOKL, Department of Intelligence and Security section. Confi.

¹³⁷⁰ DCBC, Box 59. Overview of Citations Logbook Air Operations Control Center, Annex A to Klu replies to Questions by the Chamber on Srebrenica.

¹³⁷¹ DCBC, 594. Situation report Srebrenica dtg 061430B Jul 95; DCBC, 595. Dutchbat Firing Close Report, 06/07/95; UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 54/77. File 2.2.7 Sector Command Matters 01/06/95-17/08/95. HQ SNE, Sitrep for Period 051700B to 061700B Jul 95; Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 161; SMG, 1001. Fax UNMO Srebrenica to Dutchbat LO Team, 061221B Jul 95.

refugees emerged from their retreats, the shelling would recommence to force the victims back into hiding. It was especially hard to keep the children inside. This appeared to have been the routine between roughly 08.00 and 22.00 hours.

It would have been easy for the VRS to have shelled the UN compound in Potocari; however, that did not happen even though the VRS did fire at the nearby hillside to keep Dutchbat undercover as long as possible. The UNMOs failed to establish contact with the VRS, as a result of which VRS intentions remained unclear. The interpreter to the UNMOs who was based in Bratunac had learnt from the VRS that he was to refuse his services to the UNMOs.¹³⁷² According to a later testimony by the former Chief of Staff of the VRS, General Manojlo Milovanovic, the VRS most certainly did execute the shelling to intimidate Dutchbat and the local population. He also added that the VRS had issued orders as to the general conduct of its forces in the presence of UNPROFOR. It was however quite possible that the UN could have been fired upon sporadically, partially due to the fact that it would have been hard to maintain discipline amongst the VRS troops.¹³⁷³

Reactions in the Netherlands

At this point the build-up in Srebrenica enjoyed only very limited coverage in the Dutch national and international press which was largely dominated by other events in Bosnia. Colonel Brantz reported to the ANP that there had been no Dutch casualties and that Dutchbat did not appear to be a direct target of the Bosnian Serbs. That notwithstanding, a nervous home front assaulted the Royal Netherlands Army Crisis staff with telephone calls and an atmosphere of major uncertainty prevailed. Although Dutchbat had not been attacked directly, the shelling in the immediate vicinity could certainly be described as life threatening. 'What will happen next?', was the question posed by Deputy Chairman J. Janssens of the Home Front Committee. Could Dutchbat leave the enclave or not? This question fed on the uncertainty of those who had been left at home, partially due to the fact that many had booked holidays in view of the approaching leave of the Dutchbat troops.¹³⁷⁴ However, specifically due to the enormous uncertainty around the issuance of convoy clearances by the Bosnian Serbs, the Defence Force opted for silence. No further utterances would be made regarding Dutchbat's relief until a convoy was actually underway to the enclave.¹³⁷⁵

On the evening of 6 June, the start of the VRS offensive was also a hot topic of speculation at the Defence Crisis Management Centre in The Hague. It had always been expected that the offensive would start at Gorazde, which was not only the largest of the eastern enclaves, but also the most important from a strategic perspective. It is conceivable that the Bosnian Serbs did not wish to provoke the British who were based in Gorazde, especially in view of statements to the effect that the Rapid Reaction Force would be operational within a few days and could be used to open a corridor to Sarajevo. At least, that was the prevailing speculation in the Defence Crisis Management Centre. For those reasons the attack on Srebrenica could have been a preventative action; however, the possibility that it might have been an incident 'gone out of control' could also not be ruled out. A further possible explanation for the VRS offensive, which was offered by Defence Management Control Centre in a limited-circulation draft Memorandum, was that the VRS was attempting to inhibit Dutchbat's evacuation from the enclave. This would indeed have been a worrisome development, as Dutch policy was specifically aimed at getting Dutchbat III out of the enclave as soon as possible.¹³⁷⁶

In light of the planned relief of Dutchbat units, the aforementioned draft Memorandum posed the question as to the political-military options available if Dutchbat would be unable to obtain permission to leave the enclave. According to an analysis both the VRS and the ABiH could benefit

¹³⁷² NIOD, Confidential Coll. (4). Debrief of UNMOs from the Srebrenica enclave, 23 /07/95.

¹³⁷³ Interview Manojlo Milovanovic, 18/11/98.

¹³⁷⁴ ANP 061332 Jul 95; *Algemeen Dagblad*, 07/07/95.

¹³⁷⁵ DCBC, 2432. Ministry of Defence Directorate of Counselling, 07/07/95.

¹³⁷⁶ DCBC, 2434. Draft Memo DCBC, no number, sent by Fax No. 562Sec, 062255B Jul 95 to Col. Smeets.

from the continued UN presence. In spite of the statement by Sacirbey, the Bosnian Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the effect that the Muslims were quite capable of defending the enclave on their own, the speculation was that the evacuation of Dutchbat could lead to intensification of the VRS attacks and possibly to the conquest of the enclave.

In any event, it was clear to The Hague that, had the Bosnian Serbs hoped to gain control of the enclave, they had been prevented thus far by the presence of the UN. The attack increased international attention to acts of terror on the part of the VRS. On the other hand, the presence of the UN personnel as potential hostages presented the Bosnian Serbs with a means of countering the effective use of the Rapid Reaction Force or to frustrate NATO Close Air Support. Mladic had already announced that the VRS would act against the enclaves in the case of the deployment of a Rapid Reaction Force. All that notwithstanding, The Hague considered Bosnian Serb resistance to the evacuation of Dutchbat improbable. It was however almost certain that both warring factions would want to benefit from the withdrawal of Dutchbat by taking over the OPs, equipment and armoured vehicles.

In the event of Dutchbat being taken hostage, the Rapid Reaction Force would have to be deployed to relieve the situation. To do so would primarily demand the support of the British as the situation in Gorazde was potentially comparable. Other options included asking NATO for a withdrawal operation (Operation Plan 40104) or to get negotiator Bildt to insist on a speedy relief effort. High-level negotiations with Mladic would however conflict with the prevailing negotiation techniques of the international community; that is, no contact with the Bosnian Serbs. To that end, and in spite of doubts concerning Dutchbat's capabilities to that effect, the only alternative was for Dutchbat to optimise its own contact with local VRS commanders to negotiate passage over Bosnian-Serb territory.

A notable suggestion, developed by the Defence Crisis Management, was to reward the combating parties for a safe rotation – a dubious action with regard to the UN's neutral position. In an extreme situation, Dutchbat could surrender its armoured vehicles to the VRS while offering its auxiliary resources and/or equipment to the Muslims. This draft Memorandum drawn up by the Defence Crisis Management Centre was sent to the Royal Netherlands Crisis staff for commentary. No further traces were found of that Memorandum in the archives; which presents the feasible conclusion that the Memorandum was quietly put to rest at official level. Clearly this appeared uncomfortably close to a Dutch attempt to bypass UNPROFOR and, in any event, the ideas posed to solve the problems of evacuating the enclave did not coincide with political reality. Clearly, by sacrificing UN neutrality, the DCBC was prepared to pay a high price. The anonymous author of the draft Memorandum was clearly aware of the consequences, especially in view of the conclusion of an overwhelming likelihood that Dutchbat would have to remain in the enclave for an extended period of time. In view of the existing supply problems that would entail an exacerbated physical burden and an increasingly anxious home front.¹³⁷⁷

Agreements for joint self-defence efforts?

The Bosnian Muslims did indicate that, shortly before the assault, Dutchbat and the ABiH had reached an agreement concerning joint defence of the enclave.¹³⁷⁸ Dutchbat denied the existence of any such agreements, stating that a joint defence effort could not and would not have taken place. It would also have been in conflict with the UNPROFOR mandate.

According to Sergeant-Major Rave of the section for military-civilian relations (in military terms: Section-5), Major Franken had only told Ramiz Becirovic that Dutchbat would defend the OPs as long as possible. Rave stated that a coordinated defence effort was not possible due to the fact that the UN

¹³⁷⁷ DCBC, 2434. Draft Memo DCBC, no number, sent by Fax No. 562Sec, 062255B Jul 95 to Col. Smeets.

¹³⁷⁸ ABiH Tuzla. 2nd Corps, no number. Supplementary statement by Ramiz Becirovic, 16/04/98, based on previous statement of 11/08/95.

had to remain neutral. Franken pointed out the big gaps between the OPs and requested ABiH report the presence of the VRS in those areas. The Dutchbat vision was that the OPs could be defended for 72 hours in the case of an attack, assuming that the attack was to be executed with weapons similar to those used by Dutchbat. The gaps in the defence would thereby be the responsibility of the ABiH. They would be able to maintain the defence in those intermediate areas for seven days.¹³⁷⁹

According to a report compiled by the ABiH of a meeting with Franken on 29 May, the ABiH claims that there were definite agreements to collaborate in the defence of the enclave. The report was mentioned in the previous chapter. The agreement was made at a time when, during the hostage crisis, a real threat had been identified with respect to the OPs. In the days that followed, that threat culminated in the capture of OP-E by the VRS. During the meeting, as reported in the ABiH analysis, Dutchbat stated that in the event of an attack of the OPs they would be able to defend them for 72 hours. Subsequently both Dutchbat and ABiH frequently used that period as a given. According to Major Franken, armoured vehicles could, if necessary, be used to regroup or to move ammunition. The troops in question were airborne soldiers who had never been exposed to a real fire fight, but efforts had been made to prepare them for an attack without panicking.

According to the report of that meeting Franken could not guarantee to Becirovic that Dutchbat and the ABiH would be able to fight side by side, but he stated that Dutchbat would certainly defend themselves if necessary. If at any point the OPs could no longer be maintained, they would withdraw to the centre of the enclave. According to the ABiH report, Franken proposed that the ABiH remains in the vicinity of Dutchbat in order to provide assistance. Becirovic accepted that proposal. Franken also proposed that the representatives of Dutchbat and the ABiH could jointly identify critical points in the defence of the enclave and, if necessary, come to an agreement that, in the case of an emergency, the ABiH could occupy those positions. This would have to be done under cover so as not to reveal the situation to either Dutchbat or the VRS. Becirovic also accepted that proposal.¹³⁸⁰

UNMO interpreter Hasan Nuhanovic also stated that, in a meeting during the hostage crisis, Karremans had told Ramiz Becirovic that he had received orders from Sarajevo to withdraw from all OPs. This too was covered in the previous chapter. According to Nuhanovic, after consultation with his superiors, Karremans disregarded that instruction. Dutchbat had enough ammunition in the OPs for a 72-hour defence effort, after which the ABiH would be permitted to take over the OPs from Dutchbat - according to Nuhanovic that was what Karremans had in mind: 'As soon as we surrender, you can take over'. Nuhanovic stated that the agreement was, in retrospect, one of the few moments in which Karremans showed courage. On the other hand, this also demonstrated the UN's weakness. At the time Karremans was not prepared to report the agreement to the UN because the communication lines were not secure and the Bosnian Serbs could have got wind of the news.¹³⁸¹

Dutchbat interpreter Omer Subasic confirmed that vision in broad outlines - the agreement was that Dutchbat would remain at the OPs and continue to defend them. The ABiH would guard the intermediate terrain to prevent the OPs from being outflanked. According to Subasic there were no real plans for collaboration. It was all a tacit agreement, which was also the reason why the ABiH were allowed to carry arms.¹³⁸²

Members of the Opstina also understood there to have been a tacit agreement concerning collaboration in the event of a VRS assault. The aforementioned members were uncertain as to why the agreement was never implemented.¹³⁸³

¹³⁷⁹ Interview E.A. Rave, 24/01/01; information based on confidential debriefing statement (43).; SMG/Debrief. Factual Account of the Debriefing.

¹³⁸⁰ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROM's. ABiH Komanda 28. Divizije aan Komandi 2. Korpusa Odjeljenje za moral, 02/06/09, br. 04-84/95.

¹³⁸¹ Interview Hasan Nuhanovic, 05/08/97 and 06/08/97.

¹³⁸² Interview Omer Subasic, 19/10/97 and 20/10/97. Subasic did not know the date of the agreement.

¹³⁸³ Interview Dzermaludin Becirevic and Sefket Hafizovic, 21/10/97.

According to Ramiz Becirovic, Karremans had also promised not to disarm the ABiH as long as they stayed away from the OPs, and as long as they kept their arms out of the view of the Bosnian Serbs. Otherwise the UN was required to report or confiscate the weapons.¹³⁸⁴ It was also a known fact in Tuzla that Karremans had permitted the ABiH to carry arms. Sector North East approved that for purposes of self-defence, and mentioned it during a discussion with the 2nd Corps of the ABiH.¹³⁸⁵

It is unlikely that the agreement would have been announced within Dutchbat. Hasan Nuhanovic was not a witness to orders issued and the agreement was never recorded in writing; however, in his view, based on the behaviour of the Dutch sub commanders it had been announced within Dutchbat. According to Nuhanovic it was possible partially to deduce that an agreement had been reached based on the fact that Dutchbat went to the ABiH trenches and never disarmed local units of the ABiH. Nuhanovic noticed this at OP-D and even reported an argument between the UNMOs about the question as to whether to compile a report to that effect.¹³⁸⁶ Dutchbat interpreter, Vahid Hodzic, claims to have heard Dutch soldiers say to ABiH soldiers at OP-S that they would jointly defend the OP.

Such an agreement between ABiH and Dutchbat could cast a different light on the attitude of the ABiH soldiers – it would explain why the ABiH treated Dutchbat rudely and threatened them with violence when they withdrew from the OPs. In that light, the ABiH would have interpreted Dutchbat's departure as a violation of existing agreements.

If agreements did exist in any form, it most probably concerned local initiatives at the OPs. Based on the available debriefing statements and the Factual Account of the debriefing, it appears that only those directly involved in the discussions with the ABiH would have been aware of any agreements. There were no reports of any meetings.¹³⁸⁷

Retrospectively, in the view of UNMO interpreter Emir Suljagic, only the Dutchbat leaders could have known about the agreement, and not the private soldiers. This later led to a number of clashes with armed ABiH soldiers who were not officially allowed to carry arms, much less openly display them. This created a confusing situation both for Dutchbat and the local population.¹³⁸⁸

In contrast to the Dutchbat units, it would appear that the ABiH soldiers were aware of the agreements. According to a member of the ABiH soldiers and in the view of many along the borders of the enclave, Dutchbat frequently had better contact with the VRS than with the ABiH, but that changed, partly due to the loss of OP-E, when Dutchbat proposed cooperation with the ABiH.¹³⁸⁹

There were however no indications of any coordination based on the former agreement between Dutchbat and ABiH or any initiative to that end by either party at the time of the VRS offensive on the enclave. According to Karremans the ABiH had promised to move into the positions between the Dutchbat units and to join their flanks; however, that only occurred in the night of 10 to 11 July when he announced the air strikes.¹³⁹⁰ This utterance of Karremans' refers to various perceptions. The ABiH took the Dutchbat promises made on 29 May, seriously. According to Nuhanovic it appeared that Dutchbat did not consider the agreements with the ABiH valid once the threats at the end of May and the beginning of June subsided, and did not renew them at the time of the sudden attack on 6 July. He stated further that the situation had changed meanwhile and, while at the end of May and the beginning of June the OPs were threatened by small VRS and Arkan Tiger units, the attack on 6 July was conducted with heavy weaponry and larger infantry units.

¹³⁸⁴ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

¹³⁸⁵ Interview Nadia Skokic, 04/02/98. The principal contacts in the 2nd Corps during those meetings were Sead Delic (Corps Commander), Mehmed Zilic (Chief Security), Sulejman Budokovic (Chief of Staff) and Andjelko Makar (Deputy Commander).

¹³⁸⁶ Interview Hasan Nuhanovic, 05/08/97 and 06/08/97.

¹³⁸⁷ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (42); SMG/Debrief. Factual account of the debriefing, section 3.2.5.

¹³⁸⁸ Interview Emir Suljagic, 23/11/97.

¹³⁸⁹ Interview Sadik Vilic, 06/02/98.

¹³⁹⁰ Karremans, *Srebrenica, Who cares?* p. 190.

The former agreement did however contribute to the confusion in July amongst the ABiH units. According to Nuhanovic the ABiH was therefore extremely vexed when, in the course of the battle, Dutchbat did not hold to its promise of defending the Ops for 72 hours.¹³⁹¹ According to ABiH soldier Damir Skaler, the ABiH was disappointed by the fact that Dutchbat gave up the OPs along with their arms and uniforms, and that action contributed to their loss of morale.¹³⁹²

Whatever the truth may be, it is clear that after 29 May there were no further agreements with respect to coordinated defence efforts at critical points. This resulted in clashes during the attack on the enclave. Ramiz Becirovic felt that, from a military point of view, his troops needed the positions where the OPs were located, as they held high positions in tactically important terrain and oversaw potential routes of advances on the enclave. Becirovic felt that if his soldiers had occupied those positions, the defence would have taken a course for the better. Moreover, the gradual break-up of the enclave due to the surrender of the OPs by Dutchbat in the days thereafter had a negative impact on the ABiH's morale. This was exacerbated by the fact that, according to Becirovic, Karremans had stated that Dutchbat would put up a defence in the case of an attack. He had promised not to retreat. After the surrender of the OPs, Becirovic claims to have protested to Karremans, but no longer expected Dutchbat to fight, as it 'simply lacked the motivation of its own troops'.¹³⁹³ The actual state of the morale amongst the ABiH remains questionable.

According to UNMO interpreter Emir Suljagic the 'deal' between Karremans and Becirovic, which entailed that the ABiH would defend the flanks of the Ops, transpired in retrospect to have been a mistake. In his view it resulted in a deterioration of the relations between Dutchbat and the local population. The timing of the agreement was a mistake too, as it could only have made sense had it been made earlier. That would have given them time to work on the relationship, which was, in any event, hampered by a range of problems including theft and black-market trading. Dutchbat apparently also became increasingly irate due to supply problems and the postponement of leave.¹³⁹⁴

There was therefore clearly no collaboration between Dutchbat and the ABiH during the fall of the enclave; only mutual resentment. As Ramiz Becirovic put it later, the ABiH initially succeeded in defending themselves while, in his view, Dutchbat did little more than observe.¹³⁹⁵ Dutchbat later testified that the ABiH impeded its operations and stood in the way of the battalion.

6. Combat action and Close Air Support from day to day: 7 July

The morning of 7 July started in Srebrenica with a 'low level of activity'. The action between the VRS and the ABiH appeared to be diminishing, in relation to the previous day. The continuous rain on that day limited the warring factions to a few mutual exchanges. At higher levels this did not inspire anyone to intensify the alarm signals. Moreover, on the same day Sarajevo was subject to heavy shelling, which substantially reduced the interest in Srebrenica.¹³⁹⁶

Looking back to the day before, Karremans wrote in a letter to the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo that the situation was becoming critical now that new volleys of grenades and missiles were hitting the enclave from all directions. Karremans was not clear as to the targets of the missiles. Although the shelling was impressive, it yielded very limited military results. In Karremans' view the aim of the shelling was to intimidate the local population as well as the UN. Most of the shells landed north of Mount Gradac located halfway between Srebrenica and Potocari. Five mortars hit the

¹³⁹¹ Interview Hasan Nuhanovic, 05/08/97 and 06/08/97.

¹³⁹² Interview Damir Skaler, 31/01/98.

¹³⁹³ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

¹³⁹⁴ Interview Emir Suljagic, 23/11/97.

¹³⁹⁵ AHIB Tuzla. 2nd Corps, no number. Supplementary statement by Ramiz Becirovic, 16/04/98, based on previous statement of 11/08/95.

¹³⁹⁶ Interview Samantha Powers, 08/06/00.

town of Srebrenica resulting in four casualties. According to another Dutchbat report there were four dead and thirteen casualties.¹³⁹⁷

OP-M and OP-N, the northernmost Ops, were also targets of the attack but were not hit. The VRS also gave a demonstration of its fire power with a 12-tube Multiple Launch Rocket System (in military terms: an M-63) that fired over and next to the compound in Potocari.

Karremans' view of the situation was that the VRS' agenda was to exacerbate the situation in the enclave. He assumed that the Drina Corps had been ordered to reinforce their positions and to boost their credibility by way of some military successes. Weapons systems and troops were needed elsewhere to be able to act with more flexibility against the ABiH by neutralising or eliminating their forces. In that respect Karremans had not been far off the mark. His reports did express some fear that the VRS could also be targeting the UN. Karremans therefore finally asked for support by any means 'on the ground and in the air' 'on behalf of the population of the enclave'. On that day, however, there were no specific requests for Close Air Support.¹³⁹⁸

The Military Information Cell of Sector North East learnt that the mayor of Srebrenica had said that he did not think that the VRS would want to occupy the entire enclave, but intended to dominate the area by targeting the strategically positioned higher ground. In view of the fact that the Drina Corps already had some fifty kilometres to patrol around Srebrenica alone, with an additional several hundred kilometres around the other enclaves, this seemed to be a plausible explanation. The Drina Corps was also responsible for scattered centres, such as Zvornik, Vlasenica, Han Pijesak, Bratunac and Visegrad.¹³⁹⁹

On the afternoon of 7 July, a meeting was convened between Dutchbat, the UNMOs and Opstina president Osman Suljic. He stated his dissatisfaction with the reporting of UNPROFOR. He had heard via Radio Free Europe that both the VRS and the ABiH were using artillery, tanks and mortars. The world should have known that Srebrenica had been designated a Safe Area and that all heavy weapons were to have been confined to the Weapon Collection Point. Suljic wanted to know who had reported this. UNMOs and Dutchbat revealed what information had been sent out of the enclave. Suljic's statement that the ABiH had not reacted to the VRS attacks and would not do so in future was notable in that context. The UNMOs did not treat that issue in any further detail in their reports.¹⁴⁰⁰

The War Presidency expected the UN to provide protection. While the ABiH was mobilised, the Presidency felt that actually going into battle would only serve to exacerbate the situation.¹⁴⁰¹ It was thought that if they were to take matters into their own hands, the UN would no longer be prepared to take any action. This appears to be a politically tainted statement as the ABiH most certainly did react to the VRS attack, and several skirmishes took place between the ABiH and the VRS. The local population did indeed expect a great deal from the UN. Too much, in fact, because, according to Omer Subasic (one of the Dutchbat interpreters), it was hard to explain to the locals that the weapons in Dutchbat's possession were only intended for their own self-defence. Everyone believed that Dutchbat would defend them. Some people appeared to be aware of Dutchbat's limitations, but believed help would come from the outside. That belief was kept alive for quite some time. The local population initially even thought that the VRS attack was simply one of many and that the Bosnian Serbs would eventually withdraw again.¹⁴⁰²

¹³⁹⁷ SMG, 1001. Dutchbat Daily Milinfosum 061700B to 071700B Jul 95.

¹³⁹⁸ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Letter Commanding Officer 1(NL)UN Infbn to Commander Bosnia-Herzegovina Command thru Commander Sector North East, 07/07/95, No. TK95112.

¹³⁹⁹ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. UNMO HQ SNE Tuzla, 'Assessment Situation in Srebrenica Enclave', 07/07/95, No. MIO.ASS.SREB001 and 'BSA Forces in SNE as at 07/07/95', MIO ORBAT.BSA.001. Secret and Confidential. Compiled by P.H.D. Wright.

¹⁴⁰⁰ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 421, UNMO HQ Zagreb. UNMO HQ Daily Sitrep, 080100B Jul 95.

¹⁴⁰¹ Interview Hamdija Fejzic, 03/02/98.

¹⁴⁰² Interview Omer Subasic, 19/10/97 and 20/10/97.

Also, on 7 July, the Defence Crisis Management Centre started briefing accredited military attachés in The Hague. The attachés of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France received daily briefings on the situation. In addition to verbal briefings, they were also issued with unofficial and unsigned hand-outs. In most instances those hand-outs were English translations of the confidential Situation Report compiled daily by the Defence Crisis Management Centre, which was also sent to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and General Affairs. The same information was sent to the *aide de camp* of General John Shalikashvili, the chairman of the American Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Joulwan, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, also kept General Shalikashvili up to date regarding developments in Srebrenica.¹⁴⁰³ All of these contacts were the outcome of the conferences of the Chiefs of Defence held in December 1994 and May 1995, and the good mutual relations between the British, French and American Chiefs of Staff, respectively Inge, Lanxade, and Shalikashvili, and their Dutch colleague Van den Breemen.¹⁴⁰⁴

7. Combat Action and Close Air Support from Day to Day: 8 July

On 8 July the fighting in the enclave intensified once again. In the night of 7 to 8 July the observation posts counted a total of 275 artillery and mortar explosions. Around midnight two shells fired by the Bosnian Serb artillery positioned north of OP-P shook the compound in Potocari. Later in the day, when low-lying mist that normally hung above the enclave in the early morning hours and almost completely inhibited fighting, had risen, the battle recommenced in earnest. At that time the VRS shelling also recommenced. In the course of the morning the UNMOs counted 31 hits near Potocari and 34 in the town of Srebrenica. The ABiH spotted a trailer with a tank, which indicated that the VRS was bringing in reinforcements.¹⁴⁰⁵

The ABiH assumed that the VRS was bringing in new units to various spots around the enclave. The ABiH spotted units of Drina Wolves (well-trained and equipped Bosnian Serb combat units that could form the vanguard during an attack), as well as regular combat units brought in from Serbia. This could however not be verified independently and the 2nd Corps also could not provide further proof to that effect. It is possible that auxiliary troops could have been deployed from Tara (a Serbian region opposite Drina). Hotels were vacated to make room for auxiliary troops that travelled to Srebrenica during the day only to return at night via the bridge at Bajina Basta. The same units may also have been involved in the mass murders that were committed later.¹⁴⁰⁶

The ABiH had to withdraw from a number of positions under heavy artillery fire. The 2nd Corps of the ABiH reported to the General Staff that no action had been observed on the part of Dutchbat. That report also mentioned a new request to Dutchbat to retrieve weapons from the Weapon Collection Point; however, Dutchbat again refused to oblige. Dutchbat did however state that NATO would intervene if necessary. Karremans also proposed that the ABiH initiate a dialogue with the VRS to stop the offensive; however, according to the report, the ABiH Commander in the enclave, Ramiz Becirovic, rejected that proposal.¹⁴⁰⁷

The Attack on OP-F and the Death of Raviv van Renssen

The centre of the battle on 8 July was still located in the south-eastern corner of the enclave at OP-F. By midday, VRS tanks were firing at ABiH positions approximately two-hundred metres from OP-F.

¹⁴⁰³ DV, V54/95/Defstaf. CDS memo to the Minister, 05/09/95, No. S/95/061/3473; interview General John Shalikashvili, 07/06/00. See also Faxes DCBC, 2333, 2425, 2427, 2428 and 2429. Shalikashvili entered the data in his diary.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Interview C.G.J. Hilderink, 11/08/00.

¹⁴⁰⁵ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 434, UNMO HQ SNE Srebrenica. UNMO HQ BH SNE to UNMO HQ BH Comd, 081430B Jul 95; interview Hazrudin Kusic, 17/05/99 and 18/05/99.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Confidential interview (5).

¹⁴⁰⁷ ABiH Tuzla. Komanda 2. Korpusa aan GSS ARBiH KM Kakanj, 09/07/95, Str. Pov. Br. 02/1-03.

That resulted in a heavy exchange of fire between the ABiH and the VRS; not only at OP-F, but also at the nearby posts of OP-U and OP-S.

Shortly prior to the start of the actual attack on OP-F, the OP sergeant in command, Sergeant Van Rossum, discussed an evacuation plan with the personnel of the OP. A sketch had been drawn of the route that was to be used as a retreat by the APC in the case of an emergency.

The exchange between the ABiH and VRS started soon thereafter in the vicinity of the OP. Various explosions a few hundred metres from OP-F terrorised the crew of that OP. The OP Commander, Sergeant van Rossum, then reported to the Battalion Command (Franken) that he wished to evacuate the OP; however, the OP was under fire and they were faced with the problem of safely reaching the APC. They did not receive permission to evacuate the OP. Franken would not agree to the advice of the Company Commander, Captain Groen, to allow the OP crew to withdraw towards the location of the VRS soldiers. A witness to that conversation heard Franken say on the radio; 'You know how I feel about that. I do not want to discuss it any further.' The unit was informed that they were not permitted to evacuate the OP 'under any circumstances'. Consequently, the Company Commander, Captain Groen, also refused permission to withdraw in the direction of the VRS lines. The battalion staff did however send another message to the OP crew, namely; 'Try to give the Serbs hell'; which attested to a general lack of understanding of the situation. The final decision was to remain in the OPs and to allow the VRS to advance.

A VRS tank subsequently broke through the ABiH lines and approached to within a hundred metres of the OP. The VRS additionally opened fire with an M-46 130mm Field Gun at ABiH positions nearby. UNMOs then determined that the VRS was making preparations to attack the OP. Two tanks were used to blow a hole in the defence wall of the OP to allow VRS soldiers to force their way inside, and a VRS tank, positioned a hundred metres away, kept its barrel aimed at the OP and the withdrawal route. One of the crew wrote the following about the situation: 'At that point everyone panicked. There was no way we could escape'. To top it all, Franken, at some point instructed Groen to the effect that OP-F should fire a TOW anti-tank missile to eliminate the tank. The Battalion Commander also instructed them to take the AT-4 anti-tank weapons with them in case of demolition of the OP. At that point the VRS soldiers approached the OP from the surrounding bush. Waving white flags, they attempted to establish contact with the OP crew. Initially they would not approach the OP as a result of which it was impossible to establish contact. The VRS then tried to get the OP Commander, Van Rossum, to meet them at a house located a hundred metres in front of the OP, but Van Rossum refused. After that two VRS soldiers approached the OP and, after an exchange of gestures, more followed. The soldiers were in a festive mood, for the simple reason that they intended to take over OP-F.

The VRS was prepared to let the OP crew go once they had surrendered all weapons and flack jackets. After some negotiation Dutchbat was allowed to keep their flack jackets. The VRS then demanded the crew's departure within ten minutes. The VRS did indeed let them go by APC without further problems. Karremans notified Nicolai in Sarajevo and Brantz in Tuzla that the VRS had taken OP-F.¹⁴⁰⁸ The assault on and occupation of the OP played out in a matter of approximately one hour. This put the VRS inside the borders of the enclave for a second time - this time in control of an OP.

The APC left the OP-F at high speed, but soon slowed down and eventually came to a halt approximately 200 metres further.¹⁴⁰⁹ At the foot of the hill ABiH soldiers were putting together a barricade to stop the APC. This was the second time the ABiH had witnessed a take-over of an OP by the VRS. It meant that, after the occupation of OP-E, more than a month earlier, another piece of the

¹⁴⁰⁸ NIOD, Confidential Coll. (4). Debrief of UNMOs from the Srebrenica enclave, 23/07/95; SMG, 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 08/07/95 14.15 - 14.54; SMG 1004/56. B-Company Diary 08/07/95, 13.13 - 14.55; Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 280-1; Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 162-3; NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. 'sequence of events Close Air Support Missions Srebrenica'; Debriefing statements, D.H. Ross, 12/09/95 and 14/09/95; information based on confidential Debriefing statement (40) and (42).

¹⁴⁰⁹ Debriefing statement B.W.J. Wevelkate, 07/09/95.

enclave was under threat of being nibbled away by the Bosnian Serbs. The ABiH wanted to prevent that, which is why they endeavoured to stop Dutchbat from beating the retreat. The crew of the APC feared that the ABiH was planning to use them as a shield against the Bosnian Serbs; which, understandably, motivated them all the more to retreat as soon as possible. Having established that no anti-tank weapons were aimed at the APC and after obtaining permission from the command post (in military terms: the Ops Room) of B Company, the APC broke through the barricade while the occupants under the command of the APC commander took shelter behind the armour plating. Soldier Van Renssen, who was slow in taking cover because of his length, was hit by pellets of a shotgun fired by an ABiH soldier – others, however, mentioned a handgrenade – of which small metal parts entered his skull beneath the rim of helmet.¹⁴¹⁰

Van Renssen collapsed inside the vehicle. A crew member wrote the following passages: ‘Once again everyone panicked and everyone tried to help him – he had a large wound behind his left ear. The emergency bandage we applied was almost immediately saturated with blood.’ A hastily summoned armoured casualty evacuation vehicle raced Van Renssen to the sickbay at the compound in Potocari: In spite of heart-massage and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation by two medics, while a third applied a drip and administered atropine, Van Renssen died.¹⁴¹¹ His remains were sent to the Netherlands and arrived there the following day. The negotiations to move his body from the enclave, and the medical treatment Van Renssen received at the compound in Potocari, are covered in more detail in the Appendix, ‘Dutchbat and the local population: medical issues.’

Van Renssen was the 67th victim to be mourned by UNPROFOR. Karremans wrote the following in his book: ‘Once again time stood still. Victim to a war that is not our own.’¹⁴¹² In those words Karremans also expressed the consequences of Van Renssen’s death for the battalion; morale, which had not been high for various reasons, now fell to new lows. Dutchbat increasingly fell victim to a gnawing sense of doubt in the value of their continued presence. They were hostages in the enclave and there was no visible end to their sojourn. Worse still, in the days to come things would only take a more dramatic turn.

A Closer Look at the Assault on OP-F and the Death of Raviv van Renssen

The events surrounding OP-F led to action in a number of places in the UN hierarchy. In Tuzla, Brantz wrote to the Commander of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH, General Sead Delic, that if the ABiH were going to treat UNPROFOR as an enemy, as had happened at OP-F, this simply illustrated the kind of problems facing UNPROFOR. Brantz also asked for an investigation into the ABiH soldier responsible for Van Renssen’s death.¹⁴¹³ That was followed by a meeting with the 2nd Corps. It was only at that point that Brantz learnt that the real reason for the pullback from OP-F had been a deliberate attack by the VRS. After that meeting, the ABiH in Tuzla sent an order to the 28th Division to do everything in their power to get the body of the late Van Renssen out according to the wishes of the Dutchbat commander,¹⁴¹⁴ even though that was really an issue for the VRS.

After Brantz’ request to the ABiH for an investigation, the 2nd Corps ordered the Commander of the 28th Division, Ramiz Becirovic, to investigate the circumstances of the wounding of Van Renssen and to issue a written report.¹⁴¹⁵ The Commander of the 282nd Brigade of the ABiH, Major Ibro Dudic, thereupon declared that he had conducted an interview with the ABiH soldiers in the

¹⁴¹⁰ SMG, 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 08/07/95, 14.40; Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 280-1; Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 162-3.

¹⁴¹¹ SMG/Debrief. ‘Military Analysis of the action taken by Dutchbat during the Srebrenica crisis; Assen, 28/09/95, Compiled by LCol A. de Munnik, see: OP-F REUS 9215; Dijkema, *Dutchbat in vredesnaam*, p. 281.

¹⁴¹² Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 164.

¹⁴¹³ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Memorandum for Commander ABiH 2nd Corps, 08/07/95.

¹⁴¹⁴ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. Komanda 2. Korpusa aan Komandi 28. Divizija, 09/07/95, Str. pov. br. 02/1-709/1.

¹⁴¹⁵ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. Komanda 2. Korpusa aan Komandi 28. Divizije, 09/07/95, Str. pov. br. 02/1-09/205.

direct vicinity of the APC. According to them, Van Renssen had not been wounded by the ABiH, but by a grenade launched at the APC by the VRS.¹⁴¹⁶ A witness of the attack on Van Renssen, VRS Colonel Vukota Vukovic, attributed responsibility for the events to an ABiH rifleman.¹⁴¹⁷ Inhabitants of the enclave also ultimately assigned blame to a Bosnian Muslim rifleman, one Alija hailing from Glogova.¹⁴¹⁸

Karremans in his book wrote the following about the death of Van Renssen: 'The reproaches only came later. If only the crew of OP-F had pulled out earlier, then this would never have happened. If only the OP-F APC had taken the outside route to Bratunac, then Raviv van Renssen would still have been alive today. Perhaps I should have withdrawn from all observation posts prior to 6 July.'¹⁴¹⁹ Karremans is thereby referring to the plans and orders outlined in Chapter 5 to withdraw from all OPs in May and June.

From Zagreb, General Janvier also reported to New York about the events. He reported that the ABiH had been familiar with the local situation, as APCs frequently had to pass that ABiH roadblock en route to OP-F. In that instance the APC was clearly recognisable as a UN vehicle: White with a large blue flag flying on it. The APC was visible to the ABiH at a distance of a hundred to two-hundred metres and was travelling slowly; however, according to the latter report it had failed to stop. The APC's .50 machine gun was pointing up at a 30-degree angle and was clearly not aimed at the ABiH. Moreover, at the time of the incident there were no fire fights between the VRS and ABiH in the proximity of the APC, the ABiH was not under threat, and the VRS had not confiscated any vehicles from Dutchbat.¹⁴²⁰ About the death of Van Renssen, Janvier wrote to the Commander of the ABiH, Rasim Delic, that he had been deeply shocked and that there was no doubt whatsoever that one of his soldiers had been responsible. In the event of a repetition of those events, Janvier promised to 'react in an appropriate manner and with all possible means available to me'.¹⁴²¹

The death of Van Renssen also led to a telephone conversation between Nicolai in Sarajevo and the liaison officer of the ABiH. Nicolai announced letters of protest to the headquarters of the ABiH and the Bosnian Government. He also pointed out that there were two more OPs in the proximity of the abandoned OP-F (OP-S and OP-U) that were surrounded by the VRS. Nicolai's request to the ABiH was to issue immediate instructions to Srebrenica to the effect that under no circumstances was the ABiH to fire at Dutchbat soldiers in the event of further forced evacuations from the remaining OPs.¹⁴²² Nicolai further informed the ABiH Commander, Rasim Delic, that the efforts by the ABiH to keep the OPs in place and the attacks on the peacekeepers had only further complicated an already dangerous and unstable situation. The safety of the peacekeepers was a major issue and the OPs would not be manned again until such time as the UNPROFOR headquarters considered it safe.¹⁴²³

General Gobilliard, serving as Deputy Commander of UNPROFOR, wrote that there was no justification for attacks on UN personnel. UN soldiers were non-combatants and the incident demonstrated conscious contempt of UNPROFOR. Gobilliard demanded an immediate investigation and action against those responsible for such an 'ill disciplined act'.¹⁴²⁴

¹⁴¹⁶ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 28 Divizije aan Komanda 2. Korpusa, 09/07/95, Str. pov. br. 01-168.

¹⁴¹⁷ Interview Milenko Zivanovic, 17/09/01. Zivanovic stated the place of the accident as Kozlja, one hundred metres from the monument of the Partisan Hero, Bjelakovic.

¹⁴¹⁸ Interview Mira and Miroslav Budisa, 19/06/00. The man purportedly had a criminal record from before the war for the murder of a Montenegrin man and his wife in Srebrenica.

¹⁴¹⁹ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 164.

¹⁴²⁰ DCBC, 717: Fax AMA COS UNPF-HQ to DCBC, 121715 Jul 95, with Code Cable Janvier (signed Ashton) to Annan for Van Kappen, 11/07/95, No. Z-1132.

¹⁴²¹ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Letter Janvier to Rasim Delic, 10/07/95.

¹⁴²² SMG, 1004. HQ UNPROFOR, Telephone Conversation General Nicolai - BiH LO, 08/07/95, 0830 hrs.

¹⁴²³ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Letter Brigadier General Nicolai Chief of Staff UNPROFOR to General Delic, 09/07/95.

¹⁴²⁴ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Letter Major General Gobilliard Acting Commander UNPROFOR to General Delic, 09/07/95, ref 8120.

UNPROFOR, on the other hand received objections from both the warring factions. Gobilliard sent a letter of protest to the VRS for the attack on OP-F and the use of tanks and artillery to that end. In reaction to that, the Commander of the Drina Corps, Zivanovic, sent a letter full of counter accusations to generals Krstic and Tolimir on the advance VRS command post in Pribicevac. Zivanovic stated that the General Staff of the VRS had replied to the objection to the effect that the ABiH were in possession of six UN armoured vehicles (Chapter 4 presents an explanation that the vehicles reportedly had been bought from the Ukraine battalion in \square epa – it was however an established fact that those armoured vehicles were no longer in the enclave at the time of the fall), and that the UN had authorised the ABiH to undertake offensive actions from Srebrenica in order to create a link between Srebrenica and Zepa. To avoid any surprises, UNPROFOR would have to prevent that from happening. Zivanovic also asked UNPROFOR to urge the ABiH to withdraw to within the borders of the demilitarised zone and to disarm its troops. The General Staff further asked UNPROFOR not to extend its OPs outside of the Safe Area. The General Staff of the VRS also issued a command not to fire on UNPROFOR.¹⁴²⁵

The Bosnian Muslims also submitted protests to UNPROFOR. In fact, the Commander of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH in Tuzla, Sead Delic, submitted an objection to Sector North East about the withdrawal from the OP even before the VRS actually occupied OP-F. Although Delic wrote that the withdrawal was occurring ‘under intense mortar and tank fire’, he demanded that UNPROFOR fulfil its duties instead of withdrawing in a cowardly manner. He further demanded that the Close Air Support procedure be initiated immediately. Failing fulfilment of its duties to protect the local population, UNPROFOR’s extended presence would be regarded as ‘unnecessary and harmful’.¹⁴²⁶ Sector North East did not commit itself and kept its options open.

Moreover, in a letter to the General Staff of the ABiH, the Commander of the ABiH, Rasim Delic, wrote that no effort must be spared to prevent UNPROFOR from executing further cowardly withdrawals and that it should be held to fulfil its mandate and protect the local population. UNPROFOR was bound to fulfil its agreements and moral obligations. Air strikes had to be launched immediately to stop the VRS offensive on the demilitarised zone. He also requested the deployment of the Rapid Reaction Force. Rasim Delic added that failure on the part of UNPROFOR and the troops under the command of Sector North East to implement the necessary defensive measures would render their extended presence unnecessary and even harmful.¹⁴²⁷

In Srebrenica on the afternoon of 8 July two meetings were convened with the local ABiH Commander, Ramiz Becirovic. In one of the meetings, the UNMOs were informed of the positions occupied by the VRS around the enclave while at the second meeting Major Boering confronted Becirovic with the death of Van Renssen. Becirovic offered his apologies, but explained that the ABiH had acted as it had because they did not have the means to fight the VRS and depended on Dutchbat for protection. Becirovic nevertheless, and in the same breath, labelled the UN reaction to the critical situation as ‘shameful indeed’, and accused Dutchbat of having done nothing to deter the VRS offensive. He explained that the withdrawal of Dutchbat from the OPs left the ABiH vulnerable to a VRS advance, as the ABiH were relying on Dutchbat to protect the enclave. According to Becirovic, the ABiH wanted Dutchbat to lead the defence.

During the discussion the question was raised as to whether Dutchbat should have used anti-tank weapons against the VRS. Boering claimed that Dutchbat did not do so, as firing at the VRS would have harmed the position of the ABiH. Becirovic did not agree with that view. The following day Dutchbat returned to that issue by saying that the anti-tank weapons at OP-F had been rendered unusable in the shelling of the OP. In that meeting the Dutchbat representatives suggested that the

¹⁴²⁵ ICTY (IT-98-33), D 78/a. Komando Drinskog Korpusa, general-major Milenko Zivanovic aan IKM DK Pribicevac, general-major Krstic Radislava, GSV Republika Srpska general-majora Zdravka Tolimira, 08/07/95, br. 04/156-5.

¹⁴²⁶ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. HQ 2 Corps to HQ Sector North East, 08/07/95, 14.30 hrs.

¹⁴²⁷ NIOD, Coll. CD-ROM's. Komando 2. Korpusa aan Komandi GSS AR BiH, 08/07/95, Str. pov. br. 02-1-700/3.

ABiH and VRS should hold mutual consultations. Becirovic said that, although he wanted to, he had no faith in that option. Moreover, he would need the permission of his superiors to do so.

Dutchbat further enquired as to the purpose of the VRS attack. Becirovic merely replied by saying that some way had to be found to avoid a bloodbath. Dutchbat subsequently reproached the ABiH for impeding thorough execution of their job and complained about the blockades set up by the ABiH at the OPs (as in the case of OP-F), as well as at the compound in Srebrenica. Dutchbat also complained about the ABiH firing at OP-H, but Becirovic denied the latter accusation. He stated that he had neither given a command for shelling nor for a blockade of the compound – he suggested that it must have been civilians seeking protection at the compound. Dutchbat nevertheless threatened with appropriate action in the case of future blockades. At the compound in Srebrenica, it turned out that the issue concerned thirty soldiers and civilians who had been building a bridge over the little river passing behind the compound to provide easier access to the compound. According to the compound Commander, Groen, those activities in no way threatened the compound.¹⁴²⁸

The Second Request for Close Air Support

Due to the fact that fighting was becoming more intensive in the vicinity of OP-F, as well as in the northern sections of the enclave, and the town of Srebrenica had come under increased shelling, Karremans decided on 8 July, at around 13.00 hours, to put in a second request for Close Air Support after the initial request of 6 July.¹⁴²⁹ By that time the VRS had not yet fired at OP-F.

The request reached Nicolai in Sarajevo, although it remains unclear how. Clearly Karremans bypassed Tuzla with his request – Brantz, of Sector North East in Tuzla, only heard about it during a discussion at the 2nd Corps of the ABiH, which had, in turn, heard from the 28th Division that the Dutchbat commander had submitted a request. Brantz had however not received an application and consequently had no choice but to confirm the application to his contacts. Brantz stated after the fact that he should have been informed about the request. He also did not know why the request had been denied. Brantz thought the call for Close Air Support had been denied, once again, due to failure to observe the correct procedures; moreover, the request had not been accompanied by a target list.¹⁴³⁰ That was however not the case - Sarajevo did indeed take it seriously.

Upon receiving Karremans request, Nicolai called for a briefing regarding the possibility of Close Air Support. Once it became apparent that the problems around Srebrenica were continuing, NATO made aircraft available for Close Air Support if necessary. The flight plans for Operation *Deny Flight* of 8-10 July showed that, during the day, between 05.00 and 19.00 hours, several aircraft had been available for Close Air Support. During the night however availability was limited to a few American aircraft.¹⁴³¹

NATO itself offered Sarajevo air presence (aircraft flying over the affected area without a specific mission). Nicolai accepted that offer and asked for an air presence for a period of fifteen to twenty minutes. It must be kept in mind that no procedures existed for air presence - NATO could decide autonomously to fly over Bosnia and could also be asked to do so. The procedures outlined for a Blue Sword Request did not apply to air presence.

Nicolai meanwhile also asked UNPROFOR's operations section (in military terms: the G-3) and the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo (which formed the connection between Sarajevo and NATO) to do the necessary paper work for a Blue Sword Request for Close Air Support.

¹⁴²⁸ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. UNMO HQ Sector BH-NE to UNMO HQ BH Comd, 09/07/95, No. 7123. The report is dated 082059B Jul 95; SMG, 1004/41. Dutchbat to CO-28 BiH Div, 09/07/95.

¹⁴²⁹ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 162.

¹⁴³⁰ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary (version August 1999), p. 114-115, 121-122, 126.

¹⁴³¹ DOKL STAOOPER. Flight Plans Operation Deny Flight 8-10/07/95, no number. Sunrise on 10 July was at 05.14 and sunset at 20.32 hours.

He then assigned a Dutchbat Tactical Air Control Party (with a Forward Air Controller to guide the aircraft to their targets) to the area.¹⁴³²

The Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) of NATO's Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force in Vicenza, which was in close contact with the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo, closely followed the developments in Srebrenica but merely stated: 'no request for anything'. Which was accurate, as no formal request for Close Air Support had reached Zagreb; which is where those decisions were made (see below).

NATO's southern command (in military terms: AFSOUTH) in Naples even offered aircraft for Close Air Support after the occupation of OP-F, but Zagreb failed to accept that offer. It is however dubious that Close Air Support was actually possible at that time, as the weather was considered 'not workable'. The cloud base was low and haze restricted visibility to two kilometres. Two British Jaguars did however arrive in the air space above the enclave at 15.52 hours after the personnel of OP-F had retreated towards Potocari at 15.20 hours. The Jaguars left again at 16.35 hours. In other words, there was an air presence. The aim was to remain in the air space between Tuzla and Sarajevo for some time longer, but Major General Hal Hornburg, director of the CAOC in Vicenza, put an end to that, as bad weather was fast approaching and there were indications that an anti-aircraft battery (type SA-6) was being set up by the Bosnian Serbs.¹⁴³³

Once again, on 8 July, Close Air Support failed to materialise. The explanation Nicolai gave to ABiH Army Commander, General Rasim Delic, was that the necessary criteria had not been fulfilled for Close Air Support. While there had indeed been an air presence, Nicolai claimed that technical problems prevented the identification of specific targets.¹⁴³⁴ The ABiH liaison officer, in a telephone conversation with Nicolai about the death of Van Renssen, was given the same explanation.¹⁴³⁵

Sarajevo had completed the paperwork for a Blue Sword Request and had offered it to Nicolai even before Dutchbat had been forced, at 15.20 hours, to evacuate OP-F. However, as the situation had become calmer, Nicolai decided not to send the application through to the Deputy Commander of UNPROFOR, General Gobilliard. Gobilliard had to approve the application (UNPROFOR Commander Smith was not available – see paragraph 3 above) prior to sending it on to Zagreb.¹⁴³⁶ Karremans viewed this as a refusal by Nicolai to provide him with Close Air Support. Afterwards Karremans stated that he was losing faith in Nicolai's 'sense of reality'. Karremans stated that 'it is disappointing to receive no support at all under those circumstances. I now realise that the interests in the higher echelons are engaged in a completely different realm – namely politics – and could not be bothered by a minor observation post in the Safe Area of Srebrenica.'¹⁴³⁷

Carl Bildt's Negotiations as a Reason for Denial of Close Air Support?

The reason the request for Close Air Support had failed to reach Zagreb after the shelling of OP-F, according to a report in The Hague, was that the negotiations being conducted by Carl Bildt and the combating parties could not be disrupted.¹⁴³⁸ That was however not mentioned in UN and NATO reports. Bildt was trying at the time to negotiate with the Bosnian-Serb regime in Pale for the opening of a corridor to Sarajevo through the Bosnian Serb area. Those negotiations had priority for both humanitarian and political reasons. As long as that could not be established, the Bosnian Government could not be expected to make any compromises in the peace process.¹⁴³⁹

¹⁴³² NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. 'Chronology of Events Close Air Support Missions Srebrenica'.

¹⁴³³ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook 5ATAF, 08/07/95, 14.32Z and 14.38Z.

¹⁴³⁴ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Letter Chief of Staff UNPROFOR, Brigadier General C.H. Nicolai to General Delic, 09/07/95, ref 8120.

¹⁴³⁵ NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. Telephone Conversation General Nicolai - BiH LO, 08/07/95.

¹⁴³⁶ NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. 'Chronology of Events Close Air Support Missions Srebrenica'.

¹⁴³⁷ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 163.

¹⁴³⁸ DCBC, 2430. Annex to Peace Operations Situation Report No. 136/95 (State of Affairs on 9 July 16.00 hrs).

¹⁴³⁹ ABZ, DDI-DAV/00246. Code Wijnaendts 213, 07/07/95.

During a briefing in Sarajevo, Nicolai stated that he had refused a request by Karremans for Close Air Support based on the fact that Bildt was involved in sensitive negotiations.¹⁴⁴⁰ The same report found its way to The Hague and after the fall Voorhoeve publicly announced this as the reason for the refusal to provide Close Air Support.¹⁴⁴¹ Another official present in Sarajevo at the time, Chief Civil Affairs Officer Philip Corwin later also wrote in his book, *Dubious Mandate*, that UNPROFOR was accountable for political factors related to Bildt's mission, and that policy makers in the capitals were concerned that NATO deployment could restrict the efficacy of his negotiations.¹⁴⁴² According to Lieutenant Colonel De Ruiter, Military Assistant to Nicolai, too, the presence of Bildt was a factor in the refusal to grant Close Air Support; however no orders had been issued to that end. Janvier did however spell out in a letter to General Smith that limited time was available for negotiations and it was essential to resist the temptation to use force, except in instances of self-defence. The hands of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo were more or less tied, and Dutchbat would have had limited insight into the political situation in which the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo found itself.¹⁴⁴³ On the other hand, Karremans could not understand why he had been given no support in what he called a life-threatening situation for the personnel of OP-F. The political developments were no concern of his.¹⁴⁴⁴

Colonel Brantz said that Sector North East had not been informed of the relationship between the peace process and Close Air Support. He claimed, moreover, that at his level it was also not necessary. Brantz only knew that Bildt had been in Bosnia because he had been aware of the latter's presence in the Tuzla region on 3 July. According to Brantz, Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo did indeed emphasise the importance of the peace process without advising Tuzla of the consequences thereof. The conclusion Brantz drew afterwards was that the UN considered the peace process and Bildt's efforts to get the negotiations back on track more important than the preservation of control of the enclave. He felt that the same applied in the days thereafter when no applications for Close Air Support were sent through to Zagreb.¹⁴⁴⁵

Brantz put too much emphasis on this. No written sources are available on this issue and the views and/or recollections of the individuals concerned diverge on the subject. General Smith stated that far too much attention had been placed on Bildt's mission.¹⁴⁴⁶ Rumours reached The Hague via informants in the Dutch embassy in Paris, who were in contact with Janvier, to the effect that one of the considerations for refusing Close Air Support had indeed been the negotiations between Bildt and Milosevic (regarding recognition of Bosnia).¹⁴⁴⁷ General Kolsteren, the Chief of Staff of UNPF in Zagreb, denied that the Bildt mission had played a role in the decision-making process concerning Close Air Support.¹⁴⁴⁸ Deputy Force Commander General Ashton acknowledged that there had been a discussion regarding the possible effects of the deployment of air power on negotiations; however only in the general sense in the context of the question of how to get the parties back to the negotiating table.¹⁴⁴⁹ In Zagreb only Colonel De Jonge, in an interview, referred to the negotiation process initiated by Bildt as follows: 'A process such as this one could have been disrupted completely if permission were to have been given for air operations. It would have meant throwing away the last opportunity to get the Bosnian Serbs to the negotiating table.' De Jonge's statements related to the issue of granting

¹⁴⁴⁰ Interview David Harland, 18/05/99, 21/05/99 and 25/05/99. Harland was present at these briefings.

¹⁴⁴¹ Voorhoeve Diary, p. 101; *Algemeen Dagblad*, 12/07/95.

¹⁴⁴² Corwin, *Dubious Mandate*, p. 193.

¹⁴⁴³ Interview J.A.C. de Ruiter, 29/06/00 and 30/01/02. No written instructions to that effect were found in the UNPROFOR archives. Colonel De Jonge was not aware that instructions had ever been issued from HQ UNPF. (Interview 30/05/01). Also see SMG, 1004/6. Letter Janvier to Smith, 27/06/95.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 163.

¹⁴⁴⁵ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary, p. 118, 121-122, 126.

¹⁴⁴⁶ NIOD, Coll. Nicolai. Nicolai Diary, 10/07/95.

¹⁴⁴⁷ ABZ, 999.241. Code Wijnaendts 217, 10/07/95.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/09/99.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Interview Barry Ashton, 30/05/00.

Close Air Support on 9 July and not on 8 July; whereby he commented that the real reason for the denial of permission was that the lives of the peacekeepers had not been under direct threat.¹⁴⁵⁰

Bildt denied that his negotiations had played a role. He was in fact in favour of air operations.¹⁴⁵¹ Bildt had even said to Akashi that decisions concerning Close Air Support had to be taken without fear of disrupting the political process. He even emphasised that failure to act with sufficient force would also have political consequences. Bildt and Akashi had apparently agreed that an immediate decision should have been taken as soon as Dutchbat called for Close Air Support; however, in Bildt's view, Akashi clearly feared that Close Air Support could have had negative political implications.¹⁴⁵²

Bildt was consistent in his statements on that point. On 11 July Bildt and Akashi again discussed the issue of Close Air Support. On that day they conducted two telephone conversations. During those conversations Bildt said that Close Air Support could negatively impact on the negotiations, but that he realised there were other factors at play, and that he would accept Zagreb's decisions.¹⁴⁵³ Bildt did however express a sceptical view about air strikes to Minister of Foreign Affairs Van Mierlo prior to the VRS offensive. According to Van Mierlo, Bildt said that Janvier had wanted to block them (air strikes). In his view the military were increasingly less inclined to use force.¹⁴⁵⁴

In other words, there is no clear and unambiguous answer to the question as to whether Bildt's mission was responsible for the denial of permission for Close Air Support, and whether it was indeed one of the obstacles in the decision-making process regarding Close Air Support on 8 July. No reactions or repercussions of any further discussions or instructions to that effect could be found in the archives. In the final analysis, it would appear that Zagreb did indeed consider seriously the implications for the mission; otherwise the effect of the deployment of Close Air Support on the mission would never have been a subject of consultation.

OP-U Occupied and the Personnel taken Hostage

After the occupation of OP-F, Dutchbat issued orders to a Quick Reaction Force (a rapid deployment reserve unit at both company and battalion level with APCs at its disposal) consisting of four APCs under the command of First Lieutenant Mustert of B Company to occupy a location behind OP-F and to fill the gap that had been created by the occupation of the post. Halfway to the OP, the ABiH stopped the unit with a grenade attack. The reason for the attack is unclear, but could most probably be attributed to a sense of powerlessness and lack of discipline on the part of the ABiH. The Quick Reaction Force received permission to beat a slow retreat in the direction of Srebrenica and then occupied positions in the two hairpin bends en route to Srebrenica. Captain Groen then asked the battalion staff officer to pass information about the location of the APCs on to the VRS in one way or another.¹⁴⁵⁵

At around 19.00 hours OP-U was occupied. In a tense and anxious situation, a unit of about 20 VRS soldiers that had surrounded the OP, ordered the personnel to surrender their arms. The order was enforced by a number of shots in the air. The OP Commander, Sergeant J.A.J. van Eck, informed his personnel that no clear action scenario had been formulated in the case of a VRS attack on the OP. Having previously experienced the occupation of OP-E, he insisted on action directives in the case of future VRS offensives. He received instructions to fire over the heads of any VRS soldiers crossing the border of the enclave. If that failed to obtain the desired results, they were required to shoot to kill. In

¹⁴⁵⁰ *Trouw*, 28/07/95, Renée Postma and James Kliphuis, 'UN Commander Requests Close Air Support'.

¹⁴⁵¹ Interview David Harland, 18/05/99, 21/05/99 and 25/05/99. Harland discussed it with Bildt.

¹⁴⁵² Bildt, *Peace Journey*, p. 55; interview, 13/12/00.

¹⁴⁵³ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Banbury Diary. SRSG's briefing 12/07/95.

¹⁴⁵⁴ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05244. Code Van Mierlo 81, 04/07/95.

¹⁴⁵⁵ SMG, 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 08/07/95, 18.45; SMG 1004/42. Capsat 61R to 90E, 08/07/95 1.23; Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 165.

view of the force the VRS were capable of unleashing on 8 July, the OP personnel considered such an action suicidal. The B Company Ops Room (Command Post) therefore amended the initial order as follows: ‘The local commander of the post could act at his own discretion.’

The VRS occupied OP-U and ordered the personnel to depart for Srebrenica. After the incident with the ABiH in which Van Renssen had been killed, such an action could elicit forceful resistance on the part of the ABiH. For that reason Van Eck told the VRS that movement to Srebrenica was no longer possible. A short while earlier the ABiH had fired on the VRS at a distance of ten metres from the OP.¹⁴⁵⁶ The only viable alternative was that the OP personnel surrendered as hostages to the Bosnian Serbs.

The VRS gave Van Eck permission to contact the Ops Room. After explaining the situation and the plan to go with the Bosnian Serbs, they were told to wait a while. Meanwhile, in the battalion Ops Room in the compound in Potocari, Sergeant Major L.J.L.M. van Meer, while keeping open the communications with the OP, quickly consulted the Deputy Battalion Commander, Franken, regarding the consequences of the decision. The options were: Safe passage as hostage to the Bosnian Serb territory, or a withdrawal to the north through ABiH lines. The Company Commander, Groen, also recommended that the OP personnel surrender as hostages to the VRS rather than to risk another confrontation with the ABiH.

Recollections concerning the decision-making process that led to the surrender to the Bosnian Serbs diverged from person to person. Van Meer’s account was that the decision had been taken to secure the safety of the personnel, and that he had given those instructions to the OP commander by radio.¹⁴⁵⁷ OP Commander Van Eck said that he had tried again later to establish contact, as the VRS had become nervous and demanded a decision. He then received the following instructions: ‘Whatever you decide to do, we wish you good luck.’ Based on subsequent radio traffic it could be deduced that the VRS commander concerned had said that they might as well push on to Srebrenica, indicating thereby how little resistance the VRS had encountered.

The VRS then transported the OP personnel in the direction of OP-E and, once they had removed some land mines, to an assembly area where they stopped. From there the APC went on to Pribicevac where the group sojourned for an hour and a half, and the Dutchbat soldiers saw the VRS using line communications with field telephones. A major then arrived to escort the APC to Bratunac in a Jeep.¹⁴⁵⁸ Of this Karremans wrote the following: ‘The first six Dutchbat soldiers were now in the hands of the Bosnian Serbs.’¹⁴⁵⁹

An UNPROFOR objection against the VRS advance went no further than the VRS liaison officer. On the night of 8 July there were no generals available at the VRS headquarters to receive messages from UNPROFOR in Sarajevo. General Nicolai pointed out to the liaison officer that, on that same afternoon, VRS General Tolimir had promised him that the VRS would not attack further UN positions, and demanded the withdrawal of the VRS.¹⁴⁶⁰ It was only on the following day that Nicolai and Tolimir were able to establish direct contact. Nicolai then expressed his appreciation to the VRS for having conducted the Dutchbat soldiers to safety along a safe route to Bratunac, but added that he wanted them back in Potocari as soon as possible. Tolimir however played deaf.¹⁴⁶¹

In the early hours of the evening of 8 July a meeting was convened at the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo. Nicolai and members of the staff, including the officers responsible for operations and intelligence (in military terms: the G-3 and G-2), the Director of the Air Operations Coordination Center and the NATO liaison officer, discussed options with respect to Close Air Support for Dutchbat. The aim of the discussion was to establish a ‘pre-approved’ application, whereby

¹⁴⁵⁶ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (28).

¹⁴⁵⁷ Debriefing statement Sergeant-Major L.J.L.M van Meer, 08/09/95.

¹⁴⁵⁸ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (35); Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 07/07/95, 18.58.

¹⁴⁵⁹ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 165.

¹⁴⁶⁰ NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. Message forwarded to the BSA HQ by General Nicolai, 08/07/95, 1945 hrs.

¹⁴⁶¹ NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. Telephone Conversation General Nicolai -General Tolimir, 09/07/95, 12.30 hrs.

the continuation of the VRS offensive to the North was to serve as a 'trigger'. The aim was therefore, in the case of a continued VRS advance, to provide immediate Close Air Support without the need for lengthy consultations. The Air Operations Coordination Center would meanwhile inform NATO about a possible request for Close Air Support. A Dutchbat Forward Air Controller was assigned the task of going to the southern section of the enclave and to remain in an area (the 'box') marked in the draft Blue Sword Request.

At 23.00 hours the officers in charge of operations (in military terms: the G-3) and the Director of the Air Operations Coordination Center briefed General Nicolai on the state of affairs. They advised him to ask Deputy UNPROFOR Commander Gobilliard to sign the request in advance, and to send it to Zagreb. Nicolai however decided only to deploy air presence on the morning of 9 July and not to submit the request to Zagreb before the next morning.¹⁴⁶² On 9 July, Akashi was in Geneva; however, to prevent a loss of time, he had authorised Janvier to grant permission for Close Air Support. Whether this indeed prevented a loss of valuable time is debatable, as Janvier, too, was in Geneva on that day. He was briefed by telephone from Zagreb. Upon his return to Zagreb, Akashi claimed not to have found any calls for Close Air Support.¹⁴⁶³

What was the VRS Objective?

By 8 July, UNPROFOR, too, had not yet realised the real threat to the future of the Srebrenica Safe Area. Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo did not think that the VRS were preparing to occupy the enclave. The VRS attack was seen as a 'probing attack' with a limited objective. This notion was supported by the absence of a simultaneous attack on the enclave from the North.¹⁴⁶⁴

In other words, UNPROFOR had little conception as to the reason for the VRS operations. On that evening the Civil Affairs Officer of Sector North East, Ken Biser, called Philip Corwin, Head of Civil Affairs in Sarajevo with the news that the VRS were planning to man OPs E, F and U after occupation in order to be able to use the road south of the enclave. The reason given was that it would shorten the VRS supply routes by sixty kilometres. Apparently the VRS had no interest in occupying the enclave, as they had no idea what they would do with all the local Bosnian Muslims. The VRS were still talking about a reduced Safe Area. Although Biser failed to name his source, the news appeared to have originated from the 2nd Corps of the ABiH. Biser had also been told that the time had come for the ABiH to start using 'serb tactics'; meaning that the ABiH would also have to start confiscating weapons and armoured vehicles from UNPROFOR. This led the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo to fear that this could actually happen.¹⁴⁶⁵

However, there was no mention of this in a discussion between Brantz of Sector North East and the Deputy Commander of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH, Brigadier General Makar. Makar did however express the fear that the VRS could also attack Zepa. Makar's reason for this was that the VRS wanted to force the ABiH to give up positions around Sarajevo where the ABiH were currently still executing an offensive. Makar also thought that the VRS would try to marginalise Dutchbat in order to launch an attack on the centre of the enclave. According to Makar, NATO Close Air Support was the only real solution to that problem. He added that, in the event of Dutchbat continuing to withdraw from the OPs, the ABiH would be left with no other option than to take over the defence. Makar claimed to have understood the motive for withdrawing from the OPs and saw the proposed Dutchbat rotation as the reason for this. In his view, the VRS had calculated Dutchbat's reaction; which facilitated the VRS effort to extend their positions.¹⁴⁶⁶

¹⁴⁶² NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. 'Chronology of Events Close Air Support Missions Srebrenica'.

¹⁴⁶³ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 26/07/95, No. Z-1263.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Corwin, *Dubious Mandate*, p. 188.

¹⁴⁶⁵ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Note for the file, [compiled by P. Corwin], 08/07/95, 21.15 hrs.

¹⁴⁶⁶ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Memorandum Meeting Tuzla Air Base 08/07/95, 15.45 hrs.

There were more sources who, on 8 July, did not believe that the VRS would occupy the entire enclave - including Minister Voorhoeve. He based his assessment on the judgement of the UN commanders, who, at that point apparently still assumed that this concerned a limited attack on the southern section of the enclave. In that context, according to Voorhoeve, they saw the deployment of Close Air Support as excessive use of force.¹⁴⁶⁷ A VRS officer present during the occupation of OP-F also stated to Sergeant Van Rossum that this was a limited attack on the southern section of the enclave.¹⁴⁶⁸

Based on the events of 8 July, it is possible to come to the conclusion that the occupation of OP-F and OP-U had established a pattern. The OP personnel and the VRS provided very little mutual trouble, and the terror inspired by the death of Van Renssen made Dutchbat reluctant to return to their own lines. Based on the experience of OP-F, all OP commanders had then been instructed in advance to act at their own discretion with respect to the VRS and ABiH in the case of a forced withdrawal. The safety of own personnel enjoyed the highest priority.¹⁴⁶⁹

Due to the fact that the Dutchbat hostages were partially able to continue to use their radios, and were able to report that they had not been maltreated, it was decided that, over the coming days, it might be advisable for other OP personnel to surrender as hostages – there were ABiH soldiers posted near almost every Dutchbat OP. Due to the fact that the OPs all occupied high, dominant positions in relation to the surrounding terrain, they also provided good positions for the ABiH. On the other hand, this was also a well thought out tactic on the part of the ABiH (not only in Srebrenica) to draw UNPROFOR into the fight by inviting fire on the UN positions through fire on the VRS in the vicinity of the Ops.

After the loss of OP-F and OP-U, Dutchbat had an increasingly limited view of events as they unfolded in the south-eastern section of the enclave. The other southern OPs (OP-S, OP-K and OP-D) appeared to be the next candidates for VRS occupation.

The VRS attacks on the OPs followed the usual pattern. The VRS unit would advance as close as possible to the OP, fire a few grenades in the vicinity of the OP and then repeat that action in closer proximity of the OP before sitting down to wait. In the absence of support for the OP (which was the case in most instances), the VRS would warn the OP personnel to withdraw. Most Dutchbat units soon understood that they were less likely to come to harm with the VRS than with the apparently unpredictable ABiH units. The continued assurance on the part of the Bosnian Serbs to the effect that they did not exploit the vulnerability of the UNPROFOR soldiers appeared consistent with the reality.

VRS tactics were, through the occupation of OPs in high terrain, to obtain an excellent vantage point for further attacks on the enclave and to clean up the areas around the OPs. Thus, the VRS systematically occupied all strategically important terrain in the enclave. The Bosnian Serbs successfully applied the same tactics time and again.¹⁴⁷⁰ According to the ABiH this tactic was a well-considered component of the psychological plan worked out by the VRS to neutralise Dutchbat. Every time the VRS captured more UN personnel, morale amongst the rest of Dutchbat sagged a little lower.¹⁴⁷¹ Growing numbers of Dutch soldiers were systematically finding themselves in Bosnian Serb hands. The treatment they received was good, especially when compared to the humiliation hostages had been subjected to a month earlier (when they were chained to strategically important engineering structures to prevent NATO air attacks).

¹⁴⁶⁷ Voorhoeve Diary, p. 101.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 163.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 163-7.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Interview Hazrudin Kisić, 17/05/99 and 18/05/99.

¹⁴⁷¹ Interview Semsudin Muminovic, 17/05/99.

8. Combat Action and Close Air Support from Day to Day: 9 July

Consultations in Geneva

On 9 July, a discussion was convened in Geneva under the chairmanship of Boutros-Ghali about the deteriorating situation and continued firing at UN personnel. The mood was exceptionally sombre and appeared to suggest the failure of the mission. The option of a complete withdrawal was discussed openly despite the fact that Boutros-Ghali made it clear that he would not initiate such an action. The discussions focused on Bosnia, but against the background of a potentially renewed war. There was a general consensus that Croatia might have decided to use force to retake the land previously occupied by the Krajina Serbs.

The situation in Srebrenica was not discussed during that meeting (with the exception of a point made by Janvier to the effect that it was becoming increasingly hard to continue to man the OPs). Janvier further announced that it would have been advisable for the UNPF to leave the eastern enclaves – in his view there were too many potential hostages.

General Smith, who also attended the meeting, was more pessimistic than Janvier, and stated that he believed that both the Bosnian Muslims and the Bosnian Serbs intended to end the conflict in combat.

Negotiator Stoltenberg was even more pessimistic. He stated that the parties concerned had never been so mutually hostile before, and that no one was prepared to negotiate. The Bosnian Government wanted air power to be deployed, the arms embargo to be lifted, and UNPROFOR to withdraw. They pinned their hopes on the United States as saviour in the case of continued battle. The Bosnian Serbs were not interested in negotiations because they had occupied sufficient territory and had time on their side. Stoltenberg's analysis is notable in its departure from the military vision of Smith, who believed that the VRS were in fact planning a quick end to the war because of the systematic weakening of their forces. Mladic, too, in his discussions with Janvier always insisted on a ceasefire. The role of the time factor was analysed in detail in Chapter 1.

Akashi said that he feared an escalation of the war in Croatia, as fighting in the Krajina would also encourage the struggle in Bosnia. He saw the plan of the Contact Group as an obstacle to peace. There was not that much difference between the strategic targets of Belgrade, Pale and the Bosnian Serb military – they all wanted a political constellation that would, in the long term, ensure the unity of all Serbs. It was considered Bildt's task to attempt to remove the constitutional obstacles.

It was however clear to Bildt that the Bosnian Government was fighting the battle on Capitol Hill. He continued to be told by Premier Silajdzic that his mission was a 'waste of time'. That provoked Bildt to ask the Bosnians to make a decision concerning the presence of UNPROFOR. The Bosnian Muslims were making it increasingly hard for UNPROFOR, and UNPROFOR already had its hands full with the Bosnian Serbs. It was however thought that Izetbegovic and Silajdzic would back off their position when faced with the prospect of an UNPROFOR withdrawal. However that notion appeared only to have presented another means of influencing Capitol Hill. Bildt was given little time, because, if his mission were to have failed, the only remaining option would have been to withdraw and that would have had to be done before the onset of winter.

Smith questioned whether NATO was actually needed for such a pullback, as the organisation could offer little help in the eastern enclaves.

The gravity of the situation was clearly illuminated by the proposal of the High Commissioner for the Refugees Ogata. She proposed to transfer the logistics of the humanitarian operation to the military. In June only twenty percent of the required aid had reached its destination. That was the primary point of discussion at that meeting. The UN generals were not sympathetic to that idea and, according to Boutros-Ghali, due to the fact that the views of the members of the Contact Group diverged too greatly on that matter, it would have been impossible to issue another mandate for UNPROFOR (as in the case of the Ogata proposal). Boutros-Ghali closed the discussion with the

following summary: ‘One would need a mediator for the mediators.’ The conclusion remained exactly the same as before the meeting: ‘muddle on, muddle through’.¹⁴⁷²

More Hostages: OP-S Occupied

Meanwhile, the tension was mounting amongst the personnel of OP-S after the loss of the nearby OP-U the day before. The tension reached a peak when, in the morning, a large unit of ABiH military gathered behind the OP. Initially, a number of ABiH military fired a single shot at the VRS from about one hundred metres in front of the OP, but no fire was returned. Fifteen minutes later the VRS moved in from the surrounding bush and pinned the OP personnel down in their shelter. By that time the ABiH seemed to have disappeared. The OP was captured just as the OP personnel had received the order to send out a patrol to ascertain the current location of the ABiH. Prior to and during the overpowering of the OP, the OP commander Sergeant J.G.A. Bresser said he was given no instructions from B Company. It hurt him to hear by chance on the radio of an APC the next day that Major Franken had said that he didn’t want ‘another OP-S story’: as if the OP personnel had done something completely wrong.¹⁴⁷³

Around 9.00 hours the VRS occupied the OP. Once again the VRS demanded the surrender of all personal weapons and posed Dutchbat the option of departing for Srebrenica or Bratunac. Captain Groen consented to Bratunac. OP Commander, Sergeant J.G.A. Bresser was permitted to continue to use his radio and to signal information through concerning the presence of the VRS in Pribicevac (mortars, anti-aircraft weapons, and a tank and artillery were underway). The VRS now held the six members of personnel of OP-U, as well as the eight from OP-S.

The personnel of OP-S had also checked access to the Swedish Shelter Project occupied by Bosnian Muslim refugees. According to Karremans, it would have been possible to abandon the OP at night or at the break of day, but then access to the Swedish Shelter Project and the Jadar Valley would have been open to the Bosnian Serbs.¹⁴⁷⁴ The fact that the OPs had been taken in the morning had major consequences. In the eyes of the Bosnian Muslims, Dutchbat had given the OPs up too easily; which seriously compromised the confidence in Dutchbat on the part of both the ABiH and the local population.¹⁴⁷⁵ This was manifested in the fact that, after the fall of OP-U, thousands of inhabitants of the Swedish Shelter Project fled to the town of Srebrenica. In fact, that exodus had already started the day after the occupation of OP-F; which was also located in the proximity of the Swedish Shelter Project.

The inhabitants of the project, most of whom originated from Bratunac and Kravica, did not feel a great commitment to Srebrenica, and were not involved in the defence of the enclave. Every day the VRS were visible in the surrounding hills. The ABiH saw the Swedish Shelter Project as a weak point in their defence, as both the ABiH positions and the Dutchbat OPs were located in the hills behind it.

When news surfaced that the ABiH and Dutchbat could offer little resistance to the VRS, the inhabitants lost their nerve, which resulted in a massive run. The scale of the flight of the population

¹⁴⁷² Confidential information (122). Present were: Boutros-Ghali, Akashi, Ogata, Stoltenberg, de Lapresle, Gharekhan, Goulding, Kittani, Annan, Almstrong, Generals Smith and Janvier, Colonels Puga and Moneyt and Bijleveld. Supplemented with diary entries of the parties concerned. The presence of de Lapresle as former Force Commander and former Military Advisor to the Co-Chairman was a controversial decision taken by Boutros-Ghali. Also see NIOD, Coll. Smith. Fax 091649BJul for notes by Smith and Janvier’s draft operations ‘By-Pass’ (‘Pontage’) for supplies for Sarajevo to which all Bosnian issues were secondary. For the Bildt negotiations, see ABZ, DEU/ARA/05244. Code Madrid Coreu 454, 11/07/95 and for the strategic objectives of the Serbs see ABZ, DEU/ARA/05244. Code Engels 78, 11/07/95.

¹⁴⁷³ SMG, Debrief. Military analysis of the action taken by Dutchbat during the Srebrenica crisis, Assen, 28/09/95, compiled by Lt Col A. de Munnik, see OP-S, BOSCD016.I; BRESJ030.I and unknown report.

¹⁴⁷⁴ Karremans, *Srebrenica*, p. 169. (SMG, 1004/61) Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 09/07/95, 08.56, 08.58, 09.37, 10.20 and 10.36; Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 294.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Interview Muharem Mujic, 17/05/99.

prevented both the Opstina and the ABiH from restoring order to the situation. When those people took flight, a massive panic attack hit the town of Srebrenica, with disastrous effect on morale in the ABiH. In the view of the ABiH Commander in Srebrenica, Ramiz Becirovic, the run from the Swedish Shelter Project was the overture to the fall of Srebrenica.¹⁴⁷⁶

One consequence of the loss of OP-S and OP-U was that Dutchbat no longer had an observation post in the south-eastern section of the enclave. For that reason, Company Commander Groen ordered one of the Quick Reaction Force APCs to assess the situation at the Swedish Shelter Project in the early afternoon, and to establish how far the VRS had penetrated there. The APC reported battle noise, and saw ABiH soldiers and inhabitants flee towards the West. The bungalows in the project had been abandoned. After a ten-minute loss of communication, the APC Commander (Sergeant 1st Class J. Bos) checked in again with the news that the APC and its crew of five had been captured by the VRS – the VRS now had five more Dutchbat hostages. The surprise attack occurred at an awkward moment: when the driver was urinating from the open hatch of the APC, the crew found themselves confronted with between 15 and 20 VRS soldiers. They motioned to the crew to step out of the vehicle and hand over their weapons and ammunition. After walking for one hour the crew arrived at a VRS camp behind Mount Jasenova. The APC was driven to the former OP-E under supervision of the VRS soldier. The VRS transported the driver and crew to Bratunac along with the personnel captured at OP-S. Bos was no longer allowed to use the radio.¹⁴⁷⁷ The next, highly predictable VRS target was OP-K. That was scheduled for later in the day.

Karremans' Expectations

In a letter to the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command, dated 9 July, Karremans looked back on the events of the previous days. The VRS attacked the ABiH and Dutchbat positions with all means available and deployed artillery, mortars and Multiple Launch Rocket Systems or MLRS systems of types M-63 and M-77. Most of the OPs were targeted with mortars and, in Karremans' view the VRS knew exactly what they were doing and how far they could go. Their operations appeared to have been executed based on a premeditated and well-formulated plan. The situation was tense and due to the shelling of the Swedish Shelter Project, some three to four thousand inhabitants had left their homes for the perceived safety of Srebrenica. Not only had OP-F been hit, but OPs U and S were surrounded by the VRS, and the Dutchbat personnel instructed to surrender. In neither instance was there any way out due to the presence of the ABiH units in depth behind the OPs. At the time both OP units, with weapons, equipment and APCs, were captives of the VRS. Karremans assumed that the Dutchbat personnel would be treated decently, but that they would lose their APC, ammunition and equipment.

Karremans expected that, now that the VRS had opened the southern route past Zeleni Jadar, they would continue further along the Jadar Valley (which ran more or less parallel with the road) in the direction of Mount Kak. The 946-metre high, Mount Kak dominated the terrain along the road, as well as the bauxite mines in the foothills. This gave the VRS full control of the southern section of the enclave. According to Karremans the VRS now had two options: Continued occupation of the southern section, or occupation of the entire enclave. The use of Close Air Support, 'in all possible ways', was, in Karremans' view, 'not feasible yet. It would provoke the VRS in such a way that both Srebrenica itself, and the OPs and compounds would be targeted by all means.' Karremans' main fear in that respect was the Multiple Launch Rocket Systems that were deployed to the north of the enclave at OP-P and in Bratunac. He also feared that artillery and mortars would be fired at predetermined

¹⁴⁷⁶ Interviews Ramiz Becirovic, 02/02/98 and 05/02/98 and 18/04/98 and Sadik Vilic, 06/02/98 and 15/04/98.

¹⁴⁷⁷ SMG/Debrief. Military analysis of the action taken by Dutchbat during the Srebrenica crisis, Assen, 28/09/95, compiled by Lt Col A. de Munnik, see Bos J107.1; *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 221, 294.

targets. In Karremans' view, Close Air Support would only make sense if all those weapon systems could be wiped out at the same time; however, in his view that just did not seem possible at the time.¹⁴⁷⁸

The Morning of 9 July: Time for Close Air Support?

Even though Karremans did not consider the use of Close Air Support desirable yet for fear of VRS reprisals, NATO was ready on 9 July. Dutch F-16s on an air presence mission were in the air over Srebrenica by 08.15 hours, expecting the pre-prepared Blue Sword Request (the draft of which was ready in Zagreb) to be activated once the VRS penetrated further into the Safe Area. At that time there were no VRS tanks in either the Safe Area or the box indicated on the maps on the draft Blue Sword Request.¹⁴⁷⁹

In consultation with the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo, Bosnia –Hercegovina Command had drawn a number of boxes on the map as most probable targets. The boxes were areas in which the advancing VRS vehicles would be channelled and therefore present a rich target opportunity. The boxes on the map measured three kilometres. As the boxes represented no more than a preliminary definition of a possible plan, this did not mean that all of those areas would be attacked. A specific box, the so-called Kill Box, centred around the village of Pusmulici, was determined for the Blue Sword Request. According to the Canadian Lieutenant Colonel Rick Hatton, Chief G3 of Bosnia-Hercegovina Command, information about the boxes had been sent to Sector North East in Tuzla. He had assumed that the information had subsequently been forwarded to Dutchbat.¹⁴⁸⁰ Whether that had indeed happened is not clear.

One of the problems on the morning of 9 July was that visibility around Srebrenica was limited to one kilometre. A further problem was that no Forward Air Controllers had been posted south of Srebrenica. Without a Forward Air Controller it would have been impossible to provide Close Air Support, as the aircraft needed to be guided to their targets. The Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo had asked for a Forward Air Controller to be sent to the area during the night of 8 to 9 July, but that failed to materialise. Sarajevo could not establish why – it could have been due to shelling or because someone in Dutchbat had given orders to stay put in the compound. As a result there was no Forward Air Controller available in the south of the enclave 'in the area of interest'. Contact had however been established with Windmill 01 before the aircraft appeared near Srebrenica at 08.15 hours, and via him with Windmill 02. The authentication procedure between the aircraft and Forward Air Controllers had also been successful.

For some reason or another, after the aircraft appeared above the enclave at 08.15 hours, the Air Operations Coordination Center was informed to the effect that Karremans did not want any aircraft above the enclave. The Forward Air Controller communicated the same to the Dutch F-16s as follows: 'Get the hell out of here, they are holding some of our guys.' This was a reference to the eight Dutchbaters from OP-S that were being held captive in the southern section of the enclave, along with the six from OP-U taken hostage by the Bosnian Serbs the night before. Karremans was under the impression that the aircraft were planning low altitude *attack runs* over the area. Permission for the attack was also outstanding as Akashi had not yet signed the Blue Sword Request. In other words, Karremans had been reluctant to intimidate the Bosnian Serbs with the presence of the aircraft.¹⁴⁸¹ He wanted no air presence out of fear for the safety of the Dutch soldiers held captive by the VRS.¹⁴⁸²

The aircraft left the Srebrenica area on the orders of Major General A.M. Hornburg, Director of the CAOC in Vicenza. Ten minutes later, after due consultation with the Air Operations

¹⁴⁷⁸ NIOD Coll. Karremans. Letter Commanding Officer 1(NL)UN Infbn (Dutchbat3) to Bosnia-Hercegovina Command through Commander Sector North East, 09/07/95, No. TK95113.

¹⁴⁷⁹ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook 5ATAF 09/07/95, 0440Z, 0545Z.

¹⁴⁸⁰ Interview Rick Hatton, 16/11/99.

¹⁴⁸¹ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook 5ATAF 09/07/95, 0440Z, 0545Z, 0610Z, 0620Z.

¹⁴⁸² DCBC 2430. Fax DCBC to staatssecretaris, 091600Z Jul 95, No. 570.

Coordination Center in Sarajevo, Hornburg instructed the aircraft to return to the skies above Srebrenica. There was however still no Forward Air Controller in the south of the enclave. Windmill 02, Sergeant 1st Class R. Voskamp, reported to Sarajevo that he did not have sufficient diesel to take the position indicated by the Air Operation Coordination Center.¹⁴⁸³

In other words, Close Air Support had been available even though no decisions had been taken as yet about actual deployment. Sarajevo did take that into account. The aircraft intended for Close Air Support returned to the tanker above the Adriatic Sea, while the aircraft intended to suppress VRS Air Defence fire remained in the Srebrenica area to provide NATO with rapid reaction capability, as it was expected that Gobilliard would soon sign and send the draft Blue Sword Request to Zagreb.¹⁴⁸⁴

The final request had to be signed by both Gobilliard and Janvier; however, that was not possible due to Janvier's absence (he was with Akashi in Ilidza near Sarajevo). They were therefore flown back to Zagreb in a hurry. However, at 10.15 hours Janvier purportedly stated telephonically that, in his view, the VRS were only testing the waters and would withdraw again soon. At 11.15 hours Nicolai reported to the Air Operations Coordination Center that the request would soon be signed by Gobilliard, only to let them know at 12.15 hours that it was not to be the case.¹⁴⁸⁵

Although Karremans was against it, Sarajevo did initiate the necessary preparations for a request for Close Air Support. Shortly before midday, new information reached Zagreb from Sarajevo - General Nicolai and Lieutenant Colonel Jim Baxter, the British Military Assistant to the absent General Smith, wanted to start the procedure for Close Air Support. To that end, Baxter had asked for an interview by secure phone with Deputy Force Commander General Ashton (Janvier was still absent) or Colonel Dureaux, Janvier's Military Assistant.¹⁴⁸⁶

Gobilliard did not sign the request at that stage; in other words, there was no formal request, only a draft. It is notable that, on that occasion, Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo had prepared a request for Close Air Support and had offered a draft version to Zagreb in advance based on the rapidly deteriorating situation in the enclave. Sarajevo took that decision based on the fact that the situation was approaching the predetermined criteria. In other words, the request did not follow the standard procedure based on a request from the battalion commander. Karremans had been informed about the request, but only reacted by saying that he was not happy about it. In his view Close Air Support would have had an escalating effect - as he had advised Sarajevo in his written assessment of the situation.¹⁴⁸⁷

NATO aircraft left the Srebrenica area again around midday. The reason for their departure was not the fact that their presence was considered a threat to the safety of the Dutchbat hostages, as Karremans had claimed, but because they had received reports about unidentified radars and a battery of Surface-to-Air-Missiles southwest of Srebrenica. It later emerged that those positions would have posed no threat, as the batteries were on Serbian terrain some 70 kilometres east of Srebrenica.¹⁴⁸⁸

After this sequence of events the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo did not expect further requests for Close Air Support for 9 July. At 14.00 hours, Nicolai reported to The Hague that no more aircraft would be deployed to avoid disrupting efforts to secure the release of the fifteen Dutch soldiers kept hostage by the VRS.¹⁴⁸⁹

Nicolai did however want to keep his options for Close Air Support open.¹⁴⁹⁰ He had previously been briefed to the effect that once the aircraft returned to their base in Italy it could take hours to

¹⁴⁸³ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook CAOC 5ATAF 09/07/95, 0440Z, 0545Z, 0610Z, 0620Z, 0629Z and 0830Z.

¹⁴⁸⁴ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook CAOC 5ATAF 09/07/95, 0645Z, 0730Z, 0830Z and 0845Z.

¹⁴⁸⁵ DCBC, Box 59. Overview of Citations Logbook Air Operations Control Center, Annex. A to Klu-replies to Questions by the Chamber on Srebrenica; interview Gary F. Collins, 08/06/00.

¹⁴⁸⁶ NIOD Coll. Ashton. Notes to Diary Ashton, 09/07/95, 11.52 hrs.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Debriefing statement Lieutenant Colonel J.A.C. Ruiter, 27/09/95.

¹⁴⁸⁸ DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 09/07/95, 11.28Z.

¹⁴⁸⁹ DCBC, 2430. Annex to Peace Operations Situation Report No. 136/95 (state of affairs at 09/07/95, 16.00 hours).

¹⁴⁹⁰ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook 5ATAF 09/07/95, 04.40Z, 1326Z.

assemble a new group of aircraft. That was however not the case. Close Air Support continued to remain possible even after the aircraft had returned to their bases. NATO always kept aircraft ready for Close Air Support (French and Dutch F-16s, each armed with four dumb Mk82 bombs (unguided once dropped)). The aircraft remained available in the vicinity of a tanker flying over the Adriatic Sea (for aerial refuelling if necessary).¹⁴⁹¹

Close Air Support on the Afternoon of 9 July

After the aircraft had returned to base in the afternoon, the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo continued to question why it had not been possible for Dutchbat to send a Forward Air Controller to the southern section of the enclave that morning. As outlined above, Sarajevo failed to establish this while the aircraft were available above the enclave that morning.

The Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force in Vicenza (5ATAF) then received a report to the effect that Karremans had refused all personnel permission to leave the compound; which explained why Windmill 02 had been unable to relocate.

Sarajevo meanwhile took the necessary steps to ensure the presence of a Forward Air Controller. Bosnia-Herzegovina Command instructed the British Joint Commission Observers attached to Dutchbat (JCOs) to relocate to the south, and to take a Dutchbat Forward Air Controller with them. At around 13.00 hours the JCOs headed south after Bosnia-Herzegovina Command, in consultation with the Air Operations Control Center, had determined that Close Air Support was needed to prevent the occupation of Srebrenica. The JCOs were in their position at Stupine at 13.00 hours. At that time the aircraft had been absent for approximately one hour.¹⁴⁹² Dutchbat did however (for the first time) send a target list to both Tuzla and Sarajevo indicating fifteen artillery and mortar targets.¹⁴⁹³

The battalion command made a provisional decision to leave the JCOs in their position without the Dutchbat Forward Air Controller; however he did arrive a few hours later. At that time most of the fighting was occurring in the east, south of the so-called kill box around Pribicevac. From their position the JCOs noticed an increasing stream of wounded VRS being carried to a casualty collection point where they were picked up by ambulances. The JCOs could not confirm the report that a tank had been deployed on a hilltop north of the kill box from where it commanded a view of the town of Srebrenica.

At around 16.00 hours, a Dutchbat Tactical Air Control Party joined the JCOs. At 17.00 hours the JCOs heard from Sarajevo that no further aircraft were available, and that they were to return to the compound in Potocari to await further instructions. Upon their arrival there they were told by Sarajevo that Dutchbat was to be assigned to so-called blocking positions (see below). They also heard that Dutchbat had not yet received instruction regarding the blocking positions and that it could take some time. The JCOs, meanwhile, were instructed to prepare to accompany the Dutchbat Tactical Air Control Party to the blocking position that would later be known as Bravo 1 (see below).¹⁴⁹⁴

Discussions between Dutchbat and the ABiH and Opstina

On the morning of 9 July, the Dutchbat liaison section and the UNMOs were in a meeting with the Bosnian Muslims, including the local ABiH Commander, Ramiz Becirovic. That meeting was followed by other meetings with the Opstina and *Medicins Sans Frontières* (MSF).

In the meeting with the ABiH, Major Boering complained that Dutchbat had received no guarantee from the ABiH to the effect that the battalion would not be harassed during subsequent

¹⁴⁹¹ DCBC, 2430. Annex to Peace Operations Situation Report No. 136/95 (state of affairs at 09/07/95 16.00 hrs).

¹⁴⁹² DCBC, 2430. Annex to Peace Operations Situation Report No. 136/95 (state of affairs at 09/07/95 16.00 hrs); DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number Logbook 5ATAF 09/07/95, 0645Z, 0730Z, 0830Z and 0845Z.

¹⁴⁹³ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. HQ Dutchbat to Sector North East, BHC, 09/07/95 13.31.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Confidential information (1).

withdrawals. The absence of that guarantee resulted in the capture that morning of the personnel of OP-S by the VRS. Becirovic countered that the understanding between his troops and OP-S had always been good

Boering then attributed the problems to misunderstandings on both sides. He stated that it was essential for Dutchbat to obtain a guarantee from the ABiH to ensure the battalion of the necessary freedom of movement. Failing that, Dutchbat would feel compelled to take the necessary measures - Boering failed to explain what that meant. Becirovic assured him that he had instructed his troops on that issue. If the OP-S situation were to be repeated, it would be due to insubordination in his ranks; in which case he would intervene personally.

Becirovic agreed to keep Dutchbat updated on developments to enable the battalion to anticipate the necessary actions. Boering also accused Becirovic of having asked permission from the 2nd Corps of the ABiH to forcibly raid the Weapon Collection Point. Becirovic argued that the contrary was true. The 2nd Corps had instructed him to claim those weapons along with the Dutchbat weapons, as the Dutch were not prepared to confront the VRS.¹⁴⁹⁵

Becirovic had indeed received such an order, the result of two radio conversations conducted on the afternoon of 8 July with Naser Oric about the situation in Srebrenica. In those conversations Becirovic reported that the 280th Brigade was faced with a large concentration of VRS, and that Dutchbat had withdrawn. Becirovic said that while they were still holding out in the south, there were no guarantees as to the outcome. He also stated that Dutchbat had asked NATO for support but that none had been forthcoming. Oric replied that he had to put his shoulder to the wheel – it was all or nothing – and hoped that help would arrive. Oric insisted that they remain in the trenches and use the anti-tank weapons (type Red Arrow) to prevent the VRS from taking the trenches. Becirovic replied that they had already tried to use the weapons with no success. There was nothing they could do against the VRS artillery; however, the real danger was that if the artillery were to stop its fire, the VRS would send in the infantry. Oric further insisted that they focus on securing Likari (at OP-Q) to prevent the same kind of take-over that happened in the south of the enclave. If UNPROFOR was not offering any resistance against the VRS, then Oric wanted Dutchbat to return the weapons that were in safekeeping and the ABiH should ask Dutchbat to surrender their weapons so that the ABiH could use them to continue the fight. If Dutchbat refused to surrender the weapons, then Oric assumed that the commander of the 2nd Corps would issue an instruction to take the weapons by force.

Two hours later Oric continued the conversation with Becirovic. Meanwhile he had asked and received instructions from the commander of the 2nd Corps, Sead Delic. The ABiH had to make the Dutchbat OPs as secure as possible, but if Dutchbat withdrew, their weapons had to be taken and the OP occupied. The Dutchbat commander could be told to fight the VRS or surrender his arms.

Becirovic countered that he could not disarm Dutchbat. The ABiH could not approach Dutchbat as the battalion was under the same fire as the ABiH. What had happened was that Dutchbat had been attacked directly by the VRS and therefore had to withdraw with the ABiH. Dutchbat had lost a man and blamed the ABiH for his death. Becirovic did reproach Dutchbat for failing to react to the VRS attack, but he also added that he would not know what to do if the VRS pushed on with their offensive. Becirovic stated that a meeting had been planned with the leaders of the Opstina to determine what to do next. Becirovic also added that he did not wish to negotiate with the VRS (as Dutchbat had suggested) without the permission of the higher echelons in the ABiH. Becirovic called the situation dramatic and complex. The ABiH had been under artillery fire for the past three days, incapable of defending themselves against the VRS. The ABiH soldiers were not used to that kind of situation and were mortified.

Oric attempted to encourage Becirovic by telling him not to panic and to take it easy. Oric advised him to summon all brigade commanders and to order them to occupy as many positions as possible in the lines. If Dutchbat decided to withdraw, the battalion had to be disarmed immediately

¹⁴⁹⁵ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Capsat TA to TX, 091103B Jul 95.

and the weapons used against the VRS. Second Corps Commander, Delic, had told Oric that Dutchbat would probably not be willing to surrender their arms. In that case Dutchbat was to be given the option of being surrounded by the ABiH to force them to endure the same VRS attack as the ABiH, or surrendering the arms. In addition, Oric insisted that they execute counter attacks on lost lines. The ABiH in the enclave had to seek ways of getting behind the VRS and attacking them from the back – that was the only way the ABiH would survive.¹⁴⁹⁶

According to Ramiz Becirovic, Dutchbat did indeed offer, later, to return the weapons in the Weapon Collection Point. Becirovic also referred to the discussion of that issue with Dutchbat on 6 July whereby it had already been agreed that the weapons would be given back in the case of the VRS crossing the enclave borders. Opstina and the ABiH had however agreed after due consultation to reject that offer. They saw that as a pretext for Dutchbat not to react in the case of a VRS attack. It was in any event too late for that and, moreover, Becirovic feared that it would provoke the Bosnian Serbs to hit back with even greater force.¹⁴⁹⁷ The War Presidency of the Opstina also did not want to assume responsibility for such an action and, like Becirovic, feared the consequences of a confrontation with Dutchbat. However, more than that, they feared that it would provide Dutchbat with the pretext to do nothing at all. No one dared to make the decision.

In any event, most of the weapons were more or less useless.¹⁴⁹⁸ They were old, had not been maintained for two years, and there was hardly any ammunition available.¹⁴⁹⁹ Later, the weapons which were kept in the compound in Srebrenica were damaged by a shelling.¹⁵⁰⁰

The second Dutchbat meeting was with the War President, Osman Suljic. He started by offering the condolences of the entire nation for the death of Van Renssen. In this meeting Dutchbat pointed out that the ABiH had contributed to the loss of two OPs, namely, OP-U and OP-S. Suljic's problem was that three thousand people from the Swedish Shelter Project and a thousand from the surrounding villages had sought refuge in the city. One thousand people could be accommodated in a primary school, and the Civil Defence unit of the Opstina provided blankets for them. More water needed to be taken to the school and the MSF was asked to set up an *Ambulanta*. It was expected that most of the difficulties would arise around the children. The MSF however reported that it had already exceeded its capabilities and could no longer cope with the accelerating demand for care.

The notes of Sergeant Major Rave and MSF diverged from the UNMO report with respect to the capacity to continue to provide medical care. Rave wrote that the MSF could still cope for two to three weeks and that space was still available in the hospital. MSF coordinator Christina Schmitz claimed to have offered supplies to prepare the school for accommodation, and had also offered to visit the school where the refugees from the Swedish Shelter Project were accommodated with the Dutchbat liaison team. That visit had been prevented by continued shelling on the enclave.

Suljic also proposed during the discussion that Dutchbat should protect the hospital. MSF however dismissed that proposal as it would only have attracted military activity. The hospital had to remain a neutral zone, so the protection of the ABiH was therefore also not needed. The Opstina then suggested that enormous panic and chaos would ensue if the VRS were to occupy the city. In that case, Suljic hoped that Dutchbat would make its facilities available, as there was nowhere else for the

¹⁴⁹⁶ Sefko Hodzic, *Otpjecaceni koverat*, p. 250-3.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

¹⁴⁹⁸ ABiH Tuzla. 2nd Corps, no number. Supplementary statement of Ramiz Becirovic, 16/04/98, based on a previous statement of 11/08/95.

¹⁴⁹⁹ Interview Hamdija Fejzic, 03/02/98. UNMO interpreter Hasan Nuhanovic gave an alternative explanation: Via Liaison Officer Boering, the Dutch had insisted upon the removal of the weapons from the Weapon Collection Point. That led to the cynical notion amongst the Muslims that once the ABiH had taken up arms, there would no longer be a Safe Area and Dutchbat could leave! Dutchbat was *desperate* to leave the enclave. This notion was reinforced, according to Nuhanovic, by the fact that, since June, rumours had abounded to the effect that helicopters would come to evacuate Dutchbat from the enclave. (Interview Hasan Nuhanovic, 05/08/97 and 06/08/97)

¹⁵⁰⁰ ABiH Tuzla. 24 Divizije, 14/07/95, broj. 06-1225/95.

population to turn to. He appealed to the UN to prevent such a disaster. He himself would try to warn the Bosnian authorities to that effect.

The UNMOs added to their report on that meeting that they expected the VRS to encounter significant resistance from the ABiH if they were to attempt further occupation of the enclave. In the view of the UNMOs the reason why the north of the enclave was being subjected to artillery fire was to prevent the ABiH from sending reinforcements to the south.¹⁵⁰¹

Suljic did indeed raise the alarm with the Bosnian authorities in the form of a letter to President Izetbegovic and ABiH Commander Rasim Delic. In his letter Suljic sketched the situation at 19.00 hours on 9 July. The command structure in the enclave had begun to collapse and the 28th Division was no longer capable of stopping the VRS from entering the city. Chaos and panic prevailed and the civilian authorities were faced with the problem of saving the population. Suljic proposed a meeting between the Bosnian political and military leaders and those of the Republika Srpska to establish whether it would be possible to open a corridor to allow the population to travel to the territory of the Muslim-Croat Federation under international supervision. Suljic insisted on an answer within 24 hours. Izetbegovic did not react.¹⁵⁰²

The VRS Pushes On

On the morning of 9 July, Ramiz Becirovic reported to the 2nd Corps in Tuzla that the VRS were pursuing its offensive with full force. The VRS executed infantry assaults on the ABiH lines on the eastern side of the enclave from Zalazje to Pribicevac, as well as on the southern side of the enclave, from Podravanje (the area with the bauxite mines) to an area known as Kutuzero where Mount Kak was located. The entire Safe Area was under constant fire of a variety of calibres of artillery and, at that point, more than a thousand shells had struck the enclave. The precision of the artillery fire led to the assumption that highly trained officers of the JNA were involved. Several concentrations of armoured vehicles and Air Defence systems had been spotted and four tanks were underway between Zeleni Jadar and the town of Srebrenica.

Based on the fury of the VRS fire and the force of the infantry assaults, Becirovic stated that the VRS on that day had launched its most forceful offensive. After a previous breakthrough in the territory of the 282nd Brigade, the VRS had also broken through in the territory of the 283rd Brigade (see map 'Battle Progress 6 – 12 July 1995' section 5). The 282nd Brigade stood directly in the way of the main VRS advance from the south with the result that that section of the ABiH was completely shattered. Becirovic claimed to be doing his utmost to restore the stability of that unit. He planned to send reinforcements to prevent the continued advance of the VRS. At the time of the report the VRS had advanced to within two kilometres of the city. The remaining brigades were under heavy artillery fire.

The humanitarian situation in the city was a catastrophe. The food and drink supplies for both the population and the soldiers had been depleted and, as of the following day, 10 July, it would no longer be possible to send supplies to the ABiH lines. With respect to Dutchbat, Becirovic speculated that the battalion must have panicked, as there was no sign that it had planned to implement measures to restrain the VRS from occupying the city. Becirovic asked the 2nd Corps in Tuzla 'to plead' to the authorised government institutions and international community to do whatever they could to endeavour to stop the catastrophe in Srebrenica. He also asked a concrete contribution from the 2nd Corps.¹⁵⁰³

¹⁵⁰¹ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Capsat TA to TX, 091103B Jul 95, with supplements interview E.A. Rave, 24/01/01; NIOD, Coll. MSF, Brussels. 'sitrep Srebrenica - Potocari period 6.7 - 22/7.95', compiled by Christina Schmitz, 24/07/95.

¹⁵⁰² ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP, p. 00882884. President of the Presidency Osman Suljic to President of the Presidency of the RBU Alija Izetbegovic, Commander of the ABiH, General Rasim Delic, 09/07/95; interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98.

¹⁵⁰³ NIOD Coll. CD-ROM's. ABiH Komanda 28 Divizije to Komanda 2. KorpUSA, 09/07/95, Str. pov. br. 01-167.

The General Staff of the ABiH reacted by issuing orders to obstruct the VRS advance by all means available. The 28th Division was instructed to closely observe Dutchbat's conduct. Whenever an OP was abandoned it had to be secured immediately to prevent the VRS from occupying it. Based on those orders, it was clear that the ABiH had gauged the situation as a difficult and complex one. The 24th Division that was based in the area surrounding Kladanj was instructed to initiate immediate action towards Srebrenica in support of the 28th Division. Although the order had been drafted on the morning of 9 July, it took until the afternoon for the ABiH Commander, Rasim Delic, to approve and dispatch it.

During the night of 9 to 10 July, the Corps Commander of the 2nd Corps, Sead Delic, instructed the 21st and 25th Divisions to join the 24th Division on 10 July with two companies of 'hardened fighters' to initiate active military actions as quickly as possible to distract the VRS and to obstruct their advance to the town of Srebrenica. Delic warned the units concerned to take that order as seriously as possible while keeping in mind the historical significance of Srebrenica.¹⁵⁰⁴ The actions of those units are unknown. They were far away from Srebrenica and it was almost certain that, whatever effort they put in at that stage, it was simply too little, too late.

Colonel Brantz in Tuzla discussed the situation in Srebrenica with the Chief of Staff of the 2nd Corps, Sulejman Budakovic and compared data. There were few notable differences. Budakovic thought that the VRS were two to three kilometres from the city, while Brantz estimated three to four kilometres (Becirovic estimated two kilometres). Brantz obtained information concerning the order given to the other ABiH divisions, namely, to endeavour to reduce the pressure on Srebrenica. According to the report of the meeting, Brantz provided some information about the Close Air Support procedure and, as an example of NATO capabilities, said that three aircraft could destroy seventy targets. He also added that Karremans had issued clear orders to stop the VRS advance and to fire on the VRS. Brantz also reported that the ABiH and the commander of the Dutchbat units were effectively synchronising their activities.¹⁵⁰⁵ The 2nd Corps sent the report of this meeting to President Izetbegovic and the General Staff of the ABiH.

Brantz thereby gave rather an optimistic turn to the general course of affairs. The orders were not as clear as they are represented here, as will be demonstrated in the paragraphs on the blocking positions below, and there was hardly any (if any) coordination between Dutchbat and the ABiH.

Occupation of OP-K and OP-D

After the VRS had occupied OP-U and OP-S, the personnel of OP-K feared that theirs was the next to be taken. This was due to the fact that they had been able to listen in to the radio traffic, and were familiar with what had happened at OP-F, and the fact that there were tanks, howitzers and mortars involved. They had also learnt about Van Renssen's death via Radio Netherlands, and flew the OP flag at half mast. The news prompted a local Muslim to say that Van Renssen's death had been his own fault – something which did not contribute to a sense of good mutual trust and goodwill. There were some efforts though on the part of the ABiH to establish rapprochement with Dutchbat. An ABiH officer later visited the OP to strike up a conversation.

After the fall of OP-F, Groen notified the personnel that, in the case of a VRS attack, should the opportunity present itself, they should abandon the OP and return to the compound. The battalion wanted to pull the southern lines further north and closer to the city. The shelling was however advancing steadily and skirmishes could be observed between Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Serbs. OP-K was also visited by an ABiH commander, who queried via an interpreter what the crew planned to do in the case of a VRS attack. OP Commander Sergeant Ceelen replied that he did not know what he would do. The

¹⁵⁰⁴ NIOD Coll. CD-ROM's. ABiH Generalsstab to Komandi 2. Korpusa, Komandi 28. DKov, 09/07/95, Str.pov.broj. 1/825-1010. Also see Sefko Hodzic, *Otpjecaveni koverat*, p. 255-7.

¹⁵⁰⁵ NIOD Coll. CD-ROM's. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa to Predsjedništvo RBiH n/r A. Izetbegovica, KM Kakanj n/r k-danta ARBiH, OU brig.gen M. Hajrulahovic, 09/07/95, Str.pov.broj. 02/1-03/45.

ABiH commander's reaction was that the ABiH would then be compelled to take the preventative action of seizing their weapons and vehicles. That did not happen. The ABiH commander also stated that, were the OP personnel to withdraw, they could expect to be hit by an anti-tank grenade. The OP personnel began to believe that they would get shot at irrespective of the direction they fled in. Abandoning the OP did not present a very positive perspective; which is why they had not done so earlier.

After those events at OP-F, Ceelen decided to go with the VRS and not to risk an attack by the ABiH. The personnel felt positively threatened once they had noticed that the ABiH had indeed set up an anti-tank weapon on the route to the compound. The ABiH wanted to confiscate Dutchbats' weapons and 'blue equipment' to fight the VRS from the OP.

The crew was too scared to leave the OP. The option of making their way back to the compound on foot unarmed was no more attractive due to fact that the route led straight through the lines of fire of the warring factions. The initial intention of Captain Groen, the Commander of B Company, was to allow OP-D to retreat and, safety considerations permitting, to take up a blocking position at the village of Lipovac with a Dragon anti-tank weapon. However, upon re-examining the situation he decided the order was too dangerous and withdrew it. Instead he advised them to await further events in the relative safety of the APC. The instructions were aimed at avoiding casualties, or worse, amongst his troops. The crew therefore took cover in the APC with their personal effects, weapons and food.

It was clear that the Bosnian Serbs would come sooner or later – it was only a matter of time. The personnel felt positively relieved when, around 18.30 hours, after five mortar grenades had exploded at approximately one hundred metres from the OP, the first VRS soldiers approached the OP. The first unit to arrive in front of the OP consisted of twenty men, followed by another contingent behind the OP fifteen minutes later. After that more arrived. The personnel felt as if they had been liberated. The VRS commander and an interpreter were then granted entry to the OP, after which discussions were conducted in a friendly atmosphere. The commander said that nothing would happen to them and that they need not be afraid. The VRS presented them with a choice – to return to the compound via the ABiH lines or via the VRS lines.

After due consultation with B Company, they received permission to leave the OP with the VRS. Soon after the arrival of the VRS, the OP was surrounded by more than a hundred VRS soldiers. Everything appeared to be very well organised. The VRS conducted themselves in a becoming fashion and asked if they could take the food. The VRS also wanted Ceelen to hook the water trailer to the APC, but he refused to do so even after being given a direct order to that effect. The VRS reminded Ceelen that he had forgotten to lower the flag. The VRS then lowered the flag and presented it to Ceelen. The ten members of the OP-K personnel then got into the APC. Two VRS soldiers followed to accompany them. During the departure the APC drew automatic fire from the direction of Mount Alibegovic. It was hit and the VRS soldiers took cover. Presumably the shots had been fired by the ABiH. Somewhere further down the road the vehicle was stopped and all personal arms confiscated from the OP personnel.¹⁵⁰⁶

The personnel of OP-D had also listened in to the fate that had befallen their colleagues at the other southern OPs. They too had heard about the death of Van Renssen via Radio Netherlands. The OP-D personnel had spotted tanks, witnessed regular VRS artillery fire at the ABiH, and noticed how shelling had increased on 8 July. A group of six to ten ABiH soldiers were constantly visible at a distance of approximately 20 metres of the OP. The OP personnel had packed their belongings in preparation of a possible evacuation, a fact that did not escape the notice of the alcohol swilling ABiH.

On 9 July however there were no ABiH soldiers visible in the vicinity of the OP. By the end of the afternoon the VRS were firing artillery and mortar shells from the mining area towards Bucje, Mount Kak and the intermediate valley of Kutuzero. Presumably those areas were still occupied by the

¹⁵⁰⁶ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (27); Debriefing statements B.W.J. Wevelkate, 07/09/95, W.A. Ceelen, 08/09/95, A.J. De Roo, 11/09/95 and E.R. de Vries, 11/09/95, Y.J. Schellens, 20/09/95. Interview W.A. Ceelen, 02/07/99. *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 294.

ABiH soldiers; which would hamper efforts to withdraw from OP-D, as the escape route passed through that terrain. The Bosnian Serbs could be heard clearly in the foreground. During radio contact with Company Commander Groen, they were instructed to stay put and to withdraw to the compound in Srebrenica if they could do so without risk of personal safety.

Fifteen minutes later OP commander Sergeant 1st Class, N. Zuurman, decided to pull out. After travelling for a distance of approximately five hundred metres, they ran into a roadblock manned by a group of fifteen ABiH soldiers armed with an anti-tank gun and machine guns. Zuurman talked to the ABiH in German via an interpreter. The Bosnian Muslims wanted the Dutch soldiers to assist them in the fight against the VRS and attempted to confiscate their weapons and the APC. Zuurman however managed to persuade them that they could not join them in battle against the VRS and that the Dutchbats had not been authorised to surrender their arms or vehicle. The APC was then prevented from continuing or turning back. In the course of the evening the group of ABiH soldiers grew to about sixty strong. This led to a tense situation in the APC.

Groen was informed by radio of the actions of the ABiH. After consultation with Groen, the personnel of OP-D attempted to establish contact with OP-K, which had meanwhile been taken over by the VRS. The idea was to attempt to draw the VRS to the APC. Unfortunately they failed to establish contact. The evacuation of OP-D thus yielded the remarkable situation in which Dutchbat was attempting to call in the assistance of the VRS to reach a safety. It was only by the following morning, after Groen had negotiated with Ramiz Becirovic, that the APC was permitted to continue. Soon after that the APC got stuck in a narrow section of road, and had to turn back to an intersection manned by a number of ABiH soldiers. Thanks to a helpful interpreter and a farmer, the Dutchbats were shown an alternative route to the compound in Srebrenica.

The interpreter accompanied them in the APC through a section of VRS controlled terrain back into Muslim territory.¹⁵⁰⁷ OP-D was the fifth OP which had to be forcibly abandoned by Dutchbat. Meanwhile the number of Dutchbats held captive by the VRS had grown to thirty – twenty in Bratunac and ten in Milici. VRS General Tolimir assured General Janvier that they were not viewed as POWs – they had asked for assistance and were free; however, the VRS had not granted them the freedom to return to the enclave.¹⁵⁰⁸

While the personnel of OP-D thus used the VRS to seek safety, the VRS used Dutchbat to take over OP-D. The VRS commander in Milici sent captive Sergeant Ceelen of OP-K, and his deputy, Corporal De Vries (under duress) to accompany a VRS commander and an interpreter to the front in a small truck (type TAM 110) to persuade the personnel of OP-D to abandon the OP. Standing behind a bunker, Ceelen had to attempt to establish contact in English with OP-D using a loudhailer. The Dutch received instructions from the VRS to leave the OP via the Bijelo Polje - Palez route. OP Commander, Sergeant Zuurman however refused to leave the enclave due to the presence of mines on the road. Once the VRS commander had seen to the removal of the mines, Zuurman reported that he was being held captive by the Bosnian Muslims. Meanwhile the OP-D personnel had already left the OP. When the VRS commander learnt from Ceelen that OP-D had been evacuated, the VRS used a VRS tank (type T-54) firing grenades to destroy the OP.¹⁵⁰⁹

The VRS did not always adopt such a 'protective' attitude towards Dutchbat. UN vehicles continuously drew artillery fire while entering and leaving the compound. UNMOs were therefore instructed by the battalion staff never to arrange meetings with the ABiH or Opstina using Motorolas (walkie-talkies), as the VRS were always listening in. They were advised to do so via satellite phone.¹⁵¹⁰

Meanwhile the situation in the enclave remained extremely restless during the course of the afternoon. On that afternoon the UNMOs counted more than 78 explosions in the centre of the city

¹⁵⁰⁷ Debriefing statement Soldier 1st Class B.N. Pents, 07/09/95 and information based on confidential debriefing statement (39); SMG 1004/61. Monthly Register Dutchbat OPs Room, 10/07/95, 09.99.

¹⁵⁰⁸ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 10/07/95, No. Z-1127.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Debriefing statement Soldier 1st Class R. Jagt, 08/09/95; interview Sergeant W.A. Ceelen, 02/07/99.

¹⁵¹⁰ SMG 1004. Capsat LO team to UNMO's Srebrenica, 09/07/95, 00.4?. SMG 1004.

alone in little over an hour. Later on, the VRS turned their fire towards ABiH positions at the eastern side of the enclave.¹⁵¹¹

Another Attempt at Close Air Support?

Even before the occupation of OP-K, Zagreb Chief of Staff Kolsteren bombarded the local liaison cell of the Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force (5ATAF) in Vicenza with questions concerning the availability of aircraft and the time needed to get them in the air.¹⁵¹² By the evening of 9 July, Vicenza had assumed that by dawn on 10 July (by which time Dutchbat would have occupied the blocking positions (see below)), a so-called pre-approved Blue Sword Request would be activated immediately Dutchbat was attacked. A pre-approved Blue Sword Request entailed that the request had already been pre-approved by Gobilliard, Janvier and Akashi in the event of an attack on a UN unit.

On that evening, four tanks and several hundred VRS infantrymen were involved in the attack even though, at that time, only one tank and a hundred soldiers were actually inside the Safe Area. In addition, there was some concern about the presence of an anti-aircraft gun (type ZSU 23/2, maximum firing range 5,000 metres at 7,500 feet) that had been spotted some distance from the specified kill box near Pribicevac. A further point of concern was the fact that the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo had not been able to establish contact with the Dutchbat Forward Air Controller, Windmill 02. The spokesman for the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo, Squadron Leader Rick Phillips, considered it unlikely, although not impossible, that further requests for Close Air Support or air strikes would come in that evening.¹⁵¹³

That turned out to be a miscalculation. Deputy UNPROFOR Commander Gobilliard signed the Blue Sword Request at around 17.00 hours. It had been compiled by the Director of the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo, Rick Phillips. At 17.16 hours this formal request for Close Air Support was faxed to Zagreb. This too was not based on a request by Karremans. Gobilliard specified the event justifying the deployment of Close Air Support as 'an incursion into the Safe Area Srebrenica and a threat to UNPROFOR peace-keepers'. To the question as to whether the warring factions had threatened to take casualties, he entered 'Yes'. To the question concerning previous casualties, he referred to the death of a UN soldier.

Sarajevo did not specify precise targets in that request, but did specify all Dutchbat positions and the presence of refugees from the Swedish Shelter Project. However, according to the request, the threat to the refugees would be minimal. A Forward Air Controller, or, in the absence of one, an Airborne Forward Air Controller on board an aircraft (a possibility in the case of an emergency) would be able to identify the targets.¹⁵¹⁴

Zagreb held on to the request. Shortly after 18.00 hours UNPF headquarters sent a situation report to New York and Geneva, which described the situation as 'having quietened down for the moment'. The intention of the Dutchbat commander in that situation was 'to hold the ground'.¹⁵¹⁵

Close Air Support was available on the evening of 9 July. As of 18.00 hours a member of aircraft, in military terms: a package, stood ready on the ground. At 18.50 hours there was even the possibility of aircraft taking off. A Combat Air Patrol that was already airborne was instructed to remain in the vicinity of the tanker in the case of an emergency.

At 19.45, confusion arose at AFSOUTH (the southern NATO command) in Naples regarding the question as to whether a request for Close Air Support had indeed been approved. A liaison officer

¹⁵¹¹ SMG 1004. Capsat TX to TA, 091517B and 091648B Jul 95.

¹⁵¹² DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook 5ATAF 09/07/95, 1550Z-1605Z.

¹⁵¹³ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook 5ATAF 09/07/95, 1610Z, 1744Z and 1810Z.

¹⁵¹⁴ NIOD Coll. Kolsteren. UN Release Authority Request, 09/07/95; NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary (version August 1999), p. 137.

¹⁵¹⁵ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SRE Vol. I, 1 Jul - 16 Nov 95. Fax UNPF-HQ Zagreb G3 Land Ops to Annan UNNY, Stoltenberg Geneva ICFY, UNNY Sitroom, 091822B Jul 95.

in Zagreb had informed the Deputy Director of the Combined Arms Coordination Center (CAOC) in Vicenza to the effect that the Blue Sword Request had been signed. Verification of the news in Zagreb however revealed that the approval procedure had at that point only just been initiated.

At 19.23 hours, the liaison cell of the Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force in Zagreb had already reported to the CAOC in Vicenza that Janvier had returned to the headquarters and was being briefed. Duty NATO liaison officer Pete Lightbody however reported that Akashi was reluctant to authorise a *carte blanche* for Close Air Support. He wanted to wait until the following day.

At 20.14 hours Zagreb confirmed to the CAOC in Vicenza that a Blue Sword Request had been initiated, but that it had not been approved by Akashi.¹⁵¹⁶

At 21.15 hours Zagreb reported to Naples that Janvier had been authorised by Akashi to deploy Close Air Support.¹⁵¹⁷ It was therefore not true that Akashi had wanted to wait until the following day to make a decision - Akashi had authorised Janvier to make the decision. Although that might have been the case, the request that arrived in Zagreb that evening was not presented to Akashi or Janvier for reasons unknown.¹⁵¹⁸ As a result no decision was taken on the evening of 9 July concerning Close Air Support.

The fact that the UN had failed to authorise Close Air Support on 9 July created a shock wave in the Dutch Press; especially as the newspapers reported that the decision had been based on political rather than military-technical considerations. According to newspaper reports the reason was that, after four weeks' negotiation, the Bosnian Serbs had finally promised to allow convoys to reach to Sarajevo, which could not be jeopardised by an air strike. The primary concern was for the safety of the Dutch peacekeepers – concern for the lives of the local population only followed later. The death of Van Renssen had obviously contributed greatly to that situation. The newspaper headlines reflected the mood in the Netherlands: 'Blue helmets are pawns in the game.', 'Only one more week for the soldiers.', 'Desperation in UN peace call.', 'Dutchbat in a corner: UN blue helmets helpless against Bosnian-Serb offensive.', 'Hunted by one, shot down by the other.', 'Government and Parliament shocked by soldier's death.'¹⁵¹⁹

A survey conducted by *RTL News* (a Dutch TV channel) on 10 July showed that the majority of the Dutch population wanted the Dutch out of Srebrenica.¹⁵²⁰ *Het Parool* (an Amsterdam based newspaper) could see no further role for Dutchbat in Bosnia. The refusal to deploy Close Air Support deprived Dutchbat of the last potentially effective means of control of the local situation. According to the newspaper Dutchbat now had no further business in Bosnia, because 'one does assign a traffic officer the task of controlling a riot'. TV presenter Maartje van Weegen asked Minister Voorhoeve to explain how long he thought it would be necessary for Dutch soldiers to fight and die for Srebrenica. A main editorial in *Het Parool* stated that Close Air Support was the only remaining means of removing Dutchbat from Srebrenica. Those comments stood in sharp contrast to the type of news reports that followed the fall of Srebrenica.

Although the UN did threaten to deploy Close Air Support on 9 July, *De Volkskrant* (another Dutch daily) considered it unlikely that it would be used as long as the Dutch were being held by the Bosnian Serbs. Member of the Second Chamber, Hoekema (D66), asked for an emergency meeting to gauge the feelings of the ministers regarding the safety of Dutchbat and to determine what measures could be taken to enhance their safety. Hoekema was concerned about this, and felt that agreements that had been made with regard to the use of Close Air Support for their protection should be observed. Hoekema was also more concerned about Dutchbat at the time than about the local population. Minister Voorhoeve explained on Dutch TV that Close Air Support had been requested

¹⁵¹⁶ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook 5ATAF 09/07/95, 1823Z, 1900Z.

¹⁵¹⁷ DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 09/07/95; DCBC, 2430. Annex to Peace Operations Situation Report No. 136/95 (state of affairs on 9 July 16.00 hours).

¹⁵¹⁸ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 88040, File 4-2, SRSG Meeting, May-Oct 95. Senior Staff Meeting, 10/07/95.

¹⁵¹⁹ See also *de Telegraaf* (3x), *Trouw*, *de Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad*, all of 10/07/95.

¹⁵²⁰ *RTL News*, 11/07/95, Late News.

twice on 9 July but that the Dutchbat commander had refused it once – for the time being. Voorhoeve considered the use of Close Air Support unavoidable; however, the safety of the Dutch soldiers enjoyed priority. The order issued to the commanders was to avoid bloodshed; ‘I want every man and woman to come home safely.’ All those statements must be viewed in the context of the death of Van Renssen a few days earlier.¹⁵²¹

The Bosnian Government was also concerned about developments on 9 July. They dedicated a special parliamentary session to the situation in Srebrenica. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sacirbey, tried as early as 05.30 hours to set up a meeting with Boutros-Ghali in Geneva. The UN delegation also consulted the Bosnian Permanent Representative in Geneva concerning the panic in the Bosnian Government due to the Srebrenica offensive.¹⁵²²

Premier Haris Silajdzic accused the Western powers of having green-lighted the Bosnian-Serb attack on the enclave.¹⁵²³ In the case of the continuation of the attacks on the Safe Area and the continued failure on the part of the UN and NATO to implement meaningful counter measures, Silajdzic planned to take a number of measures, including re-evaluation of the purpose of the UN presence in Bosnia, a call on volunteers ‘to defend Bosnia-Herzegovina from fascism’ (using Spain as an example) and asking friendly nations to send troops and arms. If the situation persisted, Silajdzic planned to release all the names of those persons that aided and abetted the Bosnian Serbs in their genocide mission. Silajdzic called on General Smith to return to his position.¹⁵²⁴

President Izetbegovic also called on Clinton, Chirac, Major and Kohl to use their influence to hold the UN to its obligations and to prevent the genocide of the citizens of Srebrenica. Izetbegovic also pointed out in his letter that, even after Srebrenica had been declared a Safe Area and had been demilitarised, it had been subject to continuous shelling. The cover letter to the British Minister of Foreign Affairs from Downing Street stated ‘no reply needed’.¹⁵²⁵

Izetbegovic also telephonically notified the Iranian leader, Hashemi Rafsanjani and the Turkish President, Suleyman Demirel, of the situation. All Bosnian diplomatic and consular missions were instructed to urgently disseminate news about the Bosnian-Serb crimes against Srebrenica. Izetbegovic also called an emergency session of the Security Council.¹⁵²⁶ In a letter to the Security Council, the Bosnian representative pointed out that the VRS offensive could only be aimed at the population and UNPROFOR, as the ABiH had been disarmed in May 1993. In his view, in exchange for the disarmament, the UN and NATO had assumed responsibility for the defence of Srebrenica¹⁵²⁷ - a political assumption that did not fully coincide with the military reality.

Silajdzic also wrote to NATO Secretary-General Willy Claes to ask whether the UN had asked NATO to intervene in reaction to the ‘all-out assault’ of the Bosnian Serbs. In this instance, too, the tone of the letter made a reply unlikely:

‘some 60,000 unarmed civilians are exposed to direct heavy artillery, tank and infantry fire. UNPROFOR forces, which ought to be protecting Srebrenica, are themselves at the mercy of the Serbs. UNPROFOR units in Srebrenica are in disarray, unable to defend themselves and the helpless civilians. Today in

¹⁵²¹ Bart Rijs, ‘VN weigeren Nederlandse soldaten luchtsteun’ [UN Refuses Close Air Support for Dutch Soldiers], *de Volkskrant*, 10/07/95; Frans Peeters, ‘Geen taak meer voor Dutchbat in Bosnië’ [No Further Tasks for Dutchbat in Bosnia], *Het Parool*, 10/07/95; Editorial, *Het Parool*, 10/07/95; *NPS*, 10/07/95, News on 1, R. 1, 12.07 hours; *Nova* 10/07/95, N. 3 22.34 hours.

¹⁵²² Confidential interview (63); Confidential information (4).

¹⁵²³ *Agence France Presse*, 10/07/95 15:17 Eastern Time.

¹⁵²⁴ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 11/07/95, Source: Radio Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo, in Serbo-Croat 1600 GMT 09/07/95.

¹⁵²⁵ Confidential information (28); *Agence France Presse*, 09/07/95 14:47 Eastern Time.

¹⁵²⁶ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 10/07/95, Source: Radio Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo, in Serbo-Croat 0900 GMT 09/07/95.

¹⁵²⁷ United Nations, Security Council, 09/07/95, S/1995/548.

Srebrenica nobody can any longer even count the dead and wounded women and children who have been placed under UN protection. (...) I would appreciate it if you could immediately inform me whether the UN has requested NATO intervention, and, if so, why NATO has not reacted so far. Could it be that senior UN officials are deliberately obstructing UNPROFOR's mandate, or is this an alteration of NATO's decision on Bosnia-Herzegovina.¹⁵²⁸

Silajdzic also warned that, failing a swift reaction by the West, the Bosnian Government would seriously reconsider the presence of UNPROFOR. The Bosnian ambassador to the UN, Mustafa Bijedic, was already making utterances to the effect that the fall of Srebrenica would mean the end of the UN mission in Bosnia. Boutros-Ghali, in fact, said almost the same thing, namely that failure on the part of the warring factions to respect the UN and to start serious peace negotiations would hasten the departure of UNPROFOR.¹⁵²⁹ Akashi was becoming increasingly concerned about the media attitude to the UN mission. Withdrawal from Bosnia would be a blow to UN prestige and Akashi would be the scapegoat. To a certain extent Akashi claimed to be prepared to accept that and expressed his gratitude to Boutros-Ghali for having entrusted him with the job.¹⁵³⁰

The 'scale Tips': The VRS decide to occupy the entire Enclave

The question on everyone's mind was what would happen in the coming days. The VRS had entrenched themselves in various locations in the Safe Area and were positioned at a stone's throw from the main population centre. A general pessimism about the outcome was setting in fast. Minister Voorhoeve said on the Dutch news program, '*NOS-journaal*', that the Bosnian Serbs could not be stopped if they were planning to occupy the enclave.¹⁵³¹

That notwithstanding, a major Western intelligence agency was disinclined to believe that the Bosnian Serbs would push through into the city based on fear of the number of casualties it was likely to take. The VRS were more likely to use the enclave as a basis for neutralising ABiH attacks. By reducing the size of the enclave and exacerbating the humanitarian situation it could undermine the morale of the ABiH. The VRS were very unlikely to heed UNPROFOR protests until it had achieved its objectives. It was expected that the VRS attacks would continue until the ABiH had been neutralised in the enclave.¹⁵³²

The Royal Netherlands Military Intelligence Service (RNLA) also did not believe that the VRS planned a complete occupation of the enclave. In the view of the Army/Intelligence Service, all indications suggested that the VRS were only striving for control of the southern section of the enclave.¹⁵³³ Even the ABiH were not sure that the VRS were actually inclined to attack the heart of the enclave. The 2nd Corps of the ABiH in Tuzla, based on intercepted radio traffic, could make out that the VRS attack had unfolded successfully, but did not think that occupation of the town of Srebrenica was part of the plan. The possibility of the VRS using the opportunity of doing so was however not entirely excluded.¹⁵³⁴ Indeed, that was exactly what was about to happen.

Karremans and Franken, in retrospect, considered the VRS assault on Mount Kak in the south of the enclave the 'moment the scales tipped'. Once the VRS had established control of the mountain,

¹⁵²⁸ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 10/07/95, Source: Radio Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo, in Serbo-Croat 1300 GMT 09/07/95.

¹⁵²⁹ *The New York Times*, 10/07/95; *The Washington Post*, 10/07/95, Final Edition.

¹⁵³⁰ NIOD Coll. Banbury, Banbury Diary; SRSG's Meeting 10/07/95.

¹⁵³¹ NAA Document, 222897.09/07/95.

¹⁵³² Confidential information (5).

¹⁵³³ MID/KL. INTSUM 130/95, 101200Z Jul 95.

¹⁵³⁴ NIOD Coll. CD-ROMs. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa een Komanda 28. Divizije, 10/07/95, Str. pov. br. 02/8-01-1142.

they also controlled the southern section of the enclave and the bauxite mines. In their view, if the VRS did not stop there, they were planning to occupy the entire enclave.¹⁵³⁵

There was however a more final ‘tipping point’ of which the UN had no knowledge whatsoever. The VRS offensive had proven so successful that, on the evening of 9 July, the Bosnian Serbs decided not to limit the operation to the southern section of the enclave, but to push on and to occupy the town of Srebrenica and the entire enclave. The president of the Republika Srpska, Radovan Karadzic, had been kept informed on the success of the operation to that point. He had also been told that those successes enabled the Drina Corps to take over the city. Karadzic was satisfied with the results and agreed to extend the operation to disarm the ‘Muslim terrorist gangs’ and to demilitarise the enclave completely.

The order issued by the VRS officer, Major General Zdravko Tolimir, also specified that Karadzic had determined that the safety of UNPROFOR troops and the population had to be guaranteed. Orders to that effect had to be issued to all participating units. The safety of the population had to be guaranteed if they wanted to cross the enclave to reach the Safe Area Tuzla via the Republika Srpska. The orders made no mention of any forced removals of the population. The VRS units were to be instructed not to damage private property except in the case of resistance. The burning of buildings was strictly prohibited. An important final instruction was that the population and POWs had to be treated in accordance with the Geneva Convention.¹⁵³⁶

This made 9 July the most important day in the build-up to the fall of the enclave. No one, including major Western intelligence agencies, expected the Bosnian Serbs to occupy the entire enclave. After all, what would Mladic do with so many refugees? All that notwithstanding, the VRS decided on that fateful night to do exactly that.

9. A Line in the Sand: The Blocking Positions

Unaware of those Bosnian-Serb intentions, the UN headquarters in Zagreb almost simultaneously came to a decision to instruct Dutchbat to establish blocking positions. The aim was for Dutchbat to set up a blockade against the VRS advance to Srebrenica whether or not in combination with the deployment of Close Air Support, and thereby to stop the advance.¹⁵³⁷

On 9 July the front lines of the VRS troops were just over four kilometres into the enclave. When General Nicolai asked VRS General Tolimir for an explanation, Nicolai stated that UNPROFOR considered the actions of the VRS as an attack on the enclave. UNPROFOR demanded a withdrawal and Nicolai warned Tolimir that UNPROFOR would defend the enclave with all means at its disposal. Tolimir however countered with the argument that, in fact, Dutchbat was occupying Bosnian-Serb territory. Tolimir nevertheless reassured Nicolai that Dutchbat soldiers would not be threatened.¹⁵³⁸ A few hours later the generals again established communication. Tolimir told Nicolai that he had been assured by local commanders that there were no problems with either Dutchbat or the population. To that Nicolai could only repeat that, while the VRS may not be having problems with either Dutchbat or the local population, it would certainly have to deal with UNPROFOR if it failed to withdraw across the borders of the enclave. The agreement with Morillon had to be respected. Thanks to the good discipline of the UN forces, Nicolai stated, they had not yet taken up arms against the VRS, but he could not guarantee that this would not happen. Tolimir said that he understood the message, and repeated that the VRS had no problem with Dutchbat and the population - only with the ABiH.

¹⁵³⁵ BLS, OPS. Fax Karremans to PBL 29/08/95.

¹⁵³⁶ ICTY (IT-33-98) OTP Ex 64B. Main Staff of the Army of Republika Srpska to President of Republika Srpska, for information, Drina Corps IKM/Forward Command Post, Generals Gvero and Krstic, personally, 09/07/95, Strictly Conf. No. 12/46-501/95.

¹⁵³⁷ Confidential interview (52).

¹⁵³⁸ SMG, 1004. Note from MA/COS to MA/Comd. Telephone Conversation General Nicolai - General Tolimir, 09/07/95, 17.50 hrs.

According to Tolimir it was the actions of the ABiH from the demilitarised zone that violated the existing agreements, as well as the efforts to mutually connect Zepa and Srebrenica.

Nicolai could not see the connection. In his view this was about an attack on a Safe Area, and a threat to the local population. The VRS was the only party that was deploying heavy weaponry, as all ABiH weapons were still in the Weapon Collection Point. That was one sound reason for UNPROFOR to defend the Safe Area. Tolimir however did not agree that the ABiH had surrendered all their heavy weaponry. He claimed that the ABiH owned six armoured vehicles, which it had either bought or stolen from UNPROFOR. That led to a verbal exchange between Tolimir and Nicolai, who vehemently denied the latter statement. Tolimir was right about the armoured vehicles even though the vehicles, which had originated from the Ukraine via Zepa, were no longer in the enclave.¹⁵³⁹ (The situation concerning the armoured vehicles was discussed in Chapter 4.)

Tolimir claimed that Nicolai did not understand the heart of the matter. The ABiH had continuously launched attacks from the Safe Area, which, in contrast to the agreement, had never been demilitarised. Serbian towns constantly went up in flames. Nicolai countered that the ABiH had been warned to that effect on several occasions. At this point, however, the VRS were taking measures that went far beyond the call for self-defence. Nicolai demanded – a complete withdrawal within two hours or UNPROFOR would be forced to deploy all means available against the VRS. Nicolai failed to specify the means.¹⁵⁴⁰

The threat was backed up by a formal warning by UNPF in Zagreb to the Bosnian Serbs. The offensive was ‘totally unacceptable’ and signified a serious escalation of the conflict. The VRS were to stop the offensive on the enclave immediately and to withdraw to the border of the enclave as agreed on 8 May 1993 with General Morillon. Moreover, all Dutchbat troops held captive by the VRS had to be released immediately with their equipment. The VRS were further informed that Dutchbat had been instructed to establish blocking positions, thereby closing off access to Srebrenica. The warning stated that Akashi and Janvier had decided to deploy Close Air Support in the event of a VRS attack on the blocking position. The warning reminded the VRS of the ‘grave consequences’ following disregard of a warning. The warning failed to mention what the grave consequences would be. Sarajevo sent the warning to General Mladic and also issued a press release.¹⁵⁴¹

During the day of 9 July, Zagreb and Sarajevo worked feverishly to establish substance for this warning (which was later incorrectly viewed by many as an ultimatum). The UN headquarters in New York also had problems with the warning to the Bosnian Serbs. Reports of companies and several tanks in the vicinity of the town of Srebrenica had reached New York; however, as such, those reports signified nothing special. The UN headquarters did not expect anything special to occur until the alarm was signalled by the Situation Center in New York based on the continuous incoming reports and situation reports. Boutros-Ghali was abroad at the time, as was his deputy, Kofi Annan. Iqbal Riza thereby replaced both Annan and Boutros-Ghali.¹⁵⁴²

Riza was a Pakistani who was sympathetic to the Bosnian Muslims.¹⁵⁴³ He asked the Military Advisor to the Secretary-General, Major General of the Marines, F.H. van Kappen, what to make of the situation reports. The information stream in New York was always somewhat behind the times due to the time difference, and delays caused by written reports via the headquarters. Moreover, much of the reporting to New York was devoid of military-tactical subjects. Although New York was reluctant to establish direct contact with field commanders, there seemed to be little choice other than to contact

¹⁵³⁹ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 434, Milinfosummaries 1, Box SNE, 1. UNMO HQ Sector NE to UNMO HQ Zagreb, Weekly Infosum 21/95 (22 - 28 May) and 22/95 (29 May - 4 Jun), 281500B May 95 and 040800B Jun 95. SMG, 1001. The report from OP-K dated from 270015B May 95 (MID 443-0305 Box 113. Doc Rest 200.300.200.200.Yo.12423).

¹⁵⁴⁰ SMG, 1004. Note from MA/COS to MA/Comd. Telephone Conversation General Nicolai - General Tolimir, 09/07/95, 19.30 hrs.

¹⁵⁴¹ DCBC, 620. ‘Warning to the Bosnian Serbs: Attacks Against the Srebrenica Safe Area’, 10/07/95.

¹⁵⁴² Interview F.H. van Kappen, 21/06/00.

¹⁵⁴³ Confidential interview (63).

General Janvier directly for an explanation. Van Kappen failed to raise Janvier telephonically, but did manage to get in touch with Colonel De Jonge, who provided a clear sketch of the situation. New York found the situation disquieting: Something unforeseen had happened - the Bosnian Serbs were continuing their offensive. The reasons remained unknown to both Riza and Van Kappen. Riza nevertheless thought it essential to send a clear signal to the Bosnian Serbs to the effect that they had crossed a critical line. This resulted in a new round of communication between Van Kappen and De Jonge. De Jonge explained that Zagreb planned to establish blocking positions to provide the Bosnian Serbs with a clear and practical message: So far, and no further.¹⁵⁴⁴

Riza agreed to the notion of the blocking positions, however, he felt that it needed to entail a clear political-military signal. In his view it was essential to issue orders to offer real resistance and not only to fire over the heads of the offenders. Van Kappen said that he had pointed out to Riza that, from a military perspective, blocking positions did not make all that much sense, as infantry could easily bypass them. Riza accepted this and understood that half a battalion was not exactly capable of putting up an effective defence; however, he did consider the political message conveyed with the blocking positions important. That message had to be supported in a military sense, and Janvier had to give substance to that requirement. Riza wanted the political signal of the blocking positions to serve as a 'line in the sand'. De Jonge was then informed by Van Kappen that New York considered the blocking positions a sound initiative as long as they presented a clear signal.

The issue of Close Air Support was also mentioned in that discussion. Van Kappen was informed that Zagreb was making preparations to that end, even though the staff did not believe an attack was about to be launched with much more than one company supported by two or three tanks.

After that, events unfolded very quickly and became extremely confusing to New York. This was partially due to the fact that the Bosnian Serbs had initially reacted with a denial of their intentions to take Srebrenica city and because New York was itself beginning to doubt whether this was not just another incident.¹⁵⁴⁵

After the take-over of one OP after the other, De Jonge in Zagreb began to fear that the VRS offensive could well signify more than a 'salami tactics' or an isolated incident. The intelligence staff in Zagreb still maintained that the operation was limited to the southern section of the enclave, and that it would not lead to further invasion of the Safe Area. However, De Jonge countered, if the rollup of OPs continued unabated, not much of the enclave would remain. The question was what could be done to avoid having to answer later to accusations to the effect that the enclave had been taken without any resistance or firm action on the part of the UN.

Decision to establish Blocking Positions

On the morning of 9 July, the Zagreb staff did another dry run of handling a Blue Sword Request to ensure that everyone was familiar with their roles in that bureaucratic procedure. After the exercise De Jonge came to the conclusion that the VRS had to be put into a position where they would be forced to admit their true intentions. This led him to the idea of the blocking positions. The aim was not to set Dutchbat up in a defensive position with all means available; however, the battalion would be authorised to take up positions from which it could fire upon the VRS. The aim was to establish whether the VRS were conducting lightning strikes that would be ceased at the first sign of resistance or whether they were really planning an assault on the entire enclave. In the case of a VRS attack on a blocking position it would be obvious that their intentions went well beyond isolated operations. De Jonge's idea was thereby also to bring about a separation between the attacking and defending groups, preferably by one to two kilometres. That would present the opportunity to safely deploy Close Air

¹⁵⁴⁴ Interview F.H. van Kappen, 21/06/00.

¹⁵⁴⁵ Interview F.H. van Kappen, 21/06/00.

Support against the VRS. After all, Close Air Support was not permitted if it posed a danger to friendly troops.¹⁵⁴⁶

De Jonge proposed his plan to Chief of Staff Kolsteren. Kolsteren favoured De Jonge's idea partially based on the experience of UNPF at the fall of Sector West in Croatia, where UN troops present had taken no action against the advancing Croatians. A blocking position could fill the gap between Dutchbat's light weaponry and Close Air Support. A substantial 'gap' existed between light and heavy weaponry due to the fact that, as was well known, Dutchbat's anti-tank weapons were no longer in sound working order (more on that subject below).

Kolsteren stated that his consideration of De Jonge's idea had also been based on another idea, namely, UNPF's perception that, while there was a battalion in Srebrenica asking for Close Air Support, there were questions as to the actual role of that battalion. Dutchbat did its work - at least that was how Zagreb saw it - but it could hardly be said that they had shown courage or betrayed a sense of battle-readiness. Colonel De Jonge denied that such a notion was prevalent or that it had been uttered in Zagreb,¹⁵⁴⁷ however, in Kolsteren's view the battalion was not only in Srebrenica to observe and report. Matters were deteriorating 'invitingly rapidly'. Obviously Zagreb was concerned about the safety of UNPROFOR personnel, but that was hardly license for Dutchbat to do absolutely nothing at all. The battalion would have to show its mettle. The blocking positions would have to provide the test of that mettle. It would have to provide Mladic with a clear demonstration that attacking the blocking position and advancing on Srebrenica city was a step too far.¹⁵⁴⁸

De Jonge then proposed his idea to Force Commander Janvier. Janvier was immediately convinced of the validity of the plan. Janvier responded to De Jonge as follows: 'Then we will know Mladic's real worth. Moreover, we will then be able to deploy Close Air Support.'¹⁵⁴⁹ Janvier however first wanted to know whether this concerned a real offensive or merely a sham attack. According to Kolsteren, Janvier had not intend to give up the enclave without resistance even though he had previously presented that as an option to the Security Council.¹⁵⁵⁰ Janvier also used the words 'a line in the sand'. He wanted to attach an ultimatum to the blocking positions, so that Mladic would be clear about the consequences of continuing forward operations. Janvier's staff would fill in the details. De Jonge said that he was then instructed to draft an order for the blocking positions, which Janvier would sign.¹⁵⁵¹

Janvier and Akashi's discussion in the early evening of 9 July culminated in the order for Dutchbat to block the route to Srebrenica. The commanders of UNPF in Zagreb, UNPROFOR in Sarajevo, and Akashi would, each at their own level, issue 'a firm warning' to the Bosnian Serbs. Deputy Force Commander Ashton talked to General Mladic and demanded the withdrawal of the VRS from Srebrenica.¹⁵⁵²

Simultaneous with Akashi and Janvier's decision, early that evening, to establish blocking positions, the headquarters in Zagreb and Sarajevo were instructed to prepare for Close Air Support. The latter operation would serve as a reply in the event that the Bosnian Serbs were to undertake an 'action directe' against the UNPROFOR units that stood in their way.

Brigadier General Dave Sawyer, deputy Director of the CAOC in Vicenza, was recalled to his post to consult with Nicolai regarding Zagreb's plans for the establishment of blocking positions designed to stop the VRS. The entry in the logbook of the Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force in Vicenza was testimony to the fact that the UN was planning 'to slug it out with the VRS. If unsuccessful,

¹⁵⁴⁶ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

¹⁵⁴⁷ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 30/05/01.

¹⁵⁴⁸ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/09/99.

¹⁵⁴⁹ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

¹⁵⁵⁰ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/09/99.

¹⁵⁵¹ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99. No written order was found in the UNPROFOR archives.

¹⁵⁵² Confidential information (44).

NATO Close Air Support/Air Strikes would be used.’¹⁵⁵³ Vicenza meanwhile issued orders for an airborne command post, code name *Bookshelf*,¹⁵⁵⁴ to stand by for deployment at 06.00 hours on 10 July, and to conduct a radio check with Dutchbat’s Forward Air Controller, Windmill 02. Sawyer emphasized the importance of that action.

It was also established via the Dutch officer, Major Frenztz, who worked at the Air Operations Coordination Center, that Windmill 02 would be available at that moment. Vicenza meanwhile drew the positions of the VRS tanks onto the map and was in possession of a target list, even though they knew that it might no longer be up to date. The exact locations of the blocking positions were not as yet known in Vicenza, and the fear was expressed that it would not be known until 06.00 hours on the following day.¹⁵⁵⁵

Around 21.00 hours that evening Janvier consulted with NATO Admiral Leighton Smith in Naples. They agreed that, as of 06.00 hours on 10 July, NATO aircraft would be in positions above the Adriatic Sea, ready for deployment at the request of Sarajevo in the event of a threat to Srebrenica. The final decision for deployment remained with Janvier and Akashi.¹⁵⁵⁶ NATO was indeed ready for Close Air Support at 06.00 hours. The Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo, for several hours more, remained under the impression that a Blue Sword Request would be honoured in advance if a blocking position were to have been attacked on 10 July.¹⁵⁵⁷ That was however not the case, and the procedures remained as they had been established.

Zagreb did not conduct a risk analysis prior to issuing the order for the establishment of blocking positions. It also did not seem sensible to expect this of a headquarters four organisational levels above Dutchbat. The risk evaluation had to be left up to the commanders in the field.¹⁵⁵⁸ De Jonge said that he had in fact raised the question of the Rules of Engagement (rules of conduct for opening fire), but the staff in Zagreb did not think it required amendment.

It was however clear that a risk was being taken and that the order posed Dutchbat with an enormous problem. The white UN armoured cars would be highly conspicuous and vulnerable on the hills. Following the Rules of Engagement could at any moment compel Dutchbat to return fire and thereby to ‘green’ conduct. The battalion was neither equipped nor trained for this and it certainly did not have the mindset for such an operation. Field Manuals warn never to issue sudden ‘green’ orders to troops trained only at ‘blue’ level, as this would be demanding the impossible of the troops (see Chapter 8 of Part II). De Jonge nevertheless felt that, in that instance, the risk had to be taken. Janvier, who had always shown extreme caution and circumspect, supported him in this. Sarajevo issued the order to Dutchbat. Zagreb did not at any time consult Karremans directly regarding the assignment.¹⁵⁵⁹

Like Zagreb, Sarajevo also did not amend the Rules of Engagement and did not instruct Dutchbat as to whether to fire directly at the VRS or not. The idea was that the threat of Close Air Support would serve as a deterrence and would be sufficient to stop the advancing VRS troops. For that reason the warning to the VRS had been supplemented with the message that a VRS attack of a blocking position would result in Close Air Support.¹⁵⁶⁰ De Ruiter informed Karremans about the warning, as well

¹⁵⁵³ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook 5ATAF 09/07/95, 1550Z-1605Z.

¹⁵⁵⁴ This concerns a C-130 Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center serving as communication platform and to coordinate between the Tactical Air Control Parties and the Combined Air Operations Coordination Center.

¹⁵⁵⁵ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook 5ATAF 09/07/95, 1823Z, 1900Z, 1930Z, 2000Z, 2015Z, 2144Z.

¹⁵⁵⁶ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87304, File 3300-SRE Vol. I, 1 Jul - 16 Nov 95. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 09/07/95, No. Z-1122; DCBC, 607. UN HQ DPKO Situation Center to Members UN Security Council, 09/07/95, 1925NYT.

¹⁵⁵⁷ DCBC, Box 59. Overview of Citations Logbook Air Operations Control Center, Annex A to Klu Answers to Questions by the Chamber Srebrenica,

¹⁵⁵⁸ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/09/99.

¹⁵⁵⁹ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99. In *NRC Handelsblad* of 26/08/95 De Jonge was quoted to have said: ‘We did not consider the safety of the men. Not for one minute. We did not philosophise about ‘acceptable risks’ – that is a political concept and I do not know what it means.’

¹⁵⁶⁰ Debriefing statement Lieutenant Colonel J.A.C. de Ruiter, 27/09/95.

as the availability of Close Air Support. According to De Ruiter, Karremans dismissed the Close Air Support with the words, 'That will only result in an escalation of the situation.'¹⁵⁶¹

In the event of the VRS firing on a blocking position, the normal Rules of Engagement dictated that fire could be returned in self defence. According to Nicolai in Sarajevo, Janvier wanted to implement an intermediary step between letters of protest and the deployment of air power in the form of a return of fire by Dutchbat with surface-to-surface weapons. According to Nicolai that strategy had been discussed with Karremans. In the event of a real threat of Srebrenica falling into Bosnian-Serb hands, or in the event of the VRS firing directly at UNPROFOR, Dutchbat was under order to return fire. The VRS would then have to pass through or around a blocking position.¹⁵⁶² When setting up the warning to the Bosnian Serbs, Zagreb believed that Mladic would think twice before moving into the enclave. That thinking was confirmed by Lieutenant Colonel Jim Baxter, the Military Assistant to General Smith. The interpretation of the warning was however primarily a Dutch issue.¹⁵⁶³

Warning or Ultimatum?

Dutchbat was confused about the nature of the warning issued to the Bosnian Serbs. Although a warning had been issued, both Karremans and Company Commander Groen, who was in charge of the execution of the blocking positions, initially spoke of an ultimatum. The difference being that an ultimatum encompasses a time limit and consequences, while a warning does not. The *Inner Circle*, Dutchbat's internal information leaflet, also used the word ultimatum.¹⁵⁶⁴ Karremans reiterated this in a report, at the end of August 1995, to the Minister of Defence.¹⁵⁶⁵ That notwithstanding, he did later state in his book, '*srebrenica, Who Cares?*' that, in the strict sense of the word, this could not be considered an ultimatum, but only a warning.¹⁵⁶⁶ The report on the debriefing in Assen also mentions an ultimatum.¹⁵⁶⁷ The question remains as to the extent to which Karremans adjusted his judgement in retrospect. In the publication, '*Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*' ('*Dutchbat for Peace's Sake*'), Groen offers his impression of the staff meeting in which Karremans reported the directives as received from Sarajevo: 'The UN's first reaction finally came at 20.30 hours! It came in the form of an ultimatum to the VRS, and specified that all VRS troops had to have pulled back south of a line drawn about three kilometres south of the city by no later than 21.00 hours. Failure to comply with that instruction would result in a massive air strike on 10 July (the following day)!'¹⁵⁶⁸ An anonymous author wrote in the same book that 'in reaction to the VRS offensive, UNPROFOR sent the VRS an ultimatum on that same night.'¹⁵⁶⁹ The section for military-civilian contacts (in military terms: Section 5) did the same when it announced the warning early on the morning of 10 July to the commander of the 28th Division, the president of the Opstina and the mayor.¹⁵⁷⁰

Colonel Brantz in Tuzla also referred to an ultimatum even though he had been aware that a VRS attack of a blocking position would only invoke consideration of a NATO deployment.¹⁵⁷¹ Karremans also viewed the ultimatum as a promise.¹⁵⁷² That was however not justifiable, as no decision had been taken at that point regarding the deployment of Close Air Support. The warning most certainly made no mention of air strikes. In other words, there was no question of an ultimatum with

¹⁵⁶¹ NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. C-11 Pagnbat (LCol J.A.C. de Ruiter) to CDS and BLS, 07/11/95.

¹⁵⁶² Interview C.H. Nicolai, 09/07/99.

¹⁵⁶³ Interview Jim Baxter, 16/10/00.

¹⁵⁶⁴ *The Inner Circle*, No. 49, 10/07/95.

¹⁵⁶⁵ BLS Kab. Karremans to Ministry of Defence through BLS, 29/09/95.

¹⁵⁶⁶ *Srebrenica, Who Cares?*, p. 174.

¹⁵⁶⁷ See Debriefing Report §§ 3.29, 3.36.

¹⁵⁶⁸ Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 296.

¹⁵⁶⁹ Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 332.

¹⁵⁷⁰ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (93); interview W. Melchers, 23/10/00.

¹⁵⁷¹ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary, version August 1999.

¹⁵⁷² CRST, 1157. C-13 Infbat Lumbl, 15/11/95, No. TK95.213. Addressee not stated.

an associated sanction. This was clearly better understood at NATO (AFSOUTH in Naples) than by Dutchbat. To that effect, the Dutch representative at AFSOUTH, Colonel A.F. Koopmans, commented as follows on the warning to the VRS: ‘This ‘ultimatum’ will only be activated after obtaining the (renewed) permission of the UN!’¹⁵⁷³ General Nicolai also notified The Hague that no ultimatum had been issued, but that withdrawal had been demanded with an associated sanction.¹⁵⁷⁴ The point of the difference between a ‘warning’ and an ‘ultimatum’, as well as the difference between ‘Close Air Support’ and ‘air strike’, was to play an important role on the following day.

The VRS reaction to the warning, according to General Nicolai, was exactly what UNPROFOR had become accustomed to – denial that the events had occurred. The VRS invariably reacted to all threats of Close Air Support with extraordinary agitation and the statement: ‘Threaten us with Close Air Support and terrible things will happen.’ In other words, that warning made a limited or no impression at all on the Bosnian Serbs, let alone that the VRS saw it as an ultimatum. At most, the warning had had a marginal influence on VRS tactics. In a military sense, Mladic was unquestionably extremely wily and undoubtedly realised that a concentration of heavy weaponry would set his units up as a clear target. According to Nicolai, Mladic was acutely aware of his vulnerability to an airborne attack. For that reason he avoided deploying his tanks on the blocking position and, instead, orchestrated an infantry attack.¹⁵⁷⁵

The idea was that Close Air Support was the ultimate deterrent and could therefore not be deployed too soon. No direct contact was established with either Mladic, Karadzic or Milosevic regarding the warning.¹⁵⁷⁶ NATO Admiral Leighton Smith, who held the second key for Close Air Support, was not involved in drawing up the plans for the blocking positions.¹⁵⁷⁷

In short, in spite of reports to the contrary, there was never any question of a formal ultimatum with an associated sanction. According to Nicolai, General Smith had initially wanted to issue an ultimatum, but pressure from Zagreb had changed that. UNPROFOR could not afford to be manipulated into a situation similar to the events of 25 May 1995, which had led to the air strikes at Pale – that operation only yielded bad experiences. That was the reason for the conscious avoidance of the word ‘ultimatum’. An ultimatum, after all, had an irreversible character. Zagreb specifically wanted to leave itself room to manoeuvre to be able to determine the precise action at the supreme moment. Consequently, all it did was to issue a warning accompanied by a threat that, if necessary, Close Air Support would be used. The wording was carefully formulated and proposed to Zagreb. The text was edited a few times in an exchange of faxes between Zagreb and Sarajevo until a final text had been decided upon for approval by Janvier and Akashi. Zagreb had no further plans beyond the deployment of Close Air Support. In other words, there was never any question of air strikes.¹⁵⁷⁸ Zagreb never gave thought to any actions beyond Close Air Support in the event of failure on the part of the VRS to heed the warnings. Certainly there were never any plans to follow up Close Air Support with an air strike. In other words, there was no Plan B to cover the consequences of a VRS dismissal of the warning.¹⁵⁷⁹

The Hague and the Blocking Positions

No substantive consultation occurred between Dutchbat and the Netherlands Army Crisis staff on 9 July concerning the blocking positions, nor was there consultation between Dutchbat and the Defence Crisis Management Centre. As UN Commander, Karremans did not need to consult those bodies. The Hague was also not authorised to amend the instructions on the use of force. Kolsteren, from Zagreb,

¹⁵⁷³ DCBC, 625. Senior National Representative CAOC 5ATAF (Col. Koopmans), handwritten fax, 10/07/95.

¹⁵⁷⁴ Voorhoeve Diary, p. 100.

¹⁵⁷⁵ Interview C.H. Nicolai, 09/07/99.

¹⁵⁷⁶ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

¹⁵⁷⁷ Interview Leighton Smith, 06/06/00.

¹⁵⁷⁸ Interview C.H. Nicolai, 09/07/99.

¹⁵⁷⁹ Interview C.H. Nicolai, 09/07/99.

notified the Defence Crisis Management Centre about the blocking positions, and Brantz, from Tuzla, notified the Netherlands Army Crisis staff.¹⁵⁸⁰ By the end of the afternoon Nicolai communicated with Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen about the plan for the blocking positions. Nicolai thereby reported on his efforts to contact Mladic regarding the current operation. He had however only succeeded in speaking to VRS General Tolimir, who claimed to have no knowledge of the proposed attack on the city.

Nicolai also stated that he had received calls from the Bosnian Muslims, respectively, Minister Hasan Muratovic and ABiH Commander Rasim Delic. Both of the latter parties pointed out to him that the population of Srebrenica had to be protected. The impression in The Hague was that Nicolai was operating cautiously. Nicolai nevertheless warned about the prospect of a rapid collapse of the enclave. Van den Breemen also spoke to Van Kappen in New York and to Kolsteren. Via that channel the Defence Crisis Management Centre in The Hague received reports to the effect that Karremans feared that failure on the part of Dutchbat to put up resistance to the Bosnian Serbs could exacerbate Bosnian Muslim irritation; which could result in further Dutch casualties. A fatal example of that was the death of Van Renssen, which quickly assumed an important place in the reporting of the Bosnian Muslims. For example, on 9 July the office of President Izetbegovic issued a statement to the effect that NATO had not reacted to a Dutchbat request for Close Air Support after Van Renssen had been killed by 'the Serb aggressor'.

The death of rifleman Raviv van Renssen was also a gripping event for The Hague. His body arrived in the Netherlands on 9 July. Minister Voorhoeve called the Bosnian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Muhamed Sacirbey, to inform him that Van Renssen had been killed by Muslim soldiers, and to ask him to instruct the ABiH in Srebrenica not to fire on Dutchbat units. Sacirbey said that he had asked Sarajevo to instruct the ABiH not to fire at the Dutch soldiers. Voorhoeve also called Nicolai and stated that, regardless of the consequences, Close Air Support could be deployed against the VRS, as the population was threatened and the UN could not guarantee their safety. It also became clear to Voorhoeve that Karremans was extremely concerned about the VRS rocket launchers stationed north of Potocari. Karremans feared that the VRS would deploy those weapons in the event of their tanks encountering blocking positions in their way. Nicolai did not share that opinion. Nicolai and Karremans could not reach agreement on that matter.¹⁵⁸¹

In those troubled days it appeared that the Dutch allies did not wish to leave the Netherlands out in the cold. The American Ambassador in The Hague, Terry Dornbush, called Minister Van Mierlo with the announcement that the United States considered the situation in Srebrenica as extremely serious and that it was prepared to help the Netherlands. Dornbush also called Voorhoeve with the announcement that the United States would give due consideration to any requests from the Netherlands. It was not clear what the proposed aid entailed.¹⁵⁸² Dornbush's efforts seemed well intentioned; however it was clear that if the Americans were to do something, it could only be from the air, and in the framework of NATO.¹⁵⁸³

The French also enquired via Chief of Defence Staff Admiral Lanxade how Dutchbat could be assisted. Voorhoeve thereupon asked whether the French would be prepared to send in attack helicopters in the case of an emergency. The helicopters made available for the Rapid Reaction Force

¹⁵⁸⁰ SMG, 1006/18. Report of interview Colonel Smeets (Deputy Commander Netherlands Army Crisis Staff since mid May 1995), 02/08/95; DCBC, 2430. Fax DCBC to State Secretary of Defence, 091600Z Jul 95. This fax notified Gmelich Meijling that Dutchbat, in consultation with Nicolai, had occupied a blocking position and that Close Air Support had been requested of NATO.

¹⁵⁸¹ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 10/07/95, Source: Radio Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo, in Serbo-Croat 0900 GMT 09/07/95; Voorhoeve Diary, p. 99-101; interview J.J.C Voorhoeve, 15/04/97.

¹⁵⁸² Voorhoeve Diary, p. 100-101.

¹⁵⁸³ H.G.B. van den Breemen, 05/10/00.

had not been deployed in Bosnia yet. Lanxade also reported that he had put pressure on Milosevic via Generals Janvier and De Lapresle.¹⁵⁸⁴ Whether any real pressure had indeed been exerted is unknown.

It is also not known whether Milosevic had any knowledge of the continuing Bosnian-Serb offensive that resulted in the occupation of the enclave. After the fall of the enclave, Milosevic made no mention to that effect to the UN envoy Thorvald Stoltenberg – he was too much of a poker player to reveal anything.¹⁵⁸⁵ On the other hand, Milosevic did express himself clearly later, in 1996, when he dropped the question to a group of Bosnian-Serb entrepreneurs as to ‘what idiot’ had made the decision to attack Srebrenica while it hosted international troops when it was obvious that, in any event, the enclave would eventually have been bled dry or become depopulated.¹⁵⁸⁶ It is not clear to what extent that statement had been intended to clear his responsibility for those events.

Orders to B Company to Occupy the Blocking Positions

Nicolai explained the purport of the assignment for the establishment of the blocking positions to Karremans by telephone from Sarajevo and they discussed the problems related to that issue. Nicolai chose to communicate this directly to Karremans instead of via the headquarters of Sector North East in Tuzla.

Nicolai explained that, in addition to the rules for the use of Close Air Support, there was a second problem, namely that Janvier was reluctant to use the toughest means possible immediately after uttering threats of Close Air Support. For that reason it was essential, to eliminate all misunderstanding, and to create a situation that would lead to a confrontation between the Bosnian Serbs and UNPROFOR troops. The Bosnian Serbs could not be allowed to use the excuse of having been fired upon by Bosnian Muslims. It had to be clear that it was UNPROFOR that was being attacked. This entailed that Dutchbat had to make concessions with regard to their visibility in order to prevent the occurrence of any misunderstandings concerning whom the Bosnian Serbs were dealing with. If and when Dutchbat was required to use their weapons, it would be easier to get permission to use air power.¹⁵⁸⁷

Karremans claims thereupon to have told Nicolai that, in view of the mandate and the available resources, the establishment of blocking positions was not practicable. The combination of the assignment to establish blocking positions and the promise of Close Air Support did however motivate him to execute the order.¹⁵⁸⁸ Karremans did not ask for any further explanation of the order or Rules of Engagement.¹⁵⁸⁹ Karremans and Franken also did not discuss those issues subsequently.¹⁵⁹⁰

At 22.00 hours on 9 July, the telephonic directives were followed up by written directives in the form of a fax in Dutch drafted by Lieutenant-Colonel De Ruyter in Sarajevo and signed by Nicolai. The formal order thus originated directly from Sarajevo and not from the headquarters of Sector North East. The text was concise: ‘You are to use all means at your disposal to establish blocking positions to prevent further advances of VRS units in the direction of the town of Srebrenica. You are to do everything in your power to reinforce those positions, including the use of weapons.’ A note added to the order stated that the blocking position had to be recognizable from the ground. As of Monday, 10 July, Karremans could count on all ‘promised supplementary resources’.¹⁵⁹¹ That referred to Close Air Support.

¹⁵⁸⁴ Voorhoeve Diary, p. 100-101.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Interview Thorvald Stoltenberg, 22/09/00.

¹⁵⁸⁶ Interview Rajko Dukic, 14/06/00.

¹⁵⁸⁷ Interview C. H. Nicolai, 09/07/99.

¹⁵⁸⁸ CRST, 1157. C-13 Infbat Lumbl, 15/11/95, No. TK95.213. No addressee stated on letter. It forms a supplement to the answers of questions by the Chamber based on the Debriefing Report.

¹⁵⁸⁹ NIOD Coll. Karremans. Correspondence NIOD Karremans, 25/11/00.

¹⁵⁹⁰ Interview R.A. Franken, 04/05/01.

¹⁵⁹¹ SMG, Debrief, Outgoing Fax HQ UNPROFOR Sarajevo to Dutchbat, 092200B Jul 1995, No. 261/95.

Meanwhile it had also become clear to Dutchbat that the ‘line in the sand’ was to be taken almost literally. While the ‘warning’ to Mladic did not indicate the precise position of the line in the sand, the location mentioned in the telephone traffic between Sarajevo and Srebrenica was along ‘Horizontal 84’. This referred to a line on the map running approximately one and a half kilometres south of the town of Srebrenica.¹⁵⁹²

Captain Groen, the Commander of B Company, received instructions from Major Franken about the purpose of the blocking positions. Franken also indicated that the orders had come not from the battalion, but from higher authorities, and roughly amounted to the prevention of the occupation of the city by the VRS. Groen was instructed to take into account that this was considered a serious ‘green order’ (as opposed to the usual ‘blue’ UN order).¹⁵⁹³ Franken was the first to use the term ‘green order’, a term commonly used in the Royal Netherlands Army Crisis Staff.¹⁵⁹⁴ That resulted in a discussion between Groen and Franken regarding the meaning of the term. The general drift of the discussion was that the order was almost impossible to execute with the means available and that Dutchbat had been sent to Bosnia with an entirely different mission. As the discussion was being conducted via a non-secure radio channel, it was continued by telephone.¹⁵⁹⁵

Major Franken confirmed the order by fax. The fax indicated that B Company had to set up a defensive position and prevent the penetration of the VRS to the city by all means available. There was thus no misunderstanding concerning the nature of the order. The question was how this could be achieved with the means available. The tone of the order was set with the comment that it was to be taken as a ‘serious green order’. The positions had to be dug in and the blocking position ready by 05.00 hours on 10 July.¹⁵⁹⁶ The receipt of that fax did not result in further consultation.

Groen did not find it realistic to dig in, but an order was an order; which was the reason for the friction that developed during the radio communication. Groen’s side of the argument was as follows; ‘What kind of an order is that – I can’t do anything with that.’¹⁵⁹⁷

The nature of the terrain did not really permit the unit to dig in, nor were there sufficient time and other resources available. Moreover, Groen had learnt that he would be receiving reinforcements from Potocari to supplement his inadequate contingent of personnel and armoured vehicles (APCs), and that it would arrive at 04.00 hours the following morning. The instructions were summary, and everything had to be arranged as quickly as possible. By September 1995, Groen could not recall whether Dutchbat had been instructed to fire directly at the advancing VRS.¹⁵⁹⁸ Karremans said that he had instructed Groen verbally to fire over the heads of the VRS unless circumstances, such as self-defence, compelled Dutchbat to fire directly at the advancing troops. However, in view of the current circumstances, there had been no time to discuss the directives in any detail. The battalion command had not considered how the existing Rules of Engagement translated into a ‘green order’.¹⁵⁹⁹

As far as weapons were concerned, the order only stated that the APCs from Potocari had to be provided with four anti-tank weapons each (type AT-4, short range).¹⁶⁰⁰ A number of other anti-tank

¹⁵⁹² Dutchbat referred to the last line specified by the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command for the VRS Advance as Horizontal 84. Horizontal 84 was a grid line on the map that passed approximately one-and-a-half kilometres south of the city. (SMG,1007/25. Debriefing Report Captain Groen, Kamp Pleso, 22/07/95). De Ruiter referred to Horizontal 84.5 (500 metres north along first houses). (SMG, 1006/18. Report of telephone conversation [SMG] with Lieutenant Colonel A. de Ruiter, 03/08/95).

¹⁵⁹³ Confidential information (15).

¹⁵⁹⁴ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Correspondence NIOD-Karremans, 25/11/00.

¹⁵⁹⁵ Interview L.C. van Duijn, 02/07/99.

¹⁵⁹⁶ Fax Maj. Franken to Capt. Groen, 09/07/95 19:53, printed in Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 338.

¹⁵⁹⁷ Interview Captain J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

¹⁵⁹⁸ Confidential information (81). According to Captain W. Melchers it was Major Franken who, on 9 July, determined that they had to shoot over the heads of the VRS at first (interview, 23/10/00).

¹⁵⁹⁹ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Correspondence NIOD-Karremans, 25/11/00.

¹⁶⁰⁰ Fax Maj. Franken to Capt. Groen, 09/07/95 19:53, printed in Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 338.

weapons were also available for the blocking positions and a number of those were taken to the blocking positions.¹⁶⁰¹ There were however several problems around those anti-tank weapons.

Dutchbat Ammunition for the Blocking Positions

The only weapons capable of having any real effect on advancing VRS tanks were the TOW and Dragon anti-tank missiles. Dutchbat had brought TOW and Dragon missile launchers to Bosnia for emergency purposes.¹⁶⁰² Of those, six TOW and eighteen Dragon launchers were in Srebrenica, while the rest were outside the enclave in Simin Han. At the time of the fall of the enclave, however, only three of the TOW missile launchers were still usable. One had been broken and several more lost during the occupation of OP-F and OP-D by the Bosnian Serbs.¹⁶⁰³ Both of those weapons systems are wire-operated systems,¹⁶⁰⁴ whereby the operator has to aim at the target through a sight. The TOW has a maximum range of three kilometres, and the Dragon, one kilometre. In addition, Dutchbat had a number of AT-4 anti-tank missiles for use over shorter ranges.

The TOW was the main anti-tank weapon and best suited for use in the terrain around Srebrenica; however it yielded problems from the word go. Already in March 1994, the American Army had advised against the continued use of TOWs of a specific series, as they presented battery problems.¹⁶⁰⁵ The Director of Materiel of the Royal Netherlands Army had banned the use of the TOWs.¹⁶⁰⁶ TOW missiles had been flown in from the Netherlands to replace the TOWs in Dutchbat's possession. There were 135 missiles.¹⁶⁰⁷ Closure of the enclave had however prevented the exchange.

Dutchbat's only alternative was to smuggle the TOWs into the enclave in deep-freeze containers, however it is not clear whether that did in fact happen. Both the Netherlands Army Crisis staff and Dutchbat were secretive about this at the time.¹⁶⁰⁸ It appears more likely to have happened at the start of the Dutchbat period than during period of Dutchbat III. Captain W. Melchers, who was responsible for supplies in the first months of Dutchbat III, had not been aware of TOWs reaching the enclave. Considering the size of the boxes in which the TOWs were transported, Karremans too was uncertain as to the possibility of that having happened.¹⁶⁰⁹ The Hague, in any event, was not informed as to the presence of usable missiles in the enclave.

Maintenance of the TOW missiles was also a problem, as they had to be tested every 180 days with a special test instrument.¹⁶¹⁰ Later that period was stretched to 360 days.¹⁶¹¹ The test equipment was not included in Dutchbat's equipment.¹⁶¹² Defective TOWs could not be repaired at the Support Command in Lukavac (outside the enclave) once they had left the enclave, as the maintenance group

¹⁶⁰¹ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (53); interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99. According to Karremans the blocking position only had four AT-4s. (*Srebrenica. Who Cares?* p. 182). Captain P.J. Hageman mentioned two Dragons and six AT-4s. (Information based on confidential debriefing statement (37).

¹⁶⁰² BSG, doss. DV 1993. Memo of Deputy Chief of Operational Affairs to the Minister through CDS, 30/11/93, no number.

¹⁶⁰³ SMG, 1007/25. Debriefing Captain Hageman, 22/07/95.

¹⁶⁰⁴ A thin wire continued to connect the launcher and the missile after launch – this enables guidance of the missile.

¹⁶⁰⁵ SMG, 1005. Internal Memorandum DMKL MUN/SMV/Hfd Bur Behoeft Bepaling to Log Base Split, 06/04/94, No. Mun/1841/94.

¹⁶⁰⁶ SMG, 1005. Internal Memorandum DMKL/Dept Mun Sie Matvzg to RNLA Crisis Staff G-4 Exec, 31/03/94, No. SMV/MUN/001/94.

¹⁶⁰⁷ SMG, 1005. Fax RNLA Crisis Staff G-4 Exec to 812 Transport Group, 05/03/94, No. Vleid/0604/001.

¹⁶⁰⁸ SMG, 1004. Report on interview Lieutenant Colonel E.G.M. Otterloo with SMG, 31/07/95. Also see SMG 1006/18. De Ruyter Report, 01/08/95.

¹⁶⁰⁹ Interview Captain W. Melchers, 23/10/00; NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Correspondence NIOD-Karremans, 25/11/00.

¹⁶¹⁰ SMG, 1005. Fax C-1(NL) UNPROFOR SPT CMD to Crisis Staff G4 Exec, 16/05/94, No. 715.

¹⁶¹¹ SMG, 1005. Fax C-1(NL) UNPROFOR SPT CMD to Crisis Staff G4 Exec, 15/11/94, No. 761.

¹⁶¹² SMG, 1005. Fax C-1(NL) UNPROFOR SPT CMD to Crisis Staff G4 Exec, 08/06/94, No. 762.

there was not qualified to do so.¹⁶¹³ The Netherlands Army Crisis staff thought that the tests, which had to be performed every 180 days, could simply be performed by the battalion; however, the Director of Materiel of the Royal Netherlands Army stated that this was not possible as it was not a simple test.¹⁶¹⁴ The Director therefore would not agree to the tests being conducted by Dutchbat or the Support Command.¹⁶¹⁵ Consequently, if they could only be tested there, the defective TOWs could not be used for more than three months due to the long circulation times between Srebrenica and the Netherlands.¹⁶¹⁶

Karremans, who returned in October 1994 from a reconnaissance trip in Srebrenica, reported to the Netherlands Army Crisis staff that there were problems with the TOW control systems, as a result of which not all weapons systems were deployable. He proposed that new control units be sent in with the rotation of Dutchbat III. The Netherlands Army Crisis staff then established via a non-secure phone line that three of the launchers in Srebrenica were deployable and three were not.¹⁶¹⁷

A new exchange of TOWs was therefore put on the agenda for March 1995.¹⁶¹⁸ That turned out to be impossible due to the blockade of the enclave.

After a visit to Srebrenica, the Chief of Defence Staff, Van den Breemen, reported in April 1995 to Minister Voorhoeve that no certainty could be established regarding the use of the TOWs and Dragons.¹⁶¹⁹ At the same time Karremans let the Netherlands Army Crisis staff know that the usability of his TOW and Dragon missiles was 'extremely debatable' due to the absence of the testing equipment. Furthermore, due to poor storage conditions, there was a possibility of moisture defects in the TOWs.¹⁶²⁰ The TOW missiles were fitted with an indicator that jumped from green to red to indicate that it was no longer suitable for use. The Dragon had similar problems and lacked aiming devices.¹⁶²¹

The limited amount and quality of the TOW ammunition was also a point of concern for the Defence Crisis Management Control Centre.¹⁶²² The Hague was however incapable of providing a solution. The only development in that respect was that, in May 1995, the ban of the use of the TOW missiles (rejected in April 1994 and still in the enclave) was restated with the addition that the missiles were not to be used under any circumstances.¹⁶²³ After the fall of the enclave, Franken, during the debriefing, stated in Zagreb that the TOWs had still been 50% reliable.¹⁶²⁴ There was no certainty regarding the state of the Dragons. Karremans could not remember.¹⁶²⁵

In retrospect, advanced weapons, such as anti-tank missiles, were in fact more of a hindrance than a help when it was found (due to the closure of the enclave) that the logistical systems needed to guarantee the usability of the weapons could not be put into practise. It was also impossible to maintain or exchange the equipment. Weapons experts advised against the use of the missiles in the strongest

¹⁶¹³ SMG, 1005. Notes DMKL Man Bwpn supplemented by fax RNLA Crisis Staff G-4 Exec to 1(NL) UN SPTCMD, 17/06/94, No. 3644/32.

¹⁶¹⁴ SMG, 1005. Internal Memorandum DMKL Bureau Bewapening, Systeemgroep Matdienstgoederen, Dept. Manoeuvre/Sectie Bewapening, Project Officer TOW to Log Vrbrd, 18/11/94, no number.

¹⁶¹⁵ CRST. Fax RNLA Crisis Staff G-4 Exec to Head G4 RNLA Crisis Staff and 1(NL) UN SPTCOMD S3, 29/11/94, No. 4929/32.

¹⁶¹⁶ SMG, 1005. Fax C-1(NL) UNPROFOR SPT CMD to Crisis Staff G4 Exec, 15/11/94, No. 761.

¹⁶¹⁷ CRST. Internal Memorandum RNLA Crisis Staff to S4 Dutchbat, 28/10/94, No. CRST/1172 and notes.

¹⁶¹⁸ SMG, No. 1005. Fax RNLA Crisis Staff G-4 Exec to LSO Bevo 1(NL) UN SPTCOMD S3, 29/11/94, No. 4929/32.

¹⁶¹⁹ DS. Memo Chief of Staff of Defence to the Minister and State Secretary, 06/04/95, No. S05/061/1517.

¹⁶²⁰ CRST. Fax C 1(NL) UN INFBAT to Commander Crisis Staff, 10/04/95, No. 089.

¹⁶²¹ SMG, 1006/18. Report of visit [SMG] Colonel Lemmen (plv C-11 Lumbl), 03/08/95.

¹⁶²² DCBC, 2379. Verslag bunkeroverleg DCBC, dated 21/04/95.

¹⁶²³ SMG, 1005. Fax RNLA Crisis Staff G-4 Exec to H/G4 RNLA Crisis Staff, S4 1 (NL) UN INFBT, Maj. Franken, 31/05/95, No. 5759/3144.

¹⁶²⁴ SMG, 1007/23. Debriefing report Major Franken, Kamp Pleso, 22/07/95. 32 packed TOW missiles and 6 Dragons were reportedly taken back to Zagreb (SMG 1004/37).

¹⁶²⁵ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Correspondence NIOD-Karremans, 25/11/00.

possible terms due to the danger of premature detonation and problems related to the directional stability of the missiles.

Ammunition was a general problem. The Netherlands Army Crisis staff was unable to establish the exact supplies available in the enclave. The battalion reports offered little useful information. Relations between the officials in charge in the enclave and those in the Netherlands, namely, Major Franken and Lieutenant Colonel E.G.M. Otterloo of the logistical section of the Netherlands Army Crisis staff, were not optimal. Otterloo had attempted on several occasions to contact Franken by phone to offer his services, but he claimed Franken refused to provide him with useful information. As a result, The Hague did not have a very thorough impression of the types and supplies of ammunition available in the enclave.¹⁶²⁶ Dutchbat stated that only 16% of the usual ammunition supplies were available.¹⁶²⁷ That number was established during the rotation of Dutchbat II and III in January 1995. It is assumed that the number was a mathematical average of all available types of ammunition.¹⁶²⁸ The officer in charge of equipment (Chief G-4) of Sector North East in Tuzla also failed to obtain the data and reported the following: 'The unit has not been able to give me the figures of the ammo [ammunition] level. Their general answer is that the ammo level is low, but they have enough for self defence.'¹⁶²⁹

The inventory figures for the various types of ammunition was unavailable. The Netherlands Army Crisis staff thought that the percentage must have been somewhere around 54%. The logistical battalion provided those figures in spite of the fact that they were considered incomplete. It is conceivable that the ammunition available to A Company in Simin Han could have made a difference. That company had sufficient ammunition to allow target practise.¹⁶³⁰ The Hague also did not know how many of the blocked series of TOWs were still in Srebrenica. A request from The Hague to determine this remained unanswered. When, in May 1995, an warrant officer of the logistical section of the Netherlands Army Crisis staff visited the enclave and could not return, Franken denied permission for further logistical data gathering. This could have had something to do with the fact that a lot of equipment had been lost (for more information on this, see the chapter entitled 'The departure of Dutchbat from Srebrenica').¹⁶³¹

Advanced weaponry also posed a problem for the ABiH, who had some anti-tank weapons, but were unskilled in the use and technology of the weapons. A reasonable number of RPG-7 (short range) anti-tank weapons were available in the enclave. Dutchbat noticed that the ABiH sometimes used RPG-7s, which were designed for ranges of up to three hundred metres, at ranges of up to a thousand metres. According to Company Commander Groen this was partially due to ignorance and partially due to the need to show off their courage, as merely firing the weapons constituted an act of valour.¹⁶³²

The ABiH had been in possession of 'Red Arrow' anti-tank weapons since 1994. There were two types of Red Arrow; the Red Arrow 8 (from China) and the older Red Arrow 73 (a licensed Soviet AT-3 Sagger). The Red Arrow 8 had superior aiming devices, a greater hit rate and superior penetration capability. Aiming at the target was determined by following the infrared radiation of the missile and wire-guided corrections. The chance of hitting a moving target was slim without training and regular simulator practice. Both weapons weigh more than eleven kilograms, are launched from a tripod-based launching device, and have a maximum range of three thousand metres.¹⁶³³

¹⁶²⁶ SMG, 1004. Report interview Lt-Col E.G.M. Otterloo, 31/07/95.

¹⁶²⁷ This number is used consistently. Also see Memorandum resupply Dutchbat, no date, which indicates that 16% was only adequate for defence over a period of 24 hours against a non-mechanised opponent (DCBC, 436) and Karremans' testimony to the Tribunal on 03/07/96 (Case No. IT-95-18-R61).

¹⁶²⁸ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Correspondence NIOD-Karremans, 25/11/00.

¹⁶²⁹ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. HQ Sector North East Memo Chief G4 to CO, DCO, A/COS, Chief G2/G3, 15/06/95.

¹⁶³⁰ SMG, 1006/18. Report interview De Ruyter, 01/08/95.

¹⁶³¹ SMG, 1004. Report interview Lt-Col E.G.M. Otterloo with SMG, 31/07/95. Shortages that started with Dutchbat I had accumulated to 12.6 million guilders.

¹⁶³² Interview J. R. Groen, 05/07/99.

¹⁶³³ MID/KL. DOKL, Intelligence and Security Section, WeekINTSUM No. 11/94, 15 March - 21 March 1994. Confi.

The most recent Red Arrows were smuggled into the enclave in the spring of 1995. No one in the enclave had however been trained in the use of the Red Arrow. The instructions were printed in English and had been translated by two (NBI) UN interpreters by order of Naser Oric. Unfortunately both the original text and the translations were subsequently lost. On 6 July the 28th Division received new instructions for the preparation and use of the Red Arrow via the military communication channels with Tuzla.¹⁶³⁴

The limitations of the 28th Division's knowledge of the weapon was illustrated when, in May, a missile was assembled and fired off by accident. Three men were injured when the missile was penetrated into the wall in the location where they were working. Fortunately the explosive charge had not yet been attached to the rocket. On 9 July the ABiH attempted to deploy the missile against one of the tanks that was shelling the city from Pribicevac. The rocket flew high into the air and hit some trees. A second rocket smashed into the ground a few hundred metres away. When loading a third missile, it was discovered that the trigger mechanism had broken down, as a result of which the launching mechanism was no longer usable. Consequently the ABiH branded the Red Arrow unreliable. At that point they still had eleven missiles.¹⁶³⁵

Dutchbat's Views of the Blocking Positions

After receipt of the order, Captain Groen and his deputy analysed the best ways to execute the order. His deputy, Captain P.J. Hageman, had been assigned by Franken as Commander of the blocking positions. The job was to be done with six APCs and fifty infantrymen. Zagreb on the other hand had assumed that at least 120 soldiers had been available.¹⁶³⁶ However, the maximum number of infantry personnel the battalion could scrape together was fifty. Of the remaining 430 Dutchbaters, only about two hundred were infantry - the rest were support or medical personnel. The 200 remaining infantry men were, at that point, manning the OPs.¹⁶³⁷

Groen was concerned that, if Dutchbat sided too openly with the ABiH and fired on the Bosnian Serbs, the VRS would consider Dutchbat an enemy. That would undermine the impartiality of the UN and their principal task, namely, the protection of the population. It was important that the VRS continued to view Dutchbat as a neutral UN unit and not as a combatant. Groen thought that he could achieve that by setting up the blocking positions between the VRS and the population. Groen had previously tried at the OPs to prevent Dutchbat from choosing sides, and wanted to maintain that position in the implementation of the blocking positions. He planned to use this strategy to prevent casualties amongst the population.¹⁶³⁸

The order, as formulated on paper by Major Franken, was therefore not formulated in exactly the same way by Groen in his orders to his own subordinates – and consequently not executed in exactly the same way. The alternative execution therefore appeared to be due as much to poor briefing from higher authorities as it was due to Groen's own decisions - his plan being to gather as much information as possible. If the blocking positions were to have become location bound in combat with the VRS, the Dutchbaters would have lost sight of the extended terrain. As a result, the lieutenants were not instructed to prevent the advance of the VRS into the city by all means available, as it was as clear to Groen and most of the others concerned that this was not a viable strategy using the blocking positions.¹⁶³⁹ Accordingly, Groen's orders were as follows: Try to determine where the VRS were

¹⁶³⁴ MID, CD-ROMs. ABiH 2. Korpusa to Komandi 28. D Kov, 06/07/95, Str. pov. br. 02/1-700/2.

¹⁶³⁵ Rohde, *Endgame*, p. 71.

¹⁶³⁶ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 88040, File 4-2, SRSG Meeting, May-Oct 95. Senior Staff Meeting, 10/07/95.

¹⁶³⁷ See Rohde, *Endgame*, p. 400, n. 2. Groen missed 40 of his 147-strong company - 42 were at the OPs, 10 were on guard duty, 19 went to the blocking position. The rest were staff, kitchen, communication or administrative personnel or Ops Room staff.

¹⁶³⁸ See Report Groen in Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 296.

¹⁶³⁹ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

planning to enter the enclave, where they were heading and along which route. Dutchbat was not supposed to engage in combat with the VRS, as the battalion was insufficiently equipped. Moreover, they could not afford to be pinned down by the VRS.¹⁶⁴⁰

Groen's interpretation of the order was therefore to prevent an escalation of the conflict as much as possible and, if possible, to try to de-escalate. Only in the case of a direct attack were they authorised to act in self-defence as deemed necessary. That was in compliance with the prevalent Rules of Engagement, and no one had determined that those rules no longer applied. For a number of days Dutchbat had been under heavy fire, a few OPs had been occupied and a number of personnel had been taken hostage. The situation was threatening to escalate and in Groen's view the VRS were about to occupy the enclave – unless Close Air Support were deployed. Understandably the whole of Dutchbat was under the impression that Close Air Support was coming. The prevailing view was that there was little else that could save the enclave from VRS occupation. In the absence of Close Air Support, the occupation of the enclave could assume two forms: With a great number of casualties or with (relatively) few casualties. In Groen's view very little could be done against the VRS offensive with a .50 machine gun (the heaviest weapon) and a number of ineffective anti-tank weapons. Groen could not recall whether there had been any further consultation with the battalion staff on the issue of the Rules of Engagement. Groen drew the conclusion as to the validity of the prevalent rules based on the circumstances and after consultation with his deputy, Hageman.¹⁶⁴¹ The battalion staff had in fact not expressed any alternative views to Groen at that point.¹⁶⁴²

Groen saw the order to 'prevent penetration of the VRS to the city' as an extremely difficult assignment. What were they to do if the VRS were to pay no heed to the blocking positions? The risk was substantial that the situation could escalate if the VRS deployed the heavy equipment positioned around the enclave. It would also result in a high mortality rate amongst the population. The VRS had previously shown themselves undeterred by prospects of attacks on the population. Apart from the unreliability of the anti-tank weapons, Groen, in retrospect, questioned when they could have been deployed and what possible goal might have been achieved thereby. Eliminating a single vehicle would be a temporary success – followed by what?¹⁶⁴³ It was by no means certain that the VRS would not fire directly at the blocking positions. Generally speaking, VRS fire on Dutchbat had been intimidating and often struck so close to vehicles and buildings that it was debatable whether they had been intentional misses.¹⁶⁴⁴ In one past instance of potential use of the TOW anti-tank weapons at the OPs, the directive was only to fire those weapons in the case of a direct assault on the OPs. In those instances, the use of the TOW would not only have resulted in an escalation, but would have resembled suicide, as, in that instance, the operator would have had to fire the missile from the exposed vantage point of the OP roof.¹⁶⁴⁵ No mobile systems were available for the heavy TOW launchers. Safe aiming, firing and guidance of those missiles should preferably occur from under armour. Due to the time-consuming reloading procedure, it was further desirable to work in pairs.

Groen thus instructed his personnel at the blocking positions to fire the first rounds over the heads of the VRS. Only in the event of the VRS firing directly at the personnel, or if considered necessary for self-preservation or to enable a retreat were they authorised to fire directly at the VRS – and then only at the discretion of the officer in charge on the spot. Personnel had to await an explicit order to fire anywhere other than over the heads of the VRS.¹⁶⁴⁶ Hageman afterwards said that the order should have entailed direct fire. In consultation with Groen, he came to the conclusion at the time that it was not really practicable. The method should have been, initially, to fire over the VRS heads, but

¹⁶⁴⁰ Interview L.C. van Duijn, 02/07/99.

¹⁶⁴¹ Confidential information (81).

¹⁶⁴² NIOD, Coll. Karremans, Correspondence NIOD-Karremans, 25/11/00.

¹⁶⁴³ Interview J. R. Groen, 05/07/99.

¹⁶⁴⁴ Confidential information (81).

¹⁶⁴⁵ SMG, 1007/25. Debriefing report Captain Groen, 22/07/95.

¹⁶⁴⁶ Interview L.C. van Duijn, 02/07/99.

thereafter to fire directly at the advancing forces. Consequently, the soldiers were instructed only to release direct fire in the case of self defence.¹⁶⁴⁷ Captain C.J. Matthijssen also did not instruct his units assigned to the blocking positions to fire directly at the VRS. He also instructed his troops to fire over the VRS heads if necessary.¹⁶⁴⁸ Captain Melchers recalled that Major Franken had in fact determined that already during the O-group.¹⁶⁴⁹

Because a broken down APC had to be exchanged during the setting up of the blocking positions, Hageman had to return to the compound in Srebrenica and Groen once again discussed the situation there with him. Even then the brief was to prevent an escalation, keep a focus on the VRS to prevent the Bosnian Serbs from advancing around the blocking positions, and to serve as a shield between the population and the VRS. Meanwhile, it transpired that the VRS desisted from firing directly at the blocking positions wherever it was not deemed strictly necessary. From that Groen and Hageman concluded that the VRS would also not fire at the population - as long as the blocking positions remained between the population and the VRS.¹⁶⁵⁰ To the question as to when Dutchbat could relinquish their positions in the blocking positions, Groen and Hageman responded that this could only happen if the ABiH (which was considered unpredictable) gave up the battle, APCs were threatened, or the VRS attempted to bypass the blocking position and no Close Air Support was forthcoming.¹⁶⁵¹ If Dutchbat were to notice an (impending) attack on the city, B Company would attempt to evacuate the civilians from the city in the direction of Potocari, which was still relatively peaceful.¹⁶⁵²

Although Hageman had been designated commander of the blocking positions, it was Groen who pulled the strings by radio from the compound in Srebrenica. Groen was at all times to be found in the B-Company Ops Room - he led the action from there and coordinated all movements. Groen did not assign a dedicated radio frequency to the blocking positions but used the company network. The aim was to ensure that all reports from the OPs could reach every vehicle. In that way all personnel would remain thoroughly informed at all times - even in the case of interference in the mountainous terrain. Moreover, this enabled Groen to maintain direct communications with all APCs in case Hageman's signal was lost. It also enabled him to consult the APC commanders directly. Due to the loss of OP-U, OP-S and OP-F, the nachonet would not be overburdened.¹⁶⁵³

Groen viewed Hageman as his eyes in the field and instructed him to reconnoitre and report as much as possible, especially as it was not possible to keep an overview of the terrain from a single vantage point. Groen also remained in constant contact with Franken.¹⁶⁵⁴ Although this gave Groen the feeling that he had not been abandoned by the staff, it was clear that now that things were really heating up there was very little they could actually do for him. He therefore realised that he had to do the job on his own.¹⁶⁵⁵ Franken was in charge of all combat operations related to the blocking positions¹⁶⁵⁶ and he also dealt with the radio communications. Although Karremans was present in the Ops Room, one of the members of the Operations Section was amazed to find the Deputy Battalion Commander leading operations in such a critical situation. As a result, a rumour did the rounds to the effect that it would have been better had the commander been heard on the radio from time to time.¹⁶⁵⁷

¹⁶⁴⁷ SMG, 1007/25. Debriefing Captain Hageman, 22/07/95.

¹⁶⁴⁸ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (41).

¹⁶⁴⁹ Interview W. Melchers, 23/10/00.

¹⁶⁵⁰ Interview J. R. Groen, 05/07/99.

¹⁶⁵¹ SMG, 1007/25. Debriefing Captain Hageman, 22/07/95.

¹⁶⁵² See Report Groen in Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 297.

¹⁶⁵³ Interview J. R. Groen, 05/07/99.

¹⁶⁵⁴ SMG, 1007/25. Debriefing report Captain Groen, 22/07/95.

¹⁶⁵⁵ Confidential information (81).

¹⁶⁵⁶ SMG 1007/25. Debriefing Capt. Wieffer S-2/Ops Room, 22/07/95.

¹⁶⁵⁷ SMG 1007/25. Debriefing Sergeant Major Van Meer, assistant S3, 22/07/95.

10. The Early Morning Hours of 10 July: Dutchbat Activities at the Blocking Positions

The task of occupying the blocking positions had thus been assigned to B Company with the support of C Company in Potocari. C Company supported B Company with four APCs for the blocking positions. Initially four, and later six APCs stood by with the still available ammunition and fuel for the blocking positions. This so-called Quick Reaction Force was the battalion reserve that had been assembled after the fall of OP-E in case the newly established OP-S and OP-U were to have been in danger. To prepare for that kind of assignment, the unit intensively reconnoitred and tested several locations.¹⁶⁵⁸ The platoon commanders and their deputies investigated possible positions for the APCs. The positions were located close to the roads and commanded a good view of the terrain. The positions had only been reconnoitred, not prepared. The soil condition did not permit trench digging and, in any event, there was insufficient fuel and equipment available to do so. The aim was therefore to establish the blocking positions on locations that had previously been reconnoitred.

The battalion reserve or Quick Reaction Force thus departed from Potocari at 03.15 hours on 10 July under the command of First Lieutenant V.B. Egbers. In fact Egbers was the Deputy Commander, as the Commander of the Quick Reaction Force was First Lieutenant E.C.M.J. Koster. The Battalion Staff however kept Koster in Potocari to organise the rotation of the battalion. Egbers was profoundly surprised by the fact that the commander had been ordered to stay behind on the very first call for action on the part of the Quick Reaction Force. Koster and Egbers had specifically trained together to that end.¹⁶⁵⁹ Koster had superior 'track experience', but because of his engagement with the organisation of the rotation, Franken had designated Hageman as Commander of the blocking positions instead of him.¹⁶⁶⁰ An extra team was also formed in C Company for the blocking positions.¹⁶⁶¹ On the evening of 9 July, Company Commander Matthijssen came with the following announcement: 'We have been asked to support the Bravo Company with the blocking positions. Volunteers?' For a few moments they stared at one another sheepishly before Lieutenant Van Duijn and a few others volunteered.¹⁶⁶² Initially a Forward Air Controller did not accompany this group.

Little documentation is available that reflect the ideas and expectations of the personnel assigned the task of setting up the blocking positions. According to Sergeant 1st Class A.A. Batalona of B Company, everyone accepted the mission and no-one really argued. Dutchbat counted on NATO support and did not believe that the VRS had any intentions of harming Dutchbat personnel. On the other hand, Soldier 1st Class S. Veer of the Maintenance Unit, who had also been sent to the blocking positions, declared in October 1995 that at the time he had thought that he had been 'sent to his death'.¹⁶⁶³

The objective was to establish four blocking positions. The naming of the blocking positions was complicated, primarily due to the fact that the blocking position personnel were continuously relocating during the hectic situation. Where the text below refers to any specific blocking position (Bravo 1 through 4), it refers to the original location of the blocking position as indicated on the map entitled 'Fighting between 6-12 July 1995'. In instances where the personnel and APC of one of the blocking positions moved to another location, this is indicated using the phrase 'the personnel of the applicable blocking position'. The locations of the four blocking positions as originally intended are indicated with a cross on the map, 'Fighting between 6-12 July 1995'. To provide an overview of the account, the following table represents the original positions. The table exclusively relates to the

¹⁶⁵⁸ Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, pp. 274-275. According to Captain Wieffer, Dutchbat II had reconnoitred all those positions. (Debriefing, 22/07/95).

¹⁶⁵⁹ Interview V.B. Egbers, 02/09/99.

¹⁶⁶⁰ SMG, 1007/23. Debriefing Major Franken, 22/07/95.

¹⁶⁶¹ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (39).

¹⁶⁶² Interview L.C. van Duijn, 02/07/99.

¹⁶⁶³ *Algemeen Dagblad*, 14/10/95.

situation on 10 July. It represents the initial location of the blocking positions, the commanders featuring in the account and the blocking position, and the number of vehicles (APCs) allocated to each blocking position. The blocking position, Bravo 2,¹⁶⁶⁴ was left out of this diagram (it was originally the first blocking position on the road between Zeleni Jadar and Srebrenica). This location served no practical purpose, as the overview from Bravo 4 (somewhat further down that route) was superior (see below).

The blocking positions as per 10 July:

Blocking position	Commanders/ <i>FAC</i>	Location	APCs
Bravo 1	Egbers	Stupine (west of Srebrenica)	2
Bravo 3	Van Duijn	At OP-H, (east of Srebrenica)	1
Bravo 4	Mustert	Hairpin bend on road between Zeleni Jadar – Srebrenica, at Height 424	2

The following information supplements the data available in the table. The Commander of the blocking positions, Hageman, was not always present in any of the blocking positions up front but spent most of the time in a APC (the sixth) on the edge of the city. There were also a number of Forward Air Controllers in the area - Voskamp at Bravo 1, and a number of Forward Air Controllers not bound to specific blocking positions. The latter group consisted of Dutchbat commandos, the British Joint Commission Observers (JCOs) assigned to the battalion, and a reserve commando unit that remained in the compound. On 10 July, the commandos and JCOs were initially located at OP-H, and later at Height 469 (west of Srebrenica, one kilometre north of Bravo 1).

Bravo 1 was located at a position at Stupine on the high ground west of the town of Srebrenica. That position provided a good view of the route descending from Zeleni Jadar to the city. The positions for Bravo 4 (and Bravo 2) were located in two hairpin bends located on the latter route. Bravo 3 was located at the position of OP-H east of Srebrenica on the road descending from Kvarac (1013 metres) via Crni Guber with a steep descent to the city. The route to the city was less visible from Bravo 2 than from Bravo 1. This was due to the fact that Bravo 2 had been located on a ridge and presented vehicles as easy targets. Bravo 2 was located about one kilometre ahead of Bravo 4 and would have formed the first obstacle to the VRS on their way down. As the position of Bravo 2 could be covered from the position of Bravo 4, blocking position Bravo 2 was cancelled in practise.

In the night of 9 to 10 July the APCs first moved from Potocari to the compound in Srebrenica. After the Deputy Commander of the Quick Reaction Force, Lieutenant Egbers, reported to Captain Groen with his four APCs, Groen explained that he had no view of the southern section of the enclave as all of the OPs in the area had been rolled up. Groen was not sure exactly where the VRS were at the time and found it most disturbing that the VRS could have advanced on the gates of the city before anyone had realised it. Consequently, the blocking positions had to be occupied quickly. Egbers was further instructed to make sure not to become engaged in the ABiH defence lines, as Groen feared that Dutchbat would be held there - which was not the intention.¹⁶⁶⁵ Groen directed Lieutenant Van Duijn to the position of Bravo 3 as he had a sound knowledge of the area.¹⁶⁶⁶

Groen also consulted with the British JCOs regarding suitable positions for the Forward Air Controllers. Groen wanted to establish two Tactical Air Control Parties: one Forward Air Controller (Voskamp) at Bravo 1 to cover the western flank, and a Forward Air Controller from the JCOs for the eastern flank at the location of Bravo 3 at OP-H. The JCOs then asked for the assistance of the commando's from Dutchbat's reconnaissance platoon. Franken agreed to that.¹⁶⁶⁷

In the early hours of the morning of 10 July, Forward Air Controller Sergeant Voskamp reported to Franken in the Ops Room (the command post) in Potocari, where Karremans too was

¹⁶⁶⁴ Bravo 2 is also referred to as Bravo 1A.

¹⁶⁶⁵ Interview V.B. Egbers, 02/09/99.

¹⁶⁶⁶ Interview L.C. van Duijn, 02/07/99.

¹⁶⁶⁷ SMG, 1007/23. Debriefing report Major Franken, 22/07/95.

present. He was instructed to accompany the second NCO Forward Air Controller directly to Bravo 1 and to prepare for possible Close Air Support. According to Voskamp, Franken emphasised that their personal safety was the top priority.

At the moment the APC was about to leave the compound in Potocari, it was fired upon with grenades. Voskamp's colleague Forward Air Controller collapsed. He panicked and refused to go along. Franken talked to the Controller concerned, but he was beyond persuasion and had to receive medical care. After that disruption, Voskamp, who was by then the only remaining Forward Air Controller, left the compound at Potocari with his driver in the APC en route to the position of Bravo 1. Halfway to their destination, the APC broke down, because, due to the excitement, the driver had forgotten to remove the canvas covers from the engine, as a result of which it overheated. They used water from jerry cans to cool the engine, but despite all their efforts they were unable to restart the engine. After a radio report to the compound in Srebrenica they were picked up by a Jeep (not a APC) from B Company. As a result Voskamp could only take his most important equipment. He accompanied the driver to the position of Bravo 1, where Lieutenant Egbers' APC was visible on a hill. The team consisting of the commandos and JCOs were visible on another hill.¹⁶⁶⁸ Voskamp did not realise at that time that the commandos and JCOs, like himself, would become active as Forward Air Controllers.

Consequently, in addition to the Dutchbat Forward Air Controller, there were also the Forward Air Controller from the commandos and the British JCOs in the southern section of the enclave.

At around 05.00 hours all three blocking positions to be established in practise, were in position at Bravo 1, 3 and 4, and awaiting further events. At first light, at 04.30 hours, the JCOs heard from Sarajevo that Close Air Support would be available at 06.00 hours with a reaction time of forty minutes between VRS action and actual Close Air Support.¹⁶⁶⁹ When the blocking positions were occupied, the potential targets for Close Air Support were visible and the weather fine. Radio contact with the Forward Air Controllers was also good. They had identified four possible targets of VRS tanks and artillery. However, at that time they were not firing at the blocking positions. It was unclear what was expected of them in the case of VRS infantry surrounding the blocking positions and entering the city on foot and without the support of tanks and artillery. At the time, as far as the Combined Arms Coordination Center (CAOC) in Vicenza was aware, no decisions had been taken to that effect. Zagreb too had had no suggestions as to an immediate course of action, and the question had never really been brought up during discussions concerning the establishment of the blocking position.¹⁶⁷⁰

Prior to the APCs departure to their blocking position, severe fighting had been reported from the front. The fighting was mostly concentrated around the strategically located Height 664 halfway between Zeleni Jadar and Srebrenica city. Thanks to fine weather, Dutchbat could see the Bosnian Serbs advance with tanks and their forces clear out the villages. The VRS systematically torched all houses scattered along the road; possibly because ABiH soldiers that were still putting up a defence had converted the houses into defensive positions. The pattern was to fire a grenade through the roof of the house and to open machine-gun fire on anyone escaping from the house. This pattern made it easy to observe the movements of the VRS, as house after house went up in flames. The fighting between the ABiH and VRS could be followed simply by listening to the gunfire. The precise strength of the VRS was hard to estimate. ABiH soldiers reported that a 220-strong VRS unit had entered the enclave at OP-F. Dutchbat only observed small groups of VRS infantrymen, unaccompanied by mechanised units, advancing while firing along the flanks of the hills.¹⁶⁷¹

¹⁶⁶⁸ Interview R. Voskamp, 08/10/98.

¹⁶⁶⁹ Confidential information (1).

¹⁶⁷⁰ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook CAOC 5ATAF, 10/07/95, 0355Z, 0408Z.

¹⁶⁷¹ Interviews R. Voskamp, 08/10/98 and J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

The Final Battle between the VRS and ABiH for the Enclave

At around 05.00 hours, the ABiH launched a counter offensive in the direction of Pusmulici, at the height of Zivkovo Brdo and Zeleni Jadar. Some ABiH units succeeded at Zivkovo Brdo to attack the rear of the VRS and to isolate them, while other units attacked the VRS as a decoy. The counter offensive was successful and forced the VRS to withdraw. Thus, in a few hours, the VRS lost all ground they had gained over the past few days, and the ABiH benefited from a new arms supply.¹⁶⁷² The VRS even abandoned a wounded soldier. It is unknown what fate befell the wounded soldier. Apparently two soldiers of the 283rd Brigade of the ABiH approached to within thirty metres of a VRS tank, but did not have the means to eliminate it. This led to a powerful boost of morale amongst the ABiH soldiers. At the time some hundred and fifty ABiH soldiers informed Lieutenant Mustert of their brilliant victory. They said that they were withdrawing towards Srebrenica to get some sleep. Mustert was amazed by that information.¹⁶⁷³ It appeared that either the ABiH had driven the VRS back or the VRS had withdrawn; however, Dutchbat did not have a clear view of the situation after the loss of the southern OPs.

The joy amongst the ABiH was short lived. The VRS brought reinforcements and launched a fresh assault in the afternoon. In the battles that ensued, sections of the ABiH lines were unable to withstand the assault. According to ABiH reports, there was even hand-to-hand fighting. The VRS shelled the lines forcing large numbers of ABiH soldiers to abandon their positions. That resulted in disorganisation and breaking up of units. The command structure failed and the 282nd Brigade under Ibro Dudic collapsed. The population fled, accompanied by large numbers of ABiH soldiers looking for family members. The early-morning victory of the ABiH was therefore a temporary one and could not be turned into real gain and the effect of the ABiH counter offensive was lost. The ABiH attempted to regroup and turn the tide, but by around 16.00 hours the VRS had retaken all their former positions at Bojna in the vicinity of the city.¹⁶⁷⁴

The view of the Dutchbaters in blocking position Bravo 1 was restricted to a relatively empty terrain in which a tank appeared from time to time. There was no question of a tank assault on the enclave. The four VRS tanks did shell Srebrenica, but their actions were not tactically related to the occupation of the terrain. The VRS used its tanks (type T-54/55, maximum range of fifteen hundred metres) as fire support. The pattern was that a tank would fire a few shells before withdrawing again. The ABiH continued to move to the south in small groups – they informed Lieutenant Egbers that they were planning to put a VRS tank out of commission. The ABiH however failed in that mission.¹⁶⁷⁵

Lieutenant Van Duijn set up an observation post that provided some shelter against the shelling at his position (Bravo 3) east of the city. From that position he could see a few small, disorganised groups of ABiH soldiers, armed only with Kalashnikovs moving across the terrain. The population still present in that area appeared to be grateful for the presence of Dutchbat. The personnel of that blocking position took turns at the observation post for the day, and were able to determine the positions of two tanks – one to the south of Pribicevac and another on the tarred road near Bojna. From Bravo 3, Van Duijn could also establish that the VRS were shelling Srebrenica with artillery from Pribicevac. He saw two Howitzers (type 2S1, 122 mm self-propelled) and tanks with their barrels up.

Initially the firing was aimed across Bravo 3 at the city, but several shells exploded close to the blocking position. In the course of the morning two shells exploded in their direct vicinity, followed by more shelling later on. Most houses in the vicinity of the APC were blown apart. Van Duijn described those events as 'quite impressive'. The rather accurate firing must have been guided by forward artillery observers with a good view of the terrain. In accordance with the directives, the personnel then

¹⁶⁷² Interview Sadik Vilic, 15/04/98.

¹⁶⁷³ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

¹⁶⁷⁴ Sefko Hodzic, *Otpjecaceni koverat*, p. 259-62.

¹⁶⁷⁵ Interview V.B. Egbers, 02/09/99.

retreated into the APC to avoid injury by exploding grenades. That notwithstanding, Van Duijn did not believe that the VRS were firing directly at them.¹⁶⁷⁶

The ABiH nevertheless reported to Tuzla that the VRS had fired five tank grenades at a Dutchbat APC. According to the report, the shelling came nowhere near Dutchbaters, so they did not react. According to local ABiH Commander Becirovic, Dutchbat had reduced its movements to an absolute minimum. In a conversation between Budakovic, the Chief of Staff of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH, and Becirovic at around 13.00 hours, the former asked what Dutchbat was reporting to its commanding officers. Becirovic thought that Dutchbat might be reporting the situation inaccurately to their superiors. Becirovic stated that Dutchbat had been fired at twice by a VRS tank and that, until then, three OPs had been occupied. In Becirovic's view Dutchbat took no measures to counter the VRS actions even though Dutchbat had accused Becirovic and the ABiH of obstructing the battalion. Budakovic reacted by saying that, if necessary, the ABiH had to force Dutchbat to surrender their weapons, and that he would contact Colonel Brantz in Tuzla to ensure that the VRS understood the nature of the UN ultimatum.¹⁶⁷⁷

Dutchbat meanwhile tried to set up a blocking position in one of the many hairpin bends on the road south of Srebrenica that offered a good view of the terrain below.¹⁶⁷⁸

Commotion at the Blocking Position

When the APCs of Captain Hageman and Lieutenant Egbers attempted to occupy positions near the hairpin bends, the crew heard explosions and found themselves under fire. Initially Hageman had mistaken it for an ABiH hand grenade, thinking they had thrown it because the ABiH did not appreciate the Dutchbat presence near their position. He only realised several hours later that it had in fact been a VRS tank grenade fired at an ABiH artillery position. The Dutchbat section concerned with military-civilian matters (in military terms: Section 5) initially even thought that the ABiH had taken over a tank and was using it to fire at the Bravo 1 blocking position. After Section 5 contacted ABiH Commander Ramiz Becirovic, it became clear that the ABiH had been attacking a VRS tank.¹⁶⁷⁹

The positions of Bravo 1 and Hageman's APC lay more or less in a straight line in relation to the direction of fire emanating from the tanks located near Pribicevac. Soon thereafter the Bravo 1 APCs were also exposed to shelling in their immediate vicinity.¹⁶⁸⁰

It later turned out that the location of Bravo 1 almost exactly coincided with an ABiH artillery position some thirty metres higher. The gun was an old-fashioned M-48 Howitzer,¹⁶⁸¹ that had been pulled into the position with a tractor. It was set up approximately one hundred metres from the Dutchbat APCs. While Dutchbat had not noticed it at first, the presence of the ABiH artillery position had real consequences for them once the VRS had noticed the gun.

During the above-mentioned grenade explosion, Hageman's APC skidded off the road when its track became jammed.¹⁶⁸² The APC came to a halt on the edge of a precipice and the crew quickly abandoned the vehicle. It was clear that the APC could be pulled out, but that the operation would demand the support of a recovery unit. This unit arrived an hour later. During the recovery operation, the VRS attacked the position of the eight exposed Dutchbat soldiers, according to one with a tank,

¹⁶⁷⁶ Debriefing statement L.C. van Duijn, 12/09/95 with supplements from interview, 02/07/99.

¹⁶⁷⁷ Sefko Hodzic, *Otpjecaceni koverat*, p. 259-602.

¹⁶⁷⁸ Due to the fact that VRS tanks first fired on the Bravo 1 APCs on 10 July and again on 11 July, after again having taken position at Bravo 1, recollections of the events over those two days are generally muddled. This obstructed efforts to reconstruct actual events.

¹⁶⁷⁹ SMG, 1007/25. Debriefing Sergeant-Major B. Rave, 22/07/95.

¹⁶⁸⁰ SMG, 1004/56. B Company Journal, 10/07/95, 07.13

¹⁶⁸¹ To be precise, this was a 76-mm mountain cannon with a range of 8,750 metres, specifically designed for combat in Yugoslavian terrain and climate, also known as the 'Tito Gun' due to the fact that it was one of the first weapons to be produced during the Tito regime. This was the only artillery weapon in the possession of the ABiH and had not been handed in during the demilitarisation of the enclave.

¹⁶⁸² SMG, 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 10/07/95, 07.16, 07.30 and 09.08.

according to another with a mortar. Mortar grenades hit the area around them and damaged a periscope of the APC. The crew of the stranded vehicle took cover and split up over the remaining vehicles. The recovery operation was stopped and the APC left perched on the edge of the precipice.

The essentials were already taken from the APC. Hageman and his men used the vehicle of the recovery unit to drive back to the compound in Srebrenica. As Hageman suspected, on their way back the ABiH shelled the recovery APC using light mortars. Back at the compound after a small debriefing session the men took some rest. At the compound in Srebrenica a new vehicle was being prepared and Groen replaced the crew who had been lightly wounded with infantry soldiers on duty at the compound. During the period of time that Hageman stayed at the compound, Groen assumed responsibility over the blocking position. At the end of the afternoon, Hageman resumed the position near the Market Square in the village.¹⁶⁸³

Lieutenant Egbers reported from Bravo 1 that a tank was firing at his APC and that he needed to change his position. It was not clear whether the VRS were firing at the APC or at the ABiH artillery position at Stupine.¹⁶⁸⁴ The confused Bravo 1 APCs turned around to withdraw out of the view of the VRS and took cover behind a mountain ridge a few hundred metres away. That position offered no view of the terrain and they lost radio contact with Groen. Hageman again ordered the crew at Bravo 1 to take positions in a safe spot on the hill, and to resume observation. As expected, they were soon targeted again and the two APCs and the command vehicle sought cover once again. Once ensconced in a safe position, the crew were able to consult outside the APCs. They returned to a hilltop position from where they could observe the terrain without being spotted by the VRS.¹⁶⁸⁵ In this way, Egbers' section of APCs relocated to safe positions several times over a period of an hour, only to return after a short while, take fire from the VRS, and return to the safe position again.

The third time Bravo 1 was fired upon, several grenades exploded around them while personnel were outside the APC.¹⁶⁸⁶ Four grenades exploded in the direct vicinity of the Dutchbat APCs, generating a great deal of smoke and dust around the APC and some personnel who were outside at the time.¹⁶⁸⁷ The Dutchbaters could clearly distinguish the sound of shrapnel hitting the side of the APCs. Soldier G.M.M. Verhaegh was wounded by a grenade explosion some ten metres away. Verhaegh, who, at the time was standing next to the APC, took shrapnel in his elbow and neck, and temporarily lost his hearing.¹⁶⁸⁸ Four others also suffered hearing loss.¹⁶⁸⁹ Forward Air Controller Voskamp, who was at the time sketching targets on his map in the door of the APC, claimed to have been disoriented by an explosion.¹⁶⁹⁰ Meanwhile a Jeep arrived with three commandos, one of whom was lightly wounded.¹⁶⁹¹

After that round of shelling the two APCs and Jeep quickly returned to the safe spot behind the mountain ridge some three hundred metres back. Once things had calmed down again, the commandos sought out a new vantage point over the terrain. Bravo 1 continued to report explosions and fighting;

¹⁶⁸³ SMG/Debrief. 'Military analysis of the action taken by Dutchbat during the Srebrenica crisis', Assen, 28/09/95, compiled by LCol A. de Munnik, see 'Verslag blocking positions' by Capt. Hageman; Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p 297-8. The driver of the recovery APC, who had closed the vehicle's hatch, lost control of the vehicle on the way back to the compound and crashed into a house. (Feitenrelaas, § 3.7.4)

¹⁶⁸⁴ Interview V.B. Egbers, 02/09/99.

¹⁶⁸⁵ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (39).

¹⁶⁸⁶ SMG, 1004/56. B Company Diary, 10/07/95, 07.23-08.45.

¹⁶⁸⁷ SMG, 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 10/07/95 06.44. Interview R. Voskamp, 08/10/98.

¹⁶⁸⁸ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (30). The shrapnel was removed by a doctor. Verhaegh subsequently did service in the compound in Potocari and helped with the management of the refugee convoys. There was still some shrapnel near his wind pipe, which could not be removed in Potocari. Rohde, *Endgame*, p. 105 attributed the wounding to a British JCO.

¹⁶⁸⁹ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (39).

¹⁶⁹⁰ Interview R. Voskamp, 08/10/98.

¹⁶⁹¹ Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 298.

however, it was unclear as to the exact source of the attacks.¹⁶⁹² Later that afternoon Egbers received orders to return to the other APCs, which had meanwhile returned to Srebrenica.¹⁶⁹³

The VRS had therefore most probably not fired at the Bravo 1 blocking position, but at the ABiH Howitzer. The fire from the Howitzer was countered by tank fire.¹⁶⁹⁴ The shelling reinforced the impression that the VRS had observers in positions at various hilltops and thus commanded a good view of the terrain.¹⁶⁹⁵ The VRS advised Dutchbat command via the Dutchbat hostages at Bratunac not to send any further vehicles to the south as, otherwise, the VRS could not guarantee Dutchbat's safety. That notwithstanding, the shelling of the APC gave the battalion command the opportunity to call in Close Air Support.¹⁶⁹⁶

11. Close Air Support: A Third Request from Dutchbat

The Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo had already advised Nicolai, at 07.55 hours in the morning of 10 July, to prepare a Blue Sword Request. Nicolai discussed this on the phone with Zagreb, but was advised not to put in his request too early. Nicolai was informed that, at that point, Zagreb still had no concrete plans for the deployment of Close Air Support. Force Commander Janvier did not want to sign a Blue Sword Request while NATO still had aircraft in the air; which, as agreed, had been the case as of 06.00 hours. The logic of the decision was unclear to the Director of the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo. The reasons for the decision can only be speculated upon in retrospect; the most probable being that Janvier had decided that there was no need to rush for a signature while NATO had aircraft in the air – if those aircraft had not been available, approval would have demanded more urgency, as valuable time would have been lost in recalling the aircraft to above the Adriatic Sea. The Air Operations Coordination Center meanwhile insisted that Nicolai give them an idea as to the conditions under which aircraft would be deployed.¹⁶⁹⁷

One possible explanation for Janvier's reluctance at the time (not linked to the presence of NATO aircraft) could have been his statement, made during the morning meeting with Akashi at 08.30 hours, to the effect that the ABiH were the real root of the problem in Srebrenica. Janvier also expressed the conviction that the ABiH were capable of defending the enclave, but had clearly chosen not to do so and that the Bosnian Muslims were now putting pressure on the UN to defend Srebrenica for them. It was further stated during the meeting that the position of the Dutchbat Forward Air Controllers was located at one-and-a-half kilometres south of the city.¹⁶⁹⁸ The meeting is discussed in

¹⁶⁹² SMG, 1004/56. B Company Journal, 10/07/95, 08.32, 09.39, 12.43.

¹⁶⁹³ Interview R. Voskamp, 08/10/98.

¹⁶⁹⁴ According to David Rohde (*Endgame*, p. 104-5) the weapon was not fired as Ramiz Becirovic had issued orders not to do so. The ABiH soldiers were instructed to wait and leave the defence to Dutchbat. In an interview, Hasan Nuhanovic said he had heard Ramiz Becirovic give the order not to use the weapon, as it could provoke the VRS to shell the population and because it could discourage the UN from granting Close Air Support. (Interview, 05/08/97 and 06/08/97). Both the Dutchbat and JCO reports independently confirmed that the Howitzer had been fired. JCO reported fire from the M-48 on 10 July. The B Company logbook stated that the M-48 fired on 10 July at 08.22 and 09.25 hours and on 11 July at 12.30 hours in the direction of the VRS. According to Lieutenant Egbers the Howitzer was never fired while he was in the neighbourhood. In the first place, the ABiH had been told not to fire it; however, later, when Dutchbat also came under fire, it was said to have fired back. In Egbers' view that never happened either because there was not enough ammunition available or the cannon failed to fire. (Interview 02/09/99). Corporal S.P. Winkler of the Reconnaissance Platoon asked the ABiH not to use the cannon until the VRS passed an unspecified point. He notified Egbers of that agreement. (OM Arnhem. KMar Brigade Soesterberg, 'sebra-Care-Team', 28/10/98, No. P. 462/99.

¹⁶⁹⁵ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

¹⁶⁹⁶ SMG, Debrief. Memorandum by Major Otter (C Support Coy) 10/07/95 10.45. The report originated from Sergeant Bos.

¹⁶⁹⁷ NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. 'Chronology of Events CAS Missions Srebrenica', 10/07/95, 0730LT, 0800LT, 0830LT. Also see DCBC, Box 59. Overview of Citations Logbook Air Operations Control Center', Annex A with Klu replies to Questions by the Chamber on Srebrenica.

¹⁶⁹⁸ Interview David Last based on journal entries, 05/07/00. The Public Relations Officer of UNPF cautioned those present not to discuss that vision outside of the room concerned.

more detail in Paragraph 12. Vicenza, via the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo, had been informed to the effect that the Forward Air Controllers, Windmill 02 and 03, had been under fire.¹⁶⁹⁹ The fact that Windmill 02 had had to withdraw from Bravo 1 that morning and had been forced to find an alternative location due to direct ABiH fire came as a surprise to Vicenza. They also questioned whether it could indeed have been the ABiH, and not the VRS.¹⁷⁰⁰ This offers a glimpse into the confusion that followed after the Dutchbat units found themselves in the crossfire between the VRS and ABiH positions. To the question from Vicenza as to whether air power should also be deployed against the ABiH when firing on a Tactical Air Control Party, it was replied that it would be considered. The question became current when, as outlined above, it transpired that the ABiH were firing an artillery piece at a very short distance from the Bravo 1 blocking position. Had the VRS answered that fire, there would have been a substantial danger of the Dutchbat requesting Close Air Support. The question posed in Vicenza was; in that case, who should be targeted first – the ABiH or the VRS? Vicenza preferred the option of the VRS; however that would have begged the question as to whether the Forward Air Controller would have been able to guide the Close Air Support if he had been incapable of relocating.¹⁷⁰¹

At 08.38 hours the officer in charge of operations (G-3) in Sarajevo briefed Nicolai regarding the availability of aircraft. Nicolai wanted ‘continuous air coverage’ until 13.00 hours. Even during that conversation Vicenza continued to work on changes to the Air Tasking Messages. Those amendments would have enabled the aircraft to remain in the air until 14.00 hours, and further work was being done to extend that to 18.00 hours. Nicolai confirmed that he wished to keep the aircraft available until 14.00 hours and that they should be ready and deployable within 60 minutes after that. The Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo again described the blocking positions to Vicenza as ‘a line in the sand’ aimed at holding the VRS back - if necessary with force. One problem in that respect was the fact that the VRS APCs were moving both on and off the roads, which made them hard to pinpoint from the air.¹⁷⁰²

Deputy Battalion Commander Franken requested Close Air Support at exactly 08.55 hours, immediately after the ABiH, who were positioned near the Bravo 1 blocking position, had opened fire on the VRS and the VRS had returned their fire. The accompanying target list showed fifteen VRS targets – mainly artillery and mortars, but including two tanks, all in the southern section of the enclave. The Target Lists were intended to prepare the pilots, and to determine priorities and the most threatening targets. The coordinates of the targets could then be programmed into the aircraft’s computers. High on the priority list was a rocket launcher that had earlier sowed death and destruction amongst the population in the eastern section of the enclave, as well as a few active Howitzers. One problem was the scattered presence of the ABiH soldiers that were attempting to close their lines in the densely forested hillsides. They could disrupt simple target identification procedures, as they were almost impossible to distinguish from the VRS on the ground.

The Dutchbat target list of the previous day, 9 July, was no longer current due to the territorial gains of the VRS. Brantz requested Dutchbat to update those targets.¹⁷⁰³ Sector North East however received no update or repetition of the request for Close Air Support. Dutchbat only updated the target list in the course of 10 July.¹⁷⁰⁴

¹⁶⁹⁹ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook CAOC 5ATAF, 10/07/95, 0630Z, 0712Z.

¹⁷⁰⁰ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook CAOC 5ATAF, 10/07/95, 0750Z, 0955Z.

¹⁷⁰¹ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook CAOC 5ATAF, 10/07/95, 0540Z, 0555Z.

¹⁷⁰² DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook CAOC 5ATAF, 10/07/95, 0638Z, 0745Z, 0812Z, 0955Z.

¹⁷⁰³ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

¹⁷⁰⁴ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary (version August 1999), p. 127. Brantz referred to Fax No. T No. 180 dated 09/07/95 from Dutchbat to SNE and HQ UNPROFOR. On that day Franken kept in contact with Brantz, because, as far as he knew, Karremans was temporarily unavailable due to a cold. Karremans however denied having been ill that day.

No trace of Franken's request could be found in the logbooks of either Sarajevo or Vicenza and Naples.¹⁷⁰⁵ Apparently the Forward Air Controllers also had no knowledge of the request, as they had issued no warnings. The Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo also gave no indication that a request was underway. The aircraft remained above the sea as instructed 'to be available "if" needed to provide CAS'.¹⁷⁰⁶

The problems were not limited to the failure of Franken's request to reach the higher echelons. Even if it had reached Zagreb, a further obstacle was the fact that Janvier had, at the time, stated that he was still not ready to sign a Blue Sword Request. In any event, Zagreb never did receive a request.¹⁷⁰⁷

At 12.00 hours, Zagreb consulted Nicolai regarding The Hague's position on Close Air Support, whereby it was confirmed that CAS was available. However, a request still had to be submitted and at that time Zagreb had not yet received the said request. The paperwork in Sarajevo was ready for a Blue Sword Request. At that point the Intelligence staff in Zagreb maintained that there would be no VRS attack. On board the USS *Lasalle*, where NATO Admiral Smith was present, there was concern about the precise location of the VRS, and what the Bosnian Serbs were planning to do. In their view the VRS were in fact moving in very close to Srebrenica.¹⁷⁰⁸

That afternoon, with the exception of brief radio contact with Bookshelf (the airborne command post), there was no further significant mention of Close Air Support.¹⁷⁰⁹ The aircraft remained available until 14.00 hours, after which they returned to their bases. The afternoon package was not scheduled go airborne, but only to remain on 60-minute alert. This made the reaction time for Close Air Support two hours and forty minutes.¹⁷¹⁰ Shortly after midday, the Director of the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo again advised Nicolai to try to obtain a signature from Janvier and Akashi for a Blue Sword Request; however, there is no record that this had ever been proposed to Zagreb.¹⁷¹¹

At around midday the VRS advance appeared to grind to a halt. The commander of the Joint Commission Observers (JCOs) assigned to Dutchbat notified Sarajevo that, in his view, the VRS were heeding the warnings.¹⁷¹² Vicenza did however continue to plot the positions of tanks and artillery signalled from Sarajevo. However, at that point clouds rolled in over Srebrenica, which, according to Vicenza significantly lessened the chances of Close Air Support being granted.¹⁷¹³

Karremans wrote in his book that he had submitted a second request for Close Air Support on the afternoon of 10 July when the city again came under fire. Karremans however did not specify the time of the request. His request was not granted based on an 'incomplete target list'; however it is unclear at which headquarters the request became stuck.¹⁷¹⁴ The Dutchbat monthly register does indeed mention shelling of the city between 15.00 - 15.54 hours.¹⁷¹⁵ However, not a single logbook mentions a request for Close Air Support, a target list or any preparatory activities to signal the alarm to the aircraft (which were on the ground after 14.00 hours). There was also no mention as to the influence of deteriorating weather conditions on that afternoon.¹⁷¹⁶ It was only at 19.11 hours that the Air Operations Coordination Center signalled that the VRS were launching an assault and that Dutchbat

¹⁷⁰⁵ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook CAOC 5ATAF, 10/07/95, 0630Z, 0712Z.

¹⁷⁰⁶ DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 10/07/95, 01.45Z, 09.19Z.

¹⁷⁰⁷ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary (version January 2001), 11/07/95, 08.55. Brantz claimed to have enquired in Zagreb.

¹⁷⁰⁸ Interview Barry Ashton, 30/05/00.

¹⁷⁰⁹ Confidential information (1).

¹⁷¹⁰ DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log for 10/07/95. The log reports at 01.45Z: 'Bosnian UN Commander'. This seems unlikely. Those powers pertained to the Force Commander in Zagreb and the Bosnian Commander was absent.

¹⁷¹¹ NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. 'Chronology of Events CAS Missions Srebrenica', 1235-1359 LT.

¹⁷¹² Confidential information (1).

¹⁷¹³ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook CAOC 5ATAF, 10/07/95, 1043Z, 1045Z.

¹⁷¹⁴ Karremans, *Srebrenica: Who Cares?*, p. 184.

¹⁷¹⁵ SMG 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 10/07/95, entries 15.00 to 15.54.

¹⁷¹⁶ This applies to Logbook CAOC 5ATAF, AFSOUTH, Sector North East, 'Chronology of Events CAS Missions - Srebrenica'. Colonel Brantz' diaries offer no further explanation.

had returned fire. The logbook also states that the final decision to withhold Close Air Support was made at 20.00 hours that evening.¹⁷¹⁷

12. Further Activities of the Blocking Position on 10 July

The notion that the VRS were observing the warning was proven wrong when, a few hours later, tank and artillery fire broke loose all over the city.¹⁷¹⁸ At around 15.00 hours the southern and eastern sections of the enclave were rocked by more than thirty explosions. Houses were hit, resulting in a stream of casualties. Four vehicles were used to transport casualties to the hospital.

Sergeant 1st Class G.W. Reussing saw a lorry with seven wounded Muslims pass en route to the hospital. The consequence of this was that it seemed that both the ABiH and the population would become more alienated and aggressive towards Dutchbat.¹⁷¹⁹ Reussing had posted his APC casualty evacuation vehicle in the centre of Srebrenica to provide medical aid, if needed, at the blocking positions. The location turned out to have been an unfortunate choice, as scores of Muslims, seeing the red cross, sought treatment for minor injuries and protection. The local population also demanded that the APC casualty evacuation vehicle be used to transport their patients to hospital.¹⁷²⁰ Reussing was however not prepared to do that. After a few hours in the centre, he moved the APC to an alternative location. After consultation with Groen, it was decided to return to the compound in Srebrenica and to remain on standby there.¹⁷²¹

Although situated behind the Bravo 3 blocking position, OP-H, due to its high location, appeared to command the best view of the terrain south of the enclave, and was therefore an important source of information. In the course of 10 July, the OP reported explosions in the centre of the city and southwest of Srebrenica, as well as heavy fighting around Mount Zivkovo Bdro at the southern edge of the enclave and north of the Swedish Shelter Project. The wooden houses there, as well as in the village of Pustumlici were on fire. The VRS were using a variety of weapons systems (Multiple Launch Rocket Systems, artillery, mortars, and T-34 and T-54 tanks) that were mostly set up near Pribicevac. At around 18.00 hours OP-H reported sighting fifty VRS infantry descending in the direction of the city, and setting everything on fire on the way. The OP also spotted a VRS concentration near the radio tower at Height 664, and to the east of the village of Rajne. The VRS pressure was increasing and many ABiH soldiers were fleeing towards the city. The population in the centre of the city panicked and started to flee en masse.¹⁷²²

By shortly after 17.00 hours, the VRS infantry had regrouped its units along the Ranje – Petrovici line (see map, section 5). All buildings and houses along that line had been destroyed or were on fire.¹⁷²³ Lieutenant Mustert reported to Captain Groen from Bravo 4 blocking position that, once the VRS infantry descended past the radio tower, Bravo 4, like Bravo 3 would be cut off from Srebrenica city. He asked Groen for advice, as only Bravo 1 would be able to return to the compound in Srebrenica along the route to the west of the city. Groen, advised thereto by Hageman, ordered his units to abandon blocking positions Bravo 3 and Bravo 4. It was becoming clear that the VRS were concentrating on occupying the city.¹⁷²⁴

It was at that time that Groen gave instruction at the compound to fire over the heads of the VRS and to launch mortar fire. The last available mortar (type 81 mm) was set up in the compound in

¹⁷¹⁷ NIOD, Coll. De Ruitter. Memorandum Maj. Frenzt, AOCC Sarajevo to Lieutenant Colonel de Ruitter

¹⁷¹⁸ Confidential information (1).

¹⁷¹⁹ SMG, 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 10/07/95, entries 15.00 to 15.45.

¹⁷²⁰ SMG, 1004/56. Logbook B Coy 10/07/95, 06.21.

¹⁷²¹ Debriefing statement Sergeant 1st Class G.W. Reussing, 12/09/95.

¹⁷²² SMG, 1004/56. Logbook B Coy, 10/07/95, various entries.

¹⁷²³ SMG, 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 10/07/95, 17.15.

¹⁷²⁴ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

Srebrenica. Sergeant F.H. Struik, the Commander of OP-H, gave the necessary corrections by radio.¹⁷²⁵ Initially only light grenades were fired in warning; the High Explosive grenades were only to be used in case of a direct assault on a blocking position.¹⁷²⁶ At that point the VRS were in the vicinity of Bojna, descending the hill towards the city, and crossing the 84th Horizontal, which served as the final line for the advance.

At 19.13 hours Hageman was instructed by Groen to withdraw blocking position Bravo 1 in the direction of the city's market square. After that the teams of blocking positions Bravo 3 and Bravo 4 also began to withdraw towards the market square in Srebrenica. The Bravo 1 team was at that stage close to Hageman on the market square.

At 19.17 hours, B Company sent out a request for Close Air Support. Hageman made this request in order to be able to fall back on a powerful weapon in case it were to become necessary to fire at the VRS with .50 machine guns. He gave instructions to only fire the .50 machine guns if Close Air Support was actually given. Hageman assumed at that time that Close Air Support would arrive within six minutes. Hageman himself did not have any view on the VRS, but reports on its presence from OP-H strengthened his conviction that a request for Close Air Support was justified.¹⁷²⁷

While withdrawing Bravo 4, Lieutenant Mustert ordered direct .50 machine gun fire on the VRS units across the open terrain on foot. His intention was to secure the withdrawal by forcing the VRS to take cover. That was the only time Dutchbat fired directly at the VRS. The firing distance was five hundred to one thousand metres. The effects of the fire could not be established. While impact points were visible, it was impossible to determine whether any casualties fell on the VRS side.¹⁷²⁸

The B Company logbook also reported that fire was stopped for incomprehensible reasons. Within a period of forty minutes, B Company fired off nine light grenades in the direction of the VRS. After that the VRS appeared to withdraw.¹⁷²⁹

Tension also ran high at Bravo 3. The ABiH appeared restless and anxious, and showed aggression towards Dutchbat. Bravo 3 received a report from the ABiH to the effect that approximately eighty VRS infantrymen were hidden behind the crest of a hill and would presently become visible. Hageman then instructed Lieutenant Van Duijn to fire over the heads of the VRS as soon as they appeared on the crest of the hill to make them aware of the UN positions.¹⁷³⁰ The Bosnian Serbs then retreated beyond the crest of the hill and out of sight. Van Duijn's unit then ceased firing the .50 machine gun from the APC, after which everyone present sighed with relief. After that Bravo 3 also pulled back in the direction of the market square.¹⁷³¹ Groen instructed the only deployable APC in the compound in Srebrenica to take a position a few hundred metres from the compound en route to the western OPs to cut off access to the city from the west. If the VRS had been able to reach the edge of the city unnoticed from the east and the south, then they could do so from the west. They had to prevent the Bosnian Serbs from entering the city and the compound unexpectedly from the west.¹⁷³²

At that point two of the three blocking positions had already been abandoned and the third, too, was beginning to withdraw even though Groen had not consulted the Battalion Staff to that effect. Consultation was in any event not possible at the time, as the radio communication with the Battalion Staff was not functioning well. This malfunction could have been caused by accidental use of the toggleswitch of one of their own radios. There was a permanent beeping tone that did not appear to be due to intentional VRS disruption; which had previously occurred on several occasions. Once they did

¹⁷²⁵ Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 298-300.

¹⁷²⁶ SMG, 1007/25. Debriefing report Captain Groen, 22/07/95.

¹⁷²⁷ SMG, Debrief. 'Military analysis of the action taken by Dutchbat during the Srebrenica crisis', Assen 28/09/95, compiled by LCol A. de Munnik, see 'Verslag blocking position' by Capt Hageman.

¹⁷²⁸ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

¹⁷²⁹ SMG, 1004/56. Logbook B Coy, 10/07/95, 18.15 to 19.28.

¹⁷³⁰ SMG, 1004. Debriefing First Lieutenant Van Duijn, 22/07/95.

¹⁷³¹ Interview L.C. van Duijn, 02/07/99.

¹⁷³² Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 298-300.

manage to establish contact with Franken, his reaction was assenting.¹⁷³³ The breaking away activities yielded no significant problems with the ABiH. There was sufficient room to manoeuvre and, with the exception of a few ABiH soldiers with hunting rifles and Kalashnikovs, there was no sign of local population in the area. The calm around the APCs became almost tangible. The general impression at the time (which was to be confirmed later) was that many of the ABiH had already left the area.¹⁷³⁴ By then it was 19.35 hours and it appeared that the VRS had pulled back; which meant that the city had been completely surrounded by the VRS on the southern and eastern sides.¹⁷³⁵

Many ABiH soldiers had gathered in the centre of Srebrenica. Many screamed and aimed anti-tank and other weapons at the APCs, and ordered Dutchbat to move to the south.¹⁷³⁶ The mayor told Hageman that Dutch bat was not allowed to move backwards. The mayor also resolutely refused Hageman's request that the population move away from the vicinity of the APCs. The population and the APCs were not to be allowed to move.¹⁷³⁷ Hageman then sought contact with ABiH Commander Ramiz Becirovic and the Dutchbat section for military-civilian contacts (Section 5). Becirovic agreed to the positions occupied by the blocking positions.¹⁷³⁸ One member of Section 5, who had been instructed to negotiate with the ABiH soldiers and population for more room to manoeuvre for the blocking positions in the vicinity of the market square, reacted with the words that he had better things to do. That negative response was reported to Groen, but was not followed up.¹⁷³⁹ Dutchbat was sorry about the lack of support on the part of Section 5, even though they were fully familiar with the circumstances that gave rise to that lack of support.¹⁷⁴⁰

After having ordered the APCs to move to the south, the Bosnian Muslims ordered Dutchbat to fire at a ridge where some VRS were supposed to have been lurking. Some of the ABiH even fired (small-arms fire) at one of the Dutchbat APCs, forcing the gunner to take cover.¹⁷⁴¹ After that the situation on the market square deteriorated rapidly. An ABiH soldier climbed onto the APC and started firing randomly with the .50 machine gun. This happened due to the fact that the machine gun had been left exposed and without supervision, whereby it was possible for anyone to use it. It was impossible to tell whether the firing had any effect. The machine gun fire only stopped once the ammunition box had been emptied. Lieutenant Mustert warned the gunner on board the APC by radio to do something to stop the firing, but that failed because the ABiH soldier that was operating the gun was sitting on the hatch, thus trapping the gunner insider the vehicle.¹⁷⁴² According to Ramiz Becirovic, two ABiH soldiers were involved in that incident – the Commander of the 282nd Brigade, Ibro Dudic, and a second ABiH soldier. According to the Bosnian journalist, Sefko Hodzic, Dudic confiscated the APC and, driving it through the streets of Srebrenica, used the machine gun to chase the VRS from the police station to the market. After having used up all the ammunition, he purportedly took the APC to the compound in Srebrenica and left it there. That story did the rounds for a while, but falls strictly under the category of 'tall stories'.¹⁷⁴³

The remaining ammunition boxes were under armour in the APC and were thus out of the reach of the ABiH. The ABiH did however continue to demand that the APC be driven to the south to fight the VRS instead of standing passively on the market square. That demand was also worded as a

¹⁷³³ Confidential information (15).

¹⁷³⁴ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

¹⁷³⁵ SMG, 1004/56. Logbook B Coy, 10/07/95, 19.35.

¹⁷³⁶ Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 276.

¹⁷³⁷ SMG/Debrief. 'Military analysis of the action taken by Dutchbat during the Srebrenica crisis', Assen 28/09/95, compiled by Lt Col A. de Munnik, see 'Verslag blocking position' by Capt Hageman.

¹⁷³⁸ SMG, 1004/56. Logbook B Coy, 10/07/95, 20.57.

¹⁷³⁹ SMG/Debrief. Feitenrelaas [Factual Account] debriefing § 3.2.5.

¹⁷⁴⁰ SMG, 1004. Debriefing First Lieutenant Van Duijn, 22/07/95.

¹⁷⁴¹ Debriefing statement Soldier 1st Class A. Hagenaaars, 14/09/95.

¹⁷⁴² Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

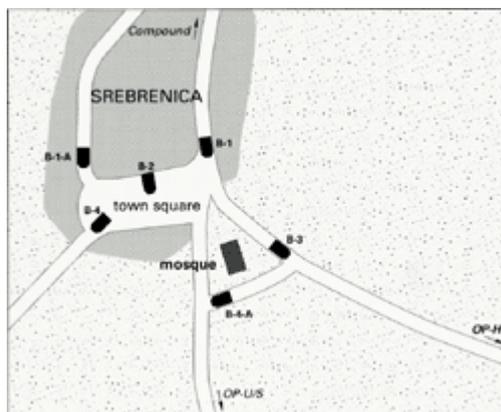
¹⁷⁴³ Sefko Hodzic, *Otpjecaceni koverat*, p. 268.

threat.¹⁷⁴⁴ In addition to the vehicles, there were some ABiH soldiers with anti-tank weapons (type RPG); which also implied a certain threat.¹⁷⁴⁵ It is conceivable that some of the ABiH soldiers present might mistakenly have thought that one of the Dutchbat vehicles was about to be returned to the compound in Srebrenica when, in fact, it was about to be moved a little further to the south. One of the leaders of the Opstina (it is not clear who) was present and succeeded to calm the situation down somewhat by telling the soldiers to stop threatening Dutchbat and to let them do their work.¹⁷⁴⁶ Hageman ordered the Bravo 1 crew to fire the .50 machine gun over the heads of the Bosnian Serbs.¹⁷⁴⁷ After that they did indeed fire using approximately half a case of ammunition, before the APC in question pulled back to two hundred metres from the market square.¹⁷⁴⁸ The Bosnian Muslims appeared to have been appeased by that. Two APCs remained on the market square with gunners above armour.¹⁷⁴⁹

After that a VRS tank (type T-54/55) resumed fire and also a mortar grenade exploded in the direct vicinity of an APC (near the UNHCR Warehouse) causing shrapnel to hit the APC's armour. No one, including the population on the square was injured. Hageman then ordered the withdrawal of the vehicles of blocking positions Bravo 1, 3 and 4.

After the shelling, Groen reported to the Battalion Chief Staff that B Company was using direct fire to defend the city, but according to the logbook that never happened. Groen had indeed ordered all APCs to open fire, but all units reported that they had fired into the air. It is possible that Groen, with that announcement, sold the Battalion Chief Staff and also the UN staffs a dummy (because it was reported to the higher echelons). While the report had not been accurate, the VRS did indeed back off somewhat after the .50 machine gun fire.¹⁷⁵⁰

During the night of 10 to 11 July, all the APCs from the blocking positions remained concentrated on the market square, mainly because Groen had feared that the VRS might have been able to surround one of APCs in the dark. That would have been quite easy due to the nature of the terrain and the fact that it was not always easy to distinguish between the VRS and ABiH.¹⁷⁵¹



At that point OP-H was still occupied. The ABiH returned in small groups to the city from the south of the enclave. During the evening there was air presence in the form of some fighter aircraft; however, soon thereafter an announcement was made to the effect that the request for Close Air Support had been turned down. After that things were relatively quiet for a few hours. There was still some

¹⁷⁴⁴ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

¹⁷⁴⁵ Debriefing statement First Lieutenant L.C. van Duijn, 12/09/95.

¹⁷⁴⁶ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

¹⁷⁴⁷ Debriefing statement Soldier 1st Class J.A. Eggink, 11/09/95.

¹⁷⁴⁸ Debriefing statement First Lieutenant L.C. van Duijn, 12/09/95.

¹⁷⁴⁹ Debriefing statement Soldier 1st Class A. Hagenaaars, 14/09/95.

¹⁷⁵⁰ SMG, 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 10/07/95, 19.10 and 19.50. SMG, 1004/56, Logbook B Coy, 10/07/95, 19.01 and 19.05.

¹⁷⁵¹ Interview J. R. Groen, 05/07/99.

fighting on the eastern side of the city.¹⁷⁵² As in the preceding days, the night was relatively peaceful.¹⁷⁵³ People continued to stream backwards and forwards across the city square, but it was only at around 01.00 hours in the night of 10 to 11 July that the chaotic mass finally began to settle down. At that point, although all members of the crew of the blocking positions left stranded in the market square in their APCs felt miserable about the course of events, they nevertheless managed to remain resolute.¹⁷⁵⁴

13. The Night of 10 July: The Fourth Request for Close Air Support

When briefing Akashi on the morning of 10 July, the Operations Department in Zagreb reported the receipt, on the previous evening, of the pre-planned request for Close Air Support from Sarajevo. The only step that was still outstanding was the signature from Zagreb. This was also the meeting at which Janvier stated that the ABiH were strong enough to defend their own territory. In his view the current situation was quite different from that of 1993, when the enclave was more or less overrun. Janvier had received information to the effect that the ABiH had not only fired at Dutchbat, but also at NATO aircraft above Srebrenica. No confirmation of the latter accusation is available. Other than in Zepa, there is no evidence that the ABiH was in possession of shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles. At that meeting Janvier stated that he feared the Bosnian Government might be trying to force the UN to take a direction it was not prepared to take.

Akashi was of the opinion that the ABiH tended to initiate actions and to ask the UN and the international community to react to the consequences.¹⁷⁵⁵ The Dutch embassy in Paris reported that 'circles in daily contact with General Janvier' had attributed the fact that UNPROFOR had only threatened the Bosnian Serbs with Close Air Support a few days later to the feeling that the Bosnian Muslims had provoked the offensive with their recent thrust at Visjnica. In addition, Zagreb could not be sure as to whether the Bosnian Serbs were executing a limited operation or whether they were planning to occupy the entire enclave.¹⁷⁵⁶

The intentions of the VRS were still not clear – including to the Joint Commission Observers (JCOs) in the enclave.¹⁷⁵⁷ Several data exchanges between Karremans and Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo about the situation that day were aimed at determining at what point the VRS would have gone too far. After the VRS had resumed the advance at around 19.00 hours, the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command again considered letting the aircraft return to the air space above Srebrenica, however after due consultation with Zagreb that was called off due to the weather.¹⁷⁵⁸

At around 19.00 hours the VRS threatened to surround blocking position Bravo 1, as a result of which the blocking position had to be withdrawn towards the city. That was the best time for B Company to initiate a request for Close Air Support. Indeed, at about that time Dutchbat did send Sarajevo a new request for Close Air Support via Tuzla. Shortly prior to that, the PTT building, which also served as the UNMO base, and the nearby hospital came under fire.¹⁷⁵⁹ In the latter request, Karremans assigned priority to three areas, namely, the areas south of blocking position Bravo 1, the area north of OP-P, and the heights southeast of the town of Srebrenica.¹⁷⁶⁰

At about the same time NATO was put on the alert with the news that Dutchbat had been engaged in a firefight with the VRS, and had returned fire with 'small arms fire'.¹⁷⁶¹ A report reached the CAOC of the Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force in Vicenza at 19.11 hours from Sarajevo to the effect

¹⁷⁵² SMG, 1004/56. Various entries logbook B Coy.

¹⁷⁵³ Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 298.

¹⁷⁵⁴ Debriefing statement Soldier 1st Class A. Hagenaaars, 14/09/95.

¹⁷⁵⁵ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Branbury Diary. SRSG's Briefing 10/07/95.

¹⁷⁵⁶ ABZ, DPV/ARA/00797. Code Wijnaendts 217, 10/07/95.

¹⁷⁵⁷ Confidential information (1).

¹⁷⁵⁸ Debriefing statement Lieutenant Colonel J.A.C. Ruiter, 27/09/95 with supplements 22/01/02.

¹⁷⁵⁹ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary, (version August 1999), p. 128-130.

¹⁷⁶⁰ Karremans *Srebrenica: Who Cares?*, 186.

¹⁷⁶¹ NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. 'Chronology of Events CAS Missions Srebrenica', 1900 LT.

that VRS infantry was at that point launching attacks one kilometre north of the designated 84th Horizontal. Dutchbat had been instructed to return fire if fired upon by the VRS.¹⁷⁶² After NATO in Naples had been updated by the NATO liaison officer in Sarajevo that the VRS had resumed the offensive, the designated line had been crossed, and that UNPROFOR had asked for a Blue Sword Request, NATO initiated a number of steps to comply with the request. Three minutes later the CAOC in Vicenza confirmed that aircraft were available. Within half an hour a great number of steps had been taken: Aircraft had been put on cockpit alert and a number of aircraft were waiting on the runway with engines running. Several tanker aircraft had taken off in a hurry (in military terms: they were scrambled); and would be in position within 45 minutes. The Close Air Support aircraft could fly overland, as a number of aircraft were already engaged in the Suppression of Enemy Air Defence systems (in military terms this is known as 'HARM Shooters'). A few other aircraft that were already in Bosnian airspace were assigned the task of providing Close Air Support; however they were not suitably armed. While those F-18s did have night vision equipment, they were only armed with HARM missiles, and carried no bombs. Vicenza did however check to see whether other aircraft could be kept in the air longer.¹⁷⁶³

The proof that Sarajevo had been serious was evident in the speed at which the Close Air Support procedure had been processed. Nicolai also notified the VRS at 19.20 that he had called in Close Air Support. Getting his message across was not so simple, as there were no VRS generals or senior officers available to take the message. As a last resort, Nicolai left the message with a switchboard operator. He was informed that Mladic might be available to talk to him later.¹⁷⁶⁴ According to the UN spokesperson, Alexander Ivanko, Nicolai also notified the Bosnian Serbs that the situation of the Dutch hostages would not influence his decision concerning the deployment of air power.¹⁷⁶⁵

At 20.17 hours the NATO liaison officer in Sarajevo briefed General Nicolai that aircraft were available. Nicolai was advised to agree with the instruction to leave 'targets at the discretion of the Tactical Air Control Party'. This order related to situations in which the Forward Air Controllers felt that moving targets could be identified effectively, and that the warring factions and the population could be distinguished clearly from one another. Although the weather had deteriorated, there were no indications that it would be a restrictive factor. Windmill 03 would be the Forward Air Controller, and at that stage communications were functioning well. Nicolai prepared a Blue Sword Request. Gobilliard signed it, and the request was sent to Janvier.¹⁷⁶⁶

Janvier Refuses Close Air Support

In Zagreb, at 19.55 hours, Janvier assembled the Crisis Action Team to reach a decision concerning the request for Close Air Support. The meeting was attended by deputy NATO liaison officer, the American Air Force Colonel C. Butler (Air Commodore Rudd was with Admiral Leighton Smith at sea), the political advisor to Akashi and Janvier, a few French officers and Colonel De Jonge.

Janvier posed all the questions, which, in the view of De Jonge, were answered satisfactorily, such as: 'Where is it? Is there a danger of collateral damage? Are we not too close to the Serbian border?' The latter question related to the possibility that NATO aircraft might be targeted by Air Defence systems near the Serbian border. Janvier asked whether it was possible to execute bombing raids at night. The answer was that it would pose no problems; in fact, the American regarded this as a preferable option for their own aircraft, as it limited their vulnerability.

¹⁷⁶² DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook CAOC 5ATAF, 10/07/95, 1711Z.

¹⁷⁶³ DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 10/07/95, 1755Z, 1758Z, 1826Z, 1830Z, 1835Z.

¹⁷⁶⁴ NIOD Coll. De Ruiter. Telephone Conversation General Nicolai - BSA HQ, 10/07/95, 19.20 hrs.

¹⁷⁶⁵ Associated Press, 10/07/95, 23:15 Eastern Time. The reports on the telephone conversations provide no confirmation to that effect.

¹⁷⁶⁶ DOPKlu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook CAOC 5ATAF, 10/07/95, 1817Z.

The most important obstacle was that Janvier apparently continued to assume that the Bosnian Serbs would not attack. His staff disagreed with that; after all, there was a smoking gun and there were sufficient reasons for Close Air Support. Those were typical considerations brought up during the meeting. Finally, Janvier asked the views of everyone present, starting with Colonel De Jonge. De Jonge was certain that the time had come to say 'yes' to a call for Close Air Support. All those present, with the exception of the French Colonel Thierry Moné confirmed this. The French Colonel considered a night operation hazardous; a view that was promptly negated by the NATO liaison officer, who continued to see a night operation as viable. NATO had aircraft, such as the F-15F and the AC-130, that were perfectly suitable for night work; however, NATO was not consulted.

Janvier remained uncertain about signing the request. He consulted several people and said that he had to discuss a few more things with Akashi. Akashi's political advisor said that this was not necessary, as Janvier could make the decision himself; he had full mandate, and Close Air Support fully complied with that mandate.¹⁷⁶⁷

It was left at that. During a period of further postponement, news came that the Bosnian Serbs had withdrawn.¹⁷⁶⁸ At 21.15 hours, all JCOs in the enclave were instructed by Sarajevo to return to Potocari. ABiH soldiers fighting in the vicinity of OP-H obstructed their withdrawal from the OP and later, on the return route between Srebrenica and Potocari, the ABiH again fired at the JCOs.¹⁷⁶⁹ At 21.25 hours, after some time earlier an overview had been conducted of the aircraft that could remain in the air the longest, the state of readiness of the aircraft was brought back to sixty minutes.¹⁷⁷⁰

At 21.25 hours Janvier spoke to Mladic's headquarters to notify him to the effect that the situation was no longer tolerable. Janvier claimed to have done everything possible to avoid the use of force, but that there was a limit. Janvier briefed the staff about the conversation and concluded that the UNPF was faced with three possible scenarios: (1) do nothing. In that case the VRS could stop its advance, but could also surround the blocking positions; (2) call for immediate Close Air Support; however, as it was dark and the situation confusing, that could be risky; (3) wait until the following morning to avoid the risk of hitting friendly forces with Close Air Support, and to have a clear view of the targets.¹⁷⁷¹ Janvier chose the third option. He decided not to sign the Blue Sword Request and thus not to grant Close Air Support at night. His plan was to review the situation at 06.00 hours the following morning (unless there was an attack during the night, in which case he would order nightly Close Air Support).¹⁷⁷²

Janvier notified Sarajevo of his decision and De Jonge reported the decision to the Operation Officer in Sarajevo via his own channels. Zagreb also issued an instruction that aircraft had to be on stand by as of 06.00 hours for Close Air Support. It was agreed with NATO that by that time the

¹⁷⁶⁷ *Associated Press* reported that Akashi would have preferred to leave the decision to New York and had contacted Boutros-Ghali to that end. The latter however made a public statement that he was willing to deploy the aircraft to defend Srebrenica and the UN troops. (10/07/95, 23:15 Eastern Time).

¹⁷⁶⁸ Interviews A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/09/99; H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99; DOPKLu, STAOOPER. SCO to PDOPKLu, draft replies to questions from the Chamber. The course of the discussion is described in Rohde, *Endgame*, p. 119-121 and Westerman and Rijs, *Het zwaarste scenario (The Blackest Scenario)*, p. 153-5. Rhode (p. 124) also mentions that Karremans had asked during the CAT meeting whether he should abandon the remaining OPs. In view of the political and military consequences, he considered this a 'command decision'. Janvier thought that such decisions should be made on site. Other sources fail to mention this issue. Colonel De Jonge denied that this point had ever been raised in Zagreb. (Interview, 30/05/01).

¹⁷⁶⁹ Confidential information (1).

¹⁷⁷⁰ DOPKLu, STAOOPER, no number. Logbook CAOC 5ATAF, 10/07/95, 1925Z; DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 10/07/95, 1839Z, 1942Z.

¹⁷⁷¹ Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35(1998), § 290.

¹⁷⁷² DCBC, Box 59. Overview of Citations Logbook Air Operations Control Center, Annex A to Klu replies to Questions by the Chamber on Srebrenica, NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. 'Chronology of Events CAS Missions Srebrenica', 10/07/95, 2045LT.

aircraft would be flying over the sea. The reaction time from the sea to the enclave was only about fifteen minutes.¹⁷⁷³

Zagreb that evening was not in a state of panic. No one was expecting a massive attack on the enclave, and no one could foresee that the fall could come as quickly as it did the following day.¹⁷⁷⁴ The tone of the press briefing in Sarajevo was ‘business as usual’; although journalist Samantha Power of *The Washington Post* noticed a degree of uncertainty in the words of spokesperson Gary Coward when he said about Srebrenica that ‘we think they are trying to achieve this (he drew a small circle), but we fear they might do this’(and he drew a large circle).¹⁷⁷⁵

General Janvier’s Telephone Conversations

On the evening of 10 July, during the meeting of the Crisis Action Team regarding the request for Close Air Support, Janvier conducted a number of telephone conversations in French which later caused some commotion. Janvier frequently contacted and consulted Paris partially due to the fact that he was the most senior French officer and the commander of the French contingent.¹⁷⁷⁶ According to the Military Assistant of the Deputy Force Commander, Major David Last, Janvier’s position implied that those conversations were largely routine communications without much deeper significance. During meetings, Janvier was frequently called away for telephone calls, which took place in the office of the Force Commander where the secure telephone line to Paris was located. None of the international staff were witness to those conversations; which may well have generated and fed the prevailing rumours. However, it did not appear that any of the conversations with Paris had a significant effect on Janvier’s own position.¹⁷⁷⁷ Deputy Force Commander Ashton did not perceive the calls as any different to what the Canadians and Dutch were doing – i.e., simply calling their superiors at home.¹⁷⁷⁸ In the same way Janvier had daily telephone contact with the French Chief of Staff of the Defence, Admiral Lanxade.

He had significantly less contact with the Security Advisor of French President Chirac, and those conversations were primarily aimed at obtaining information (in addition to information from Lanxade) to better advise Chirac. The purpose of one of those calls was to pass on a decision from Chirac. Telephone conversations between the French President and the French Force Commanders were however exceptional. It apparently only happened on two occasions, namely, a conversation between Mitterrand and Cot in February 1994 during the Sarajevo crisis, and a conversation between Chirac and Janvier during the hostage crisis. On 10 July there was no direct contact.¹⁷⁷⁹

Kolsteren, the Dutch Chief of Staff of UNPF in Zagreb, was amazed by media reports to the effect that all calls from Paris conducted in French at the time of the fall of Srebrenica were from the French president. According to Kolsteren, whenever that had occurred previously, Janvier had invariably said; ‘Listen, Mr President, I am an international officer and I have my own responsibility for the situation here.’ By the time Janvier left Zagreb, his fears of being retired were apparently not entirely unfounded. Contact with the capitals was an accepted given as long as it remained clear where the primary responsibility lay. In Kolsteren’s view, Paris’ efforts at controlling the situation were not very effective. Moreover, Kolsteren claims that developments in July were such that, no matter how hard you tried to steer it, the situation was virtually beyond anyone’s control. Janvier often made prompt decisions that needed to be worked out afterwards by the staff. It was a fairly open affair, and it was not true that staff members were left out of the decision-making process and that all decision-

¹⁷⁷³ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

¹⁷⁷⁴ Interview R. Theunens, 08/02/00.

¹⁷⁷⁵ Interview Samantha Power, 08/06/00.

¹⁷⁷⁶ Interview Tony Banbury, 11/05/00

¹⁷⁷⁷ Interview David Last, 05/07/00

¹⁷⁷⁸ Interview Barry Ashton, 30/05/00.

¹⁷⁷⁹ Confidential interview (5).

making was left in the hands of two or three generals. The only closed sessions were those conducted with the American mediator, Richard Holbrooke.¹⁷⁸⁰

Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, Commodore C.G.J. Hilderink, was an incidental witness when Janvier received the message that a French mortar platoon had been ordered via national lines to occupy positions on Mount Igman near Sarajevo without his knowledge. On that occasion Janvier made no secret of his anger at Paris' interference.¹⁷⁸¹

Rohde in his book mentions some of Janvier's telephone conversations conducted in French on 10 July. He also mentions a heated discussion in which Janvier raised his voice.¹⁷⁸² If true, then it is not highly likely that Chirac had been on the line - more likely Gobilliard. They communicated on several occasions on 10 July and exchanged information regarding Janvier's conversations with VRS Generals Tolimir and Mladic's headquarters. After the aforementioned conversation Janvier reiterated his view that the dark would compromise the safety of friendly troops, and that the risk was too great.¹⁷⁸³

When asked about it later, the Belgian, Captain Theunens, replied with certainty that the conversation mentioned by Rohde had taken place between Janvier and Gobilliard – Janvier never spoke to Nicolai during Smith's absence. According to Theunens the door had remained ajar; which certainly would not have been the case had Chirac been on the line. Theunens, as representative of the Intelligence Officer in Zagreb, had been called to the meeting of the Crisis Action Team and had to stay in the meeting to interpret from French into English and vice versa. Theunens had no idea where the rumour that Chirac had called Janvier on that day had originated. In his view the story had been started by rumour mongers who had blamed Janvier for having proposed in May to allow the enclaves to fall. Rumours had played an important role in that context.¹⁷⁸⁴

The Dutch Government later also stated that it had no information that pointed to contact between Chirac and Janvier.¹⁷⁸⁵ The compilers of the UN report on Srebrenica also could not draw the conclusion that Janvier had solicited the view of the French Government based on material from their interviews.¹⁷⁸⁶ The entire debate also begs the question as to why Chirac would have refused Close Air Support in Srebrenica. Chirac is in fact known as more of a hardliner.

No other sources offered deeper insight into the question as to why Janvier refused the request for Close Air Support.¹⁷⁸⁷ Janvier was in fact generally known as a cautious military leader and always tried to put himself in the place of the UN soldiers on the ground when making decisions. According to Deputy Force Commander Ashton, Janvier did want to grant Close Air Support, but sincerely thought it impossible for the aircraft to identify their targets at night.¹⁷⁸⁸ Kolsteren also confirmed that Janvier had feared that friendly forces could be harmed by nightly Close Air Support operations. Friendly casualties and fatalities would have done more harm than good. That fear was stronger than the fear of potential harm to the Dutchbat hostages in Bratunac. It was only after the fall of Srebrenica that Admiral Smith was able to personally convince Janvier that NATO could hit targets at night and even had a preference for that. The NATO liaison officer in Zagreb on 10 July was not as explicit on that point as Admiral Smith eventually was. The NATO liaison officer did however state that a nightly

¹⁷⁸⁰ Interview A.M.W.W. M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

¹⁷⁸¹ Interview C.G.J. Hilderink, 11/08/00.

¹⁷⁸² Rohde, *Endgame*, p. 121.

¹⁷⁸³ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

¹⁷⁸⁴ Interview R. Theunens, 08/02/00.

¹⁷⁸⁵ TK, Conference Year 1995-1996, 22 181, No. 134 (30/11/95).

¹⁷⁸⁶ Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35(1998), § 287.

¹⁷⁸⁷ Colonel Brantz in Tuzla, based on information obtained from the political advisor of Sector North East and from CIA circles, claimed that it was 80% certain that Janvier had been in contact with Chirac. According to Brantz, Janvier purportedly heard from the president that no Close Air Support could be granted before 12 July. The CIA man concerned had heard from an 'acquaintance' in Akashi's office that Chirac had called Janvier during the meeting of the Crisis Action Team. This concerns second-hand information. (NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Telephone conversation SMG with Col. Brantz, 04/08/95; Westerman and Rijs, *Srebrenica: Het zwaartste scenario*, p. 158).

¹⁷⁸⁸ Interview Barry Ashton, 30/05/00.

Close Air Support operation would have been preferable to one conducted by day, and that he himself had flown such missions. Janvier was an old-fashioned infantry man and, according to Kolsteren, while he knew exactly what his powers were with regard to Close Air Support, he was less well informed about the use of aircraft and their capabilities. Another contributory factor was the fact that Janvier had thought that the fighting would stop at night, as it was almost invariably the case in Bosnia. Janvier's argument was that it would therefore also be harder to locate targets for Close Air Support. That was the position he had adopted at around 21.30 hours. The VRS offensive had been discontinued and there were no targets available; which obviated the need for Close Air Support. If the VRS were to have stopped or withdrawn, the objective would have been achieved, albeit temporarily. De Jonge did point out at the time that the VRS would probably continue the offensive on the following day.¹⁷⁸⁹

In Kolsteren's view the decision to delay was not only based on the fact that it had been dark at around 21.30 hours and that Dutchbat's safety would have been compromised, or that the Bosnian Serbs had stopped the offensive. In his view a further reason was the fact that the blocking position had not yet been attacked.¹⁷⁹⁰ Janvier's position was that the blocking positions would be more effective at stopping the VRS infantry in the dark than Close Air Support.¹⁷⁹¹ Janvier's judgement on that score was not highly relevant, as, in his own words, fighting tended to stop at night. Based on his report to New York on 10 July, Akashi agreed with Janvier on that point. According to Akashi the option of Close Air Support had received 'serious consideration', but Janvier had decided against it because it concerned an infantry attack, 'thus making means other than air power preferable in UNPROFOR's efforts to stop the advance'.¹⁷⁹² The Hague received a different and slightly more distorted impression of the situation: 'The VRS advance had stopped at 21.30 hours and Janvier had refused Close Air Support for 'technical reasons', namely that NATO aircraft could not attack infantry.'¹⁷⁹³

Janvier's caution was also reflected in his request to Kolsteren to ask Voorhoeve for the Dutch Government's position in the case of a decision in favour of Close Air Support. The Dutch Government responded to the effect that it would accept any decision made by the Force Commander, even if it led to reprisals against the captive peacekeepers.

According to the UN report on Srebrenica, Janvier's decision had also been influenced by a report he had received from Karremans. The UN report does not state who had passed on the report, and how. Karremans was purported to have said that the blocking positions 'could still hold their ground'. Karremans was further purported to have said that he did not consider Close Air Support useful at the time, but would like to have it available at 06.00 hours the following day. The UN report also stated that Dutchbat and the Bosnian Muslims were coordinating a joint defence; which was strange.¹⁷⁹⁴ Zagreb had apparently been misinformed with respect to the latter issue. There was absolutely no question of establishing a joint defence at the time. That picture must have been generated based on reports that Dutchbat had problems with the ABiH in its vicinity; which may have prompted Zagreb to conclude that they were occupying the same lines at the time.¹⁷⁹⁵

¹⁷⁸⁹ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

¹⁷⁹⁰ Debriefing statement Major General A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 27/09/95. Colonel De Jonge confirmed that Janvier had mentioned those reasons, but denied that Dutchbat's failure to take action had played a role. It had in fact not even been mentioned. (Interview, 30/05/01).

¹⁷⁹¹ Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35(1998), § 291.

¹⁷⁹² UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi (signed Janvier) to Annan, 10/07/95, No. Z-1128.

¹⁷⁹³ DCBC, 607. Annex to Peace Operations Situation Report No. 137/95.

¹⁷⁹⁴ Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35(1998), § 287, 289 and 291. Voorhoeve confirmed that Kolsteren had asked him this and that he had been in no position with respect to the population to refuse Close Air Support. (Interview 13/03/97).

¹⁷⁹⁵ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 30/05/01. In De Jonge's view reports about the withdrawal from the blocking position only reached Zagreb on 11 July and that the UN report was inaccurate on that score.

14. The Start of the Refugee Stream

On the morning of 10 July, Srebrenica city took 49 grenade and nine missile hits in one hour. The PTT building was hit several times. The situation became too hot for the UNMOs and they relocated from their post at the PTT building to the compound in Potocari.¹⁷⁹⁶ As the headquarters of the 28th Division of the ABiH was based in the building, they feared further shelling of that building. Upon their departure, they were stopped by Opstina President Osman Suljic and ABiH Commander Ramiz Becirovic, who ordered them to remain in the building.

The UNMOs were then instructed from their own headquarters in Tuzla to arrange a meeting. That took place while the building was shaken by a new round of shelling. At that point Osman Suljic burst into tears and told the UNMOs to let the world know that the VRS were using chemical weapons to wipe out the population. There were however no indications to the effect that the VRS had used any chemical weapons during the offensive. The UNMOs explained to their headquarters that they needed a safer environment in which to perform their work and would therefore continue reporting from Potocari.¹⁷⁹⁷

In the words of UNMO Squadron Leader David Tetteh, the UNMOs thereupon left the location where they had 'courageously stood their ground in a seemingly dangerous situation', and from which they had gathered information for the higher echelons from across the length and breadth of the enclave. The group then departed, again in the words of Tetteh:

'... under a rain of bullets. Driving at a death speed of approx 140 km/h, the group sped along the almost empty streets of the doomed town through the valleys of Potocari and headed directly into the line of fire of the big guns on the hills of Budak and Borici, which threateningly covered their escape route to freedom. At every moment of their flight they expected just one unlucky shell to pick them off the track and hurl them into oblivion to end their misery. And at one time a shell just missed them by the skin of their teeth; however from that moment onwards, nothing more mattered to them, as the driver increased his foot pressure on the accelerator, automatically pushing the poor Jeep Cherokee beyond its endurance.'¹⁷⁹⁸

Interpreter Emir Suljagic showed more courage than his UNMO employers. He accompanied the UNMOs to Potocari, from where the sounds of shelling was audible. Suljagic suggested returning to Srebrenica city, as the UNMOs in Potocari had no access to information about developments in the city. He claimed that the UNMOs did not dare return. He then asked for a map and a walkie-talkie, and said that he would go alone. The UNMOs thought he had gone mad, but they were happy that he had volunteered as he could thereby keep them updated. The Dutch Major, De Haan (leader of the three UNMOs), offered him a map, a radio and charged batteries, and told him that he would be operating entirely on his own, and that De Haan would accept no responsibility for him. Emir Suljagic thus dodged the shelling and returned to Srebrenica city via the river valley.

He continued to report from the PTT building, UNHCR, MSF and the hospital until about 19.00 hours that evening. At that point the city and the entire situation fell apart completely, with masses of people fleeing the city to the north. Suljagic later stated that he only became aware of his own fear when he saw thousands of people fleeing under the helpless gaze of local ABiH leader Zulfo Tursonovic and other leaders. The shelling intensified and he decided to return to Potocari. He soon came under direct fire, at which point he began to fear that returning would be impossible. Fortunately,

¹⁷⁹⁶ SMG, 1001. Capsats MSF Srebrenica to UNPROFOR Dutchbat, 10/07/95 03:24; SMG 1004. Ops Room Dutchbat to MSF, 101157B Jul 95; Sitcen BLS to Ops Room DB-3, 101500B Jul 95.

¹⁷⁹⁷ NIOD, Confidential Coll. (4). Debrief of UNMO's from the Srebrenica enclave, 23/07/95.

¹⁷⁹⁸ NIOD, Coll. Segers. 'Report on the Battle of Srebrenica', compiled by Sqn Ldr David D. Tetteh, 21/07/95.

however, a Dutchbat vehicle stopped and picked him up. At around 20.00 hours he was back in Potocari. His actions allowed De Haan to report to Karremans and the UNMO organisation on the situation in Srebrenica. He reported nine casualties that morning. The UNMOs acknowledged that Suljagic had gathered most of the information they had signalled through on that day.¹⁷⁹⁹

During their stay in Potocari the UNMOs depended on Dutchbat for information and, thereby ceased to be an independent source of information.

The afternoon was also extremely hectic in Srebrenica city. At about midday on 10 July a large crowd of refugees stormed the B Company compound in Srebrenica and tried to force the gates open. Groen learnt about this from his guards via his radio. He was under the impression that the population at the time felt that it would be safer inside the gates of the compound. In his view the compound could not offer safety to the crowd of several thousand refugees, as it was much too small and there was no reason to believe it would be spared in the case of an attack. Groen gave instructions to open the gates to admit three representatives (their identities are unknown) with the aim of persuading them to leave the compound in Srebrenica and to push on in the direction of Potocari where it was still relatively peaceful. When the gates were opened to admit the delegates, a mass of hysterical refugees broke through the fences and stormed into the tiny compound.¹⁸⁰⁰

At that time the compound was occupied by no more than thirty Dutch military personnel – the rest were occupying the blocking position.¹⁸⁰¹ Within a few moments the whole place was filled with people. The guards were called in to help prevent occupation of the Ops Room (the Command Post). Sergeant 1st Class Zuurman was instructed to keep the people at bay under force of arms, but he quickly admitted that there was no stopping them.¹⁸⁰² Groen ordered all available personnel outside to attempt to regain control of the chaotic situation, to restore calm, and to attempt to persuade as many as possible to go to Potocari.¹⁸⁰³ Zuurman proposed to Groen to get the crowds going by walking with them in the direction of Potocari. He pushed through the crowd to set it in motion accompanied by three soldiers. Groen too was hoping that once the crowd started moving, accompanied by UN soldiers, the rest of the population would follow. He asked the permission of the battalion command in Potocari to conduct the refugees to Potocari, as he saw no other way of getting them out of the compound. In his view few would have survived a grenade attack on the compound.¹⁸⁰⁴

At around 15.00 hours the group of refugees led by the Dutchbat personnel finally came into motion. The ABiH also helped to persuade the refugees to abandon the compound after Groen had pointed out that the chaos totally prevented the unit from doing its work. The column of refugees diminished systematically en route to Potocari, as many simply abandoned the column partly due to the grenades that were exploding around them and partly because few believed that the situation would be much better in Potocari.¹⁸⁰⁵ After two to three kilometres the march ground to a halt when mortar grenades exploded approximately two hundred metres from the road and the refugees sought cover. According to Zuurman it seemed as if the VRS were trying to intimidate the crowd and bring them to a halt.¹⁸⁰⁶

Later that day the, to prevent further panic, the mayor made an attempt to keep as many people as possible in Srebrenica. He did not want more people to relocate to Potocari.¹⁸⁰⁷ Hageman forwarded

¹⁷⁹⁹ Interview Emir Suljagic; 23/11/97. NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Capast TA to TX, 111000B Jul 95.

¹⁸⁰⁰ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (15).

¹⁸⁰¹ Debriefing statement, H.J.W. Timmerman, 12/09/95.

¹⁸⁰² SMG, 1007/25. Debriefing Sergeant Zuurman, 22/07/95.

¹⁸⁰³ Debriefing statement Sergeant 1st Class G.W. Reussing, 12/09/95. See also Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 299.

¹⁸⁰⁴ SMG, 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 10/07/95, 19.10 and 19.22.

¹⁸⁰⁵ Interview J.R. Groen, 05/07/99. See also Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 300.

¹⁸⁰⁶ SMG, 1007/25. Debriefing Sergeant Zuurman, 22/07/95.

¹⁸⁰⁷ SMG, 1004/56. Logbook B Coy 10/07/95, 20.33, 20.34, 21.07. Reports mention both the president of the Opstina (Osman Suljic) and the mayor (Fahrudin Salihovic). Most Dutchbat personnel did not know the officials or the difference between their positions. The Debriefing Report mentioned the mayor. Captain W. Melchers of Section 5 also confirmed this.

that message from the mayor to Company Commander Groen with the argument that the mayor did not wish to contribute to the turmoil. According to Groen the population was already in turmoil. Hageman was told, ‘The more people you can get away from the compound, the better. Try to get the stream moving and send the people towards Potocari where they will be safer.’ Conditions were still relatively safe in Potocari, as few shots had been fired in the northern section of the enclave.¹⁸⁰⁸ Shortly after 21.00 hours the local leaders of the Opstina however sent the refugees back to Srebrenica. Apparently they had consulted the ABiH Commander, Ramiz Becirovic to that effect. As a result the attempt to move the crowd to the compound in Potocari was given up and the designated personnel put on standby. By 22.00 hours the refugees had left the compound in Srebrenica.¹⁸⁰⁹

15. The Evening of 10 July: Emergency Meetings in Various Locations

New York

On the evening of 10 July Akashi reported to New York for the first time since 7 July regarding the situation in Srebrenica. The communication gap during that period could be attributed to the fact that Akashi and Janvier had had a meeting in Paris on 6 July, followed by meetings in Geneva on 8 July. Moreover, 8 and 9 July fell over the weekend. While in Geneva, Janvier questioned whether it would not have been more sensible to be in Zagreb. Akashi and Boutros-Ghali however kept him in Geneva. No information was available regarding the situation in Srebrenica, as a result of which it was nearly impossible to assess the situation realistically. Only on 9 July, after receiving more and harder data about the situation, did Janvier begin to get clarity regarding the deteriorating conditions in Srebrenica.¹⁸¹⁰

The matter-of-fact tone of Akashi’s Code Cable to New York, which was in fact a compilation of earlier UNHCR, UNMO and Dutchbat reports, differed markedly from the faxes sent to Sarajevo and Zagreb by the local UNHCR representative, Almir Ramic. Akashi’s main concern was the shelling. According to the figures released by UNHCR the shelling had, by that time, claimed six lives and 23 casualties. *Médecins Sans Frontières* had reported four deaths and 22 casualties. Akashi expected the continued shelling to increase those numbers. Two thousand refugees had sought refuge in the vicinity of the hospital and an unknown number was fleeing Srebrenica for Potocari. Akashi also mentioned a meeting between Karremans and the local VRS commander, which had in fact not occurred (its purported occurrence had been based on an incorrect conclusion drawn from a confusing UNMO report).¹⁸¹¹

Towards the end of the day on 10 July Zagreb was still in the dark as to why Mladic had launched an operation against Srebrenica. Clearly the VRS attached no value to the contents of the declarations they had issued previously (as summarised in the previous chapter). Akashi mentioned four possible scenarios. The first was that ‘a renegade commander’ was responsible for the situation in Srebrenica. That seemed unlikely, especially if the renegade commander was Mladic himself. An alternative was that the VRS wanted to reduce the size of the Safe Area to shorten their own lines in order to release more of their own troops. It was also possible that the VRS simply wished to overrun the enclave as retribution and to increase control of East Bosnia, and to release more troops and at the same time to kill the plan of the Contact Group that formed the basis for further negotiations. A final possibility was that the VRS wished to show that the Rapid Reaction Force presented no solution to UNPROFOR’s problems. No one in Zagreb however had any idea which of those scenarios was the most probable.¹⁸¹²

¹⁸⁰⁸ Interview J. R. Groen, 05/07/99.

¹⁸⁰⁹ SMG, 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 10/07/95, 21.24 through 21.49.

¹⁸¹⁰ *Mission d’Information commune sur les événements de Srebrenica*, Audition de M. Bernard Janvier, 25/01/01.

¹⁸¹¹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 10/07/95, No. Z-1128.

¹⁸¹² UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 10/07/95, No. Z-1128.

Akashi received an instruction from New York to report the situation in as much detail as possible to enable the office of the UN Secretary to answer questions posed by 'interested delegations' (of member states). Special attention had to be given to fire on UNPROFOR personnel by either side, especially by the ABiH, and the use of Close Air Support. Delegations were also likely to ask questions about the possible use of the Rapid Reaction Force to rescue Dutchbat.¹⁸¹³

The Security Council also took notice of developments in Srebrenica. The United Kingdom, France and Argentina wanted to express their support for Dutchbat, as well as for the 'resolute attitude' displayed by the civilian and military leaders of UNPF and UNPROFOR. A briefing to the Security Council stated that the ABiH had fired on three separate Dutchbat APCs with rifles, hand grenades and an anti-tank weapon. The United States and the Russian Federation adopted the usual stance with respect to the two warring factions. The Americans stated that the situation had to be investigated thoroughly before blaming the ABiH for firing on Dutch APCs. One possible interpretation of the events was that the ABiH had assumed that the APCs they had fired upon had been confiscated by the VRS. The Americans felt that that theory could not simply be dismissed, as they had previously shown no restraint in attacking UN positions in UN uniforms. The Russian Federation there against felt that the events in Srebrenica should be viewed in the appropriate context. The ABiH had executed offensives on Serbian villages from the Safe Area. The Russians questioned how the ABiH could have been capable of firing grenades and anti-tank weapons at Dutchbat APCs and referred to a recent letter from the Bosnian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sacirbey, in which he indicated that, on 8 May 1993, UNPROFOR had disarmed the ABiH in the enclave.¹⁸¹⁴

As a result of the discrepancy between the positions of the United States and the Russian Federation, no resolution was adopted in the Security Council. The Honduran President of the Security Council, Gerardo Martinez Blanco, merely stated that the Security Council had debated the value of calling in a NATO air strike against the Bosnian Serbs. In a declaration issued by the chairman, the Security Council stated that it was extremely concerned about the situation and the distress of the population. It called upon the parties to respect the status of the Safe Area, and the Security Council demanded the release of the captive Dutchbat personnel by the Bosnian Serbs.

The members of the Contact Group were also unable to reach agreement about a British draft declaration. Due to the general discord, the Bosnian Serbs were not held responsible for the situation and no condemnation expressed of their offensive against Srebrenica.¹⁸¹⁵

Démarches

That notwithstanding, the British representative in Belgrade was instructed on 10 July to urgently contact Milosevic's government and to insist that Milosevic use his influence with the Bosnian Serbs to release the Dutchbat hostages, to stop their offensive and to withdraw to the borders of the Safe Area. The results, if any, of that demarche are unknown.¹⁸¹⁶

Akashi also instructed his representative in Belgrade, Iouri Miakotnykh, to update Milosevic regarding the situation and to ask his help to get the Bosnian Serbs to stop their offensive, and especially to cease firing on civilians. On 10 July Akashi was in Dubrovnik as a guest of the Croatian Government, from where he tried in vain to reach Milosevic. Late that evening Miakotnykh reported that he had spoken to Milosevic, but the latter had told him not to expect much, as the Bosnian Serbs

¹⁸¹³ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box, 87305. File Srebrenica 3300-SRE vol. I, 1 Jul -16 Nov 95. Outgoing Cryptofax Gharekhan to Akashi, 10/07/95, No. 2268.

¹⁸¹⁴ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 10/07/95, No. MSC-2271.

¹⁸¹⁵ ABZ, PVNY. Fax PVNY to DAV, DVL/BZ, DEU/OE and DPV/PZ, 10/07/95, No. nyv-4242; DCBC, 681. Code Biegan 603, 11/07/95; *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 10/07/95, 19:42 CET.

¹⁸¹⁶ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

did not listen to him. Due to the rapidly deteriorating situation, Akashi returned to Zagreb, but only arrived back at his post around midnight on the night of 10 to 11 July.¹⁸¹⁷

In New York, Kofi Annan's replacement, Iqbal Riza, summoned the Bosnian charge d'affaires, Ivan Misić, about the ABiH shooting at Dutchbat APCs. Riza claimed to have found those actions incomprehensible, especially at a time when the UN had clearly taken positions against the VRS advance. Misić also stated that he was assuming that the ABiH had fired on the UN vehicles based on the assumption that they had been confiscated by the VRS.

According to Misić, Sacirbey had had contact with an anonymous Dutch UN general who had stated that no incidents of ABiH fire on Dutchbat vehicles had occurred on 10 July. Riza then argued that Van Kappen had been in contact with both Zagreb and the Dutch Ministry of Defence and that his contacts had confirmed the ABiH attacks. All of the APCs that had been confiscated by the VRS were in Bratunac and therefore could not have been used by the VRS. Misić then promised to take the UN protest to the authorities in Sarajevo.

The office of the UN Secretary also informed the permanent representatives to the UN of Germany and the United States about the shootings. Both representatives promised that their embassies in Sarajevo would send a demarche to the Bosnian Government to protest the attacks on peacekeepers.¹⁸¹⁸

VRS Ultimatums to Dutchbat

At around 21.00 hours on the evening of 10 July, Dutchbat received two reports from the VRS via Sergeant Bos who was being held hostage in Bratunac. Bos stated that they were being treated well and that the VRS had claimed to be against the ABiH entering Dutchbat compounds. They did not however have any objection to *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) and UNHCR entering Dutchbat compounds. Assuming those conditions were met, UNPROFOR would be in no way threatened. VRS liaison officer, Major Nikolić added to Bos' report that the VRS would not object to the population relocating to Potocari, as long as they stayed out of the compound. No further attacks would be executed on Dutchbat vehicles. Nikolić also explained that the aim of the VRS action had been to demilitarise the enclave due to the fact that Dutchbat had failed in that mission.¹⁸¹⁹

The latter report was also confirmed in a letter written earlier that day by Mladić to General Smith in which he stated that, contrary to the agreement in 1993, Srebrenica had not been demilitarised. In Mladić's view the ABiH had abused the Safe Area, as a result of which hundreds of Serbian civilians had been killed and two hundred wounded. That was the reason why the 'Muslim terrorists' had to be neutralised. Mladić added that the VRS activities were neither directed at the civilians nor at UNPROFOR, and that the UNPROFOR units need not feel threatened. The fact that Dutchbat personnel were being held safely in Bosnian Serb territory after 'one of your soldiers' had been killed by the ABiH purportedly proved that the actions were not directed at UNPROFOR.¹⁸²⁰ Deputy VRS Commander Milan Gvero repeated the message in more detail at the VRS press centre and again pointed out that, in 1993, the VRS had ceased the offensive against Srebrenica because the international community had promised to demilitarise the enclave.¹⁸²¹

Soon thereafter a new VRS message reached Dutchbat. According to that message ABiH soldiers were to report at Yellow Bridge, north of the enclave, between 06.00 hours on 11 July and

¹⁸¹⁷ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi (signed Janvier) to Annan, 10/07/95, No. Z-1128; CRST. Code Cable Akashi to Mlakotnykh UNPF Belgrade, 10/07/95, no number; Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35(1998), § 286 and 292.

¹⁸¹⁸ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 10/07/95, No. MSC-2272.

¹⁸¹⁹ SMG 1001. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 10/07/95; SMG 1004/61. Capsat TAH to TA, 10/07/95 16:44.

¹⁸²⁰ SMG 1004/84. HQ Army of the Republic of Srpska to UNPROFOR Command, 10/07/95, No. 06/17-455, sent by UNMO Liaison Officer Pale 11113B Jul 1995; SMG 1002/10. Capsat UNHCR Srebrenica to UNHCR Belgrade, Sarajevo, Zagreb, 10/07/95 17:05.

¹⁸²¹ CRST. Banja Luka (UNHCR), Input for EXTREL Press Review, 11/07/95, 1102Z.

06.00 hours on 13 July to hand in their weapons. They would then be free to leave for their own preferred destinations on the condition that they left their weapons behind. Dutchbat and NGOs would be free to leave the enclave.¹⁸²² The representatives of the NGOs and Dutchbat could go to Bratunac to surrender. Dutchbat was thereby also required to leave their weapons behind. It was not initially clear whether this also entailed a withdrawal of Dutchbat from Eastern Bosnia. The following day Prof. Nikola Koljevic, the chairman of the commission of the Republika Srpska for cooperation with the UN explained that the message should not be viewed as an ultimatum, but as an offer to Dutchbat to withdraw beyond a certain line based on considerations of safety.¹⁸²³ VRS General Milan Gvero had already confirmed to the press that the local population was free to leave: 'All civilians who want this will be able to leave the town in an organised and safe way.' At the same time Gvero warned the West not to intervene in the fighting and not to get involved in the Muslim propaganda war.¹⁸²⁴

Meeting between Janvier and VRS General Tolimir

Fifteen minutes later Janvier also learnt in a telephone conversation with VRS General Tolimir that the VRS had granted a free withdrawal to both the UN personnel and the population. Janvier summarily dismissed the proposed withdrawal of the UN¹⁸²⁵ and dismissed both options (withdrawal of Dutchbat and the population). On Sarajevo's instruction Karremans also dismissed the withdrawal of both groups. Lieutenant-Colonel De Ruiter in Sarajevo notified the Royal Netherlands Army Crisis staff that the ultimatum would not be observed.¹⁸²⁶ Ramiz Becirovic also advised Karremans not to accept the ultimatum after Dutchbat had forwarded it to him, the War President, Osman Suljic, and other members of the Opstina.¹⁸²⁷ Instead, Dutchbat replied to the VRS to withdraw beyond the 'Morillon Line' and to refrain from executing any further attacks. The withdrawal was to be effective as of 06.00 hours the following day, failing which Close Air Support would follow.¹⁸²⁸

On the evening of 10 July several further phone calls were made between Janvier and VRS General Tolimir. The ABiH listened in on three of the conversations. The transcripts are important, as no record of the conversations were available in the archives of the Force Commander. The transcripts show no record of any discussions regarding a 'free' withdrawal. The conversations were initiated by Janvier, who had wanted to talk to Mladic about the VRS attacks on Dutchbat; however, the VRS general was in the field at the time. Janvier was referred to General Tolimir, who denied any knowledge of VRS attacks on the UN. He added that he did not believe it, as the VRS had consistently endeavoured to avoid that kind of situation. He promised to verify Janvier's statements, but refused to pay heed to Janvier's warning to stop the attacks and to withdraw. Janvier could call back after 20 to 30 minutes after Tolimir had issued orders to establish a connection between the VRS and Dutchbat.

In the subsequent conversation Tolimir reported that Dutchbat had refused to establish a radio communications with a VRS radio station. He had also established that one of the OPs had fired at the VRS after it had been instructed to do so via an ABiH radio network. In Tolimir's view this meant that Dutchbat had transferred its command to the ABiH. Janvier reacted with disbelief and queried the veracity of the assertion that the UN had fired at the VRS. Tolimir confirmed it, but stated that he had

¹⁸²² NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary, (version August 1999), p. 130-131; KAB, BLS. Brief Karremans to the Minister of Defence, BLS, 29/08/95.

¹⁸²³ CRST. Pale UNHCR 11 Jul 95 12.55Z, sent by the Military Liaison Officer of UNHCR (de Moel) to RNLA Crisis Staff.

¹⁸²⁴ *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 10/07/95, 19:42 CET as quoted by the Belgrade news agency *Beta*.

¹⁸²⁵ Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35(1998), § 286 and 292.

¹⁸²⁶ SMG 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 10/07/95, 20.45 and 20.58; NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Capsat TA to TX, 101230B Jul 95; SMG/1004. Update 110200B Jul 95, Annex A to BH-SNE DSR dated 11/07/95; UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 10/07/95, No. Z-1128; DCBC, 637. RNLA Crisis Staff 102200B Jul 95.

¹⁸²⁷ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Retransmission Capsat TA to TX, 111331B Jul 95 from UNMO HQ BH SNE to UNMO HQ BH Comd, UNMO HQ Zagreb, 111415B Jul 95.

¹⁸²⁸ SMG 1004/49. Capsat Maj. Franken to Capt. Groen.

nevertheless ordered the VRS to refrain from firing at the UN positions. According to Tolimir the local VRS commander had stated that Dutchbat had been put under pressure to fire at the VRS.

In the second conversation Tolimir also stated that the VRS had agreed to withdraw to the positions taken on 9 July; however, that could only happen after termination of the current skirmishes. Tolimir reminded Janvier that 'people were dying there', whereupon Janvier stated that he was fully aware of that. Janvier then added that, unless the VRS withdrew, things could get much worse for them and that this was Tolimir's own choice. Tolimir said that he would do everything in his power to prevent a clash between the VRS and UNPROFOR. He asked Janvier to do his utmost and use his influence to prevent UNPROFOR from firing on the VRS. Janvier added that he did not want the VRS to confiscate Dutchbat's weapons. If it were to happen, the UN troops would be obliged to defend themselves as real soldiers. Tolimir promised to instruct the VRS to refrain from confiscating Dutchbat weapons; however he needed some time to get the information to the trenches. Tolimir pointed out that the Bosnian Muslims were spreading a lot of unfounded rumours. Tolimir said that he had tried for two days to prevent casualties and losses, and that the VRS had thus far succeeded in that. Tolimir again wanted to check the situation and told Janvier to call him again in one hour.¹⁸²⁹

In the follow-up conversation (only Tolimir's side of the conversation had been recorded), Janvier was again told that he could not speak to Mladic and that this could only be arranged on 11 July between 10 and 11 hours. Tolimir re-emphasised that the VRS had adopted the appropriate attitude towards UNPROFOR and the population. He assumed that Janvier was familiar with the fact that the ABiH were conducting attacks from the demilitarised zone in order to connect it to Zepa. The details of those actions had already been passed on to General Nicolai in Sarajevo, and Tolimir assumed that Janvier had been updated on that account. Tolimir further reprimanded the ABiH for using UNPROFOR weapons.

Tolimir also confirmed that the Dutchbat personnel had not been captured or taken hostage in Republika Srpska territory, but had voluntarily approached the VRS to avoid being caught in the crossfire. The Dutchbat soldiers had openly stated that the ABiH had threatened them with death if they were to withdraw from the OPs. Janvier had to understand that the ABiH were exploiting the situation in order to exacerbate the fighting. The ABiH had confiscated all heavy weaponry left behind by Dutchbat. Concerning a withdrawal on the part of the VRS, Tolimir on this occasion only stated that it would be difficult until such time as the war objectives had been fulfilled, and that it was particularly hard while the ABiH were launching attacks from all over the enclave. According to Tolimir the VRS were doing everything in their power to stabilise the situation.¹⁸³⁰

All of the conversations between Janvier and Tolimir were characterised by the Bosnian Serbs' blame of the ABiH for the situation, and repeated attempts on their part to depict the operation against Srebrenica as a defensive strategy. Janvier failed to adopt a tough line in those conversations. Tolimir largely dictated the tone of the conversations. Janvier neither set hard conditions for withdrawal nor threatened with the use of air power. They also did not discuss the fate of the population. Nicolai adopted a firmer line in his conversations with Tolimir. Janvier's conversations were aimed at preventing the VRS from firing on UNPROFOR. That did however beg the question as how that related to Janvier's orders with respect to the blocking positions, namely to invite fire from the VRS. Although that entailed the risk of a firefight with the VRS, Janvier considered it an effective means of justifying the use of air power. The VRS did fire incidental shots at Dutchbat, but the fire appeared to be aimed more at the ABiH occupying positions in the vicinity of Dutchbat than at Dutchbat itself. To emphasise his point, Tolimir again reminded Janvier that Dutchbat had found safety with the VRS, while the ABiH had threatened them with death.

¹⁸²⁹ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa, 10/07/95, Str.pov.br. 02/8-1-1205.

¹⁸³⁰ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa, 11/07/95, Str.pov.br. 02/8-1-1215.

A Demonstration in Tuzla

The events in Srebrenica also did not escape the notice of the population of Tuzla. The civilian authorities of the Tuzla Canton organised a demonstration for the evening of 10 July at Tuzla Air Base and at the compound of the Nordic Battalion in Zivinice (Norbat, consisting of Norwegian, Swedish and Danish units). The 2nd Corps of the ABiH had released information about the situation in the enclave (according to Brantz in Tuzla they had manipulated it) and provided transport for the demonstrators. The demonstrators, mostly refugees from Srebrenica who were staying in Tuzla, as well as a group of more than two hundred people who had apparently, on 9 July, succeeded in passing the combat lines,¹⁸³¹ demanded an interview with the commander of the Nordic Battalion. The meeting took place in a local restaurant. Brantz and other staff members of the Sector North East were also present.

Representatives of the refugees expressed their concern for the safety of the inhabitants of the enclave and demanded NATO intervention. Failing appropriate action on the part of NATO, they would form a blockade around the compound of the Norwegian Battalion. Moments later the first lorries arrived at the main gate with five hundred women and children. They also blocked all entrances and exits to the restaurant where the discussions were taking place. Brantz felt that he had been ambushed, but found a creative way out – he took off his uniform and, wearing a T-shirt and wielding a pistol, he calmly strolled out through the crowd while his colleagues and the vehicles remained behind. He was able to get away with the help of two Dutch Military Policemen. By the time personnel of ABiH 2nd Corps arrived to rescue Brantz, he had already returned to the staff of Sector North East. The other staff members were eventually able to get out after local authorities had removed the refugees late that evening.¹⁸³²

During the demonstration the demonstrators fired fifty rounds at the Norbat headquarters. This was not the first time the local population had displayed hostility against Norbat units based on the situation in Srebrenica. At the beginning of July the population of Srebrenica north of Tuzla held up a lorry with Swedish soldiers for four hours, threatening them and pelting them with stones and wood every time they tried to get out of the truck. The reasons stated for the hold-up were rumours about poor humanitarian conditions in Srebrenica and the rumour that people were starving to death. Those rumours had also been stimulated by the local media.¹⁸³³

Based on the cumulative events, and the situation in Srebrenica, Akashi feared a serious setback for stability in Eastern Bosnia, and a deterioration of the relationship between the military and civilian authorities in the whole of Bosnia. He expected the criticism to increase and evolve into general hostility on the part of the ABiH.¹⁸³⁴

16. The Night of 10 to 11 July: Last Meeting between Karremans and the Opstina

On 10 July the Defence Staff on *het Plein* in The Hague drew up a notable 'Report on Peace Operations'. Notable, but not entirely congruous with reality. The report stated that Close Air Support had already been requested by 06.00 hours on 11 July. Permission depended upon the outcome of proposed talks between Janvier and Mladic. Nicolai's intention had been not only to focus the Close Air Support on tanks, but also on artillery positions around Srebrenica. The report does not state the source of that information. It did however report the consultation between Gobilliard and Janvier, as

¹⁸³¹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 10/07/95, No. Z-1127. According to Brantz the refugees originated from Bijeljina and Zvornik and had been in Tuzla for some time. This seemed more likely than the situation reported by Akashi as there were no other reports that such a large group had escaped to Tuzla.

¹⁸³² Interview M.P. Wijsbroek, 10/12/97; NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary (version August 1999), p. 128. Brantz was angry because the Swedish commander of Norbat took leave that day instead of doing something to end the tense situation around his compound.

¹⁸³³ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary (version August 1999), p. 124.

¹⁸³⁴ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1144.

well as the fact that Janvier had stated that he would not hesitate to ‘give direct permission’ for Close Air Support missions were the VRS to continue their advance.¹⁸³⁵

The logbooks of the Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force in Vicenza as well as the overall NATO Command (AFSOUTH in Naples) however made no mention about possible preparations for NATO air activities for the morning of 11 July. There were no indications whatsoever of any preparations for the air strikes or Close Air Support so desperately wanted by Dutchbat. By 04.30 hours there was still no communication traffic between the headquarters, even though the aircraft had been put on a 60-minute alert at 21.25 hours on 10 July. The only indication to that effect was the fact that the Forward Air Controllers in the enclave had been ordered to contact the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo at 05.00 hours.¹⁸³⁶

In Srebrenica, the Company Commanders met Karremans at midnight on the night of 10 to 11 July for an update on the schedule for the following day. Karremans stated that the UN had set an ultimatum to the effect that the VRS were to start a withdrawal by 06.00 hours local time. Failure to do so on the part of the VRS would result in massive air strikes. The air strikes would be aimed at attacking and eliminating several targets around the enclave simultaneously. Karremans’ announcement put both his own unit and the ABiH at a disadvantage. This will be covered in more detail in Paragraph 9, *The Air Strikes that Never Came*.

The Company Commanders never doubted Karremans’ announcement. One individual did however, in retrospect, find the ultimatum strange in view of the use of the words, ‘start a withdrawal’. After all, if the VRS tanks had reversed one hundred metres, they would have complied with the ultimatum. Karremans instructed the Company Commanders to take another look at the targets and to resubmit them.

Based on the data received from Karremans, the company commanders then briefed their own units. The general atmosphere amongst the units was that they were about to witness history in the making. Finally something would be done and the Bosnian Serbs punished.¹⁸³⁷

Karremans was under the impression that all artillery positions would be destroyed and also announced the imminent arrival of forty NATO aircraft. Karremans had apparently been notified to that effect by the next level up, Sector North-East in Tuzla. According to that source a number of gunships would take part in an attack on the VRS positions at Pribicevac.¹⁸³⁸ Franken however denies that such an announcement had ever been made. In fact, it had been considered initially, but fell through during the execution of the earlier supply operation planning.¹⁸³⁹

Also on the night of 10 to 11 July, at 23.00 hours, the ABiH commanders and municipal council, the Opstina, held a meeting in the PTT building in Srebrenica city. At that meeting it was proposed that the Chief of Police, Hakija Meholic, should take over command of the 28th Division of the ABiH from Becirovic. The same happened in 1993 when Meholic temporarily took over command from Naser Oric. This time Meholic refused, as it was no longer possible to take over command of the division. Meholic did however propose the immediate launch of a counter offensive against the VRS with the two brigades of Ibro Dudic and Zulfo Tursunovic. One of the brigades would defend the city, while the other, consisting of about two thousand troops, would outflank the VRS and attack its rear. It was night time, and the VRS tanks would have little effect. The VRS were concentrated around the occupied OP-E and OP-F. The thinking was that, in the event of a successful counter offensive,

¹⁸³⁵ DCBC, 607. Annex to Peace Operations Situation Report No. 137/95.

¹⁸³⁶ DOPKlu STAOOPER, no number. Logbook 5ATAF 11/07/95, 0320Z.

¹⁸³⁷ Interview J. Otter, 26/05/99.

¹⁸³⁸ Interview A.A.L. Caris, 03/03/00. Captain Hageman also understood that gunships would arrive (C-130 gunships were used in the theatre). (SMG, 1007/25. Debriefing report Kamp Pleso, 22/07/95); interview P. Sanders, 12/12/00 and 13/12/00. Karremans dismissed the gunship reports as pure fantasy. He had also never heard of ‘Plan Gorilla’ in which the gunships were to be used. (NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Correspondence NIOD Karremans, 25/11/00).

¹⁸³⁹ Interview R.A. Franken, 18/05/01.

UNPROFOR might do something.¹⁸⁴⁰ The ABiH would be much stronger at night, as they were operating in familiar terrain without landmines and they suspected that their opponents in the area proposed for the attack would consist largely of Russian mercenaries. Meholic, who had learnt Russian in school, had heard them talking in the front lines.¹⁸⁴¹

A local doctor, Ilijaz Pilav, also attended the meeting in the PTT building. Shortly after midnight, when, according to Pilav, a decision had been taken in favour of the counter offensive (Pilav thought that a decision had been taken), Dutchbat officer, Major Boering, entered the meeting 'as if he had known about the meeting and the decision that had been taken'. Boering announced the NATO air strikes, laid a map on the table, pointed to the targets and asked the Bosnian Muslims to stay away from those areas due to the risks entailed – he called it a '*zona smrt*' or 'Death Zone'. The time of the air strike was given as 'either before or at dawn'. Boering also stated that an ultimatum had been issued demanding the withdrawal of the VRS. There was no mention to the ABiH and Opstina as to what would happen after the air strikes. The consequence of Boering's announcement, according to Pilav, was that no one made any further preparations for the counter offensive proposed at Zeleni Jadar.¹⁸⁴²

Later that night Karremans also visited the PTT building for a meeting that occurred shortly after midnight. There are different views on how the meeting had been set up. One was that the War President of the Opstina, Osman Suljic, had asked Boering at the earlier meeting to ask Karremans to personally attend a meeting at the PTT building. Another view was that Karremans had asked for a meeting with Ramiz Becirovic in the PTT building at around midnight to explain the 'ultimatum' set to the VRS and the imminent NATO support.¹⁸⁴³ In any event, the meeting with Karremans did occur and was attended by all the members of the War Presidency decked out in full military regalia.¹⁸⁴⁴ Karremans never sat down in the meeting and the others also remained standing.¹⁸⁴⁵ Karremans appeared more relaxed than usual and said that he had received information from his superiors to the effect that the VRS positions would be attacked. ABiH Major Nedžad Bektic noticed Karremans's optimistic look and 'cynical laugh'.¹⁸⁴⁶ Karremans asked Ramiz Becirovic to pull his troops out of the range of the air bombardment.¹⁸⁴⁷ Karremans pointed to the map and insisted that the population was to have evacuated the zone before the start of the bombardments. The aircraft would fire at all moving targets.¹⁸⁴⁸ Pointing in the direction of Zeleni Jadar, Karremans said; 'Tomorrow everything will be blown away. No one in that zone will survive.'¹⁸⁴⁹ Becirovic asked what the population should do during the air strike and was advised that everyone should stay as far as possible from the combat lines and seek cover in local homes.¹⁸⁵⁰ Karremans also stated that the Bosnian Serbs had been given an ultimatum; which was not new to those present, as, Izetbegovic in Sarajevo had communicated the news to the Opstina an hour earlier (see the section below; 'Contact between the Opstina and the Bosnian Government in Sarajevo').¹⁸⁵¹

Ramiz Becirovic also believed Karremans when he announced the impending Close Air Support. It did in fact herald the end of the defensive operations on the part of the ABiH. Becirovic asked what the Dutchbat would do once the VRS had pulled back. According to Becirovic, Karremans replied that the Dutchbat would re-occupy its former positions.

¹⁸⁴⁰ Interview Ekrem Salihovic, 02/12/98.

¹⁸⁴¹ Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98, 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

¹⁸⁴² Interview Ilijaz Pilav, 22/10/97.

¹⁸⁴³ SMG, 1004/56. Various entries in B Company logbook.

¹⁸⁴⁴ Interview E.A. Rave, 24/01/01.

¹⁸⁴⁵ Interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98.

¹⁸⁴⁶ Interview Nedžad Bektic, 10/09/99.

¹⁸⁴⁷ Interview Džemaludin Becirovic and Sefket Hafizovic, 21/10/97.

¹⁸⁴⁸ Interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98.

¹⁸⁴⁹ Interview Hamdija Fejzic, 03/02/98.

¹⁸⁵⁰ SMG/1004. Update dtg 110200B Jul 95, Annex A to UNMO HQ DSR, 11/07/95.

¹⁸⁵¹ Interview Džemaludin Becirovic and Sefket Hafizovic, 21/10/97.

The mayor of Srebrenica, Fahrudin Salihovic, had little faith in the proposed air strikes.¹⁸⁵² Karremans did however convince War President Osman Suljic. He claimed to have asked Karremans directly; 'If you had been in my place, would you have believed Close Air Support was imminent?' Karremans replied in the affirmative. Suljic later quoted that as the moment Karremans betrayed him. In fact, on 11 July he proposed to have Karremans arrested for that betrayal. His reasoning was that such an action might have prompted the UN to come to his aid. Prior to that, Suljic claimed to have had a good understanding with Karremans. According to Suljic, Karremans did everything in his power to save his soldiers and was himself very scared. He claimed that the Bosnian Muslims had planned a counter offensive, and the fact that many would have died made no difference, as everyone involved was going to be killed in any event, so said Suljic later.¹⁸⁵³

ABiH officer Nedzad Bektic confirmed the announcements to those present at the meeting. Everything appeared to be under control. The VRS had been given an ultimatum and they were going to withdraw. Lines had been drawn on the map to mark the 'zona smrti'. The ABiH had drawn up an all-or-nothing plan to attack the VRS rear with all means available by moving via Puzulici to Zeleni Jadar. In his view those present at the meeting had no other choice but to believe Karremans.¹⁸⁵⁴

Police Chief Hakija Meholic said that Karremans had been informed about the proposed counter attack during the meeting. Meholic saw the counter attack as the final opportunity to retain control over Srebrenica. He believed that failure on the part of the UN to deploy air strikes would end in disaster, as it would then be too late to do anything to save the enclave. Karremans stated that the leaders had to decide for themselves whether to launch the counter offensive or not; but that their troops would almost certainly be wiped out by the air strikes. He therefore asked them to call off the plan. Meholic said that he had asked Karremans what would happen if the air strikes failed to materialise, as then Srebrenica would certainly be lost. Karremans replied that 'Our task is to wait'. Meholic wanted to pursue the planned counter offensive because he did not believe that the 'Death Zone' would be attacked at 06.00 hours as Karremans had claimed. In his view, it made no real difference whether his people were killed by air strikes or by the VRS. ABiH Brigade Commanders Ibro Dudic and Zulfo Tursunovic supported Meholic's idea of pursuing the planned attack, but they were opposed by Ramiz Becirovic and the other brigade commanders. The members of the Opstina also supported Karremans' position. The discussion ultimately culminated in the decision not to pursue the attack.¹⁸⁵⁵ According to Becirovic that decision was only made after Karremans' departure. Becirovic then instructed the ABiH to withdraw to a safe distance of two kilometres from the VRS lines.¹⁸⁵⁶

Karremans later described the meeting as the most depressing he had ever experienced. The discussions were painful, everyone was exhausted, and the tension was tangible. He attempted to persuade those present that UNPROFOR would fulfil their promises to him. Karremans was thereby referring to a talk he had had with the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in which it reported that 'as of 06.00 hours all known targets, anything moving or firing, will be eliminated' – thus implying air strikes. According to him the area south of Srebrenica was a kill box, which is why he appealed to the ABiH to withdraw to the southern edge of the city. Karremans did not mention the ABiH plans for the counter offensive in his book.¹⁸⁵⁷

¹⁸⁵² Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98; NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. Update 110200B Jul 95, Annex A to BH-Sector North East DSR, dated 11/07/95.

¹⁸⁵³ Interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98. Suljic believed that the international community had agreed to the takeover of the enclave and that a secret deal had been signed between Milosevic, Clinton and Yeltsin. The latter purportedly arranged the pact. Mladic and Karadzic had apparently cheated on the deal.

¹⁸⁵⁴ Interview Major Nedzad Bektic, 10/09/99.

¹⁸⁵⁵ Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98, 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

¹⁸⁵⁶ Sefko Hodzic, *Otpjecaceni koverat*, p. 263.

¹⁸⁵⁷ Karremans, *Srebrenica*, p. 190.

Last-ditch Efforts by the ABiH

There is no certainty as to whether the planned counter offensive would have been executed had Karremans and Boering not informed the Opstina about the proposed air strikes. It seems highly unlikely, as the offensive had already been branded as a desperate last-ditch effort during the meeting. The question remains as to the possible effects of such an ABiH attack. At best it would have represented a temporary setback for the VRS. It appears unlikely that the ABiH would have succeeded in destroying the VRS tanks (although the ABiH did have short-range anti-tank weaponry). It was equally inconceivable that the ABiH would have been able to neutralise the threat of the artillery and mortars set up around the enclave. Finally, the ABiH troops no longer seemed to have the will and morale to undertake large-scale combat operations.

Karremans' announcement did however make an end to the scattered presence of ABiH units south of the 84th Horizontal, an area into which Dutchbat had very limited insight. The last report of a fire fight on the evening of 10 July came at 21.58 hours from the east of Mount Kak; however that area was located quite a long way to the west. After that report everything became relatively quiet in the enclave. The next shots were only reported again the following morning at 08.00 hours, also at Mount Kak, from where renewed firefights were reported. At that time most of the ABiH soldiers appeared to have withdrawn to the edge of the city. Reports of returning ABiH soldiers had started to come in even before Karremans met with the Opstina.

At 00.25 hours, four hundred partially armed ABiH troops passed the compound in Srebrenica en route to Potocari. It would hardly have been possible at that point to pass orders to them from the PTT building. Further reports of ABiH troop movements were received in the course of the night. At 03.00 hours a few hundred armed troops set off in a south-south-westerly direction from OP-C, which was located in the south-western sector – in other words, out of the enclave, possibly in the direction of Zepa. An hour later B Company reported that more ABiH soldiers were entering the centre of Srebrenica. Groen could not make sense of the movements: Were they moving around the VRS? Were they preparing for a flank attack? Or were they breaking out?¹⁸⁵⁸ There was no further consultation, and after the meeting with Karremans there was no more contact between Dutchbat and the ABiH or the Opstina.

It must be kept in mind that Dutchbat had a very limited view of what exactly was happening in the enclave - with the exception of the structures that were set alight by the VRS (and that was only due to the dark and the loss of the OPs in the south). At that point the blocking position was located on the edge of the city. Later on the morning of 11 July it was relocated to the south to obtain a view over the terrain.

The planned counter offensive against the ABiH was also mentioned by other authors on the subject of the fall of Srebrenica; however they did not offer significantly more information. David Rohde, in his *Endgame*, described Karremans' visit to the aforementioned meeting based on fewer witness accounts than the account stated above, but makes no mention of plans for a counter offensive. Westerman and Rijs do not mention the meeting. Nor do the brief descriptions of Honig, Both and Sudetic, all of which are rather similar. Sudetic does mention that Becirovic had withdrawn most of his troops to the west, leaving behind only a symbolic resistance to the east of the enclave under the leadership of Ejup Golic.¹⁸⁵⁹ That account coincided with the observations reported by Dutchbat; although it would have been almost impossible to distinguish between that group and any other group of soldiers leaving the enclave on 10 July. The NIOD contacts were reluctant to make any statements in that regard.

Karremans wrote in his book that a number of other events also occurred on the night of 10 to 11 July – the night during which most of the male population of Srebrenica left the city. Although this might suggest that they were executing a premeditated plan of the military council, this is patently

¹⁸⁵⁸ SMG 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register; Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 301.

¹⁸⁵⁹ Both and Honig, *Srebrenica*, p. 47-48; Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, p. 279.

incorrect. Minister Voorhoeve also wrote in the cover letter of the Debriefing Report to the Second Chamber that ten to fifteen thousand men had left the enclave on 10 July. That too is incorrect, as the exodus only occurred on the night of 11 to 12 July.¹⁸⁶⁰

Contact Between the Opstina and the Bosnian Government in Sarajevo

Government officials in Sarajevo maintained regular radio contact with the leaders of the Opstina. The press had previously referred to such communications during the VRS offensive. According to statements by his Cabinet, President Izetbegovic made radio contact with the War President of Srebrenica, Osman Suljic, in the evening of 8 July and on the morning of 9 July.¹⁸⁶¹ Izetbegovic later remembered having spoken to Osman Suljic (although he was not sure exactly when), and instructing him to use the anti-tank weapons that had been sent to the enclave a few months earlier. Izetbegovic felt that if they could eliminate one or two tanks the VRS would stop the advance.¹⁸⁶²

The Bosnian Premier, Haris Silajdzic, also claimed to have spoken to Osman Suljic on 9 July and that he had been informed about the desperate humanitarian conditions in the city due to the arrival of the 4,000 inhabitants of the Swedish Shelter Project in Srebrenica city. Suljic told Silajdzic that there had been no contact with the local UNPROFOR command (Dutchbat), as it had gone underground and, in any event, provided inaccurate information. It was unclear in which way the information had been inaccurate.¹⁸⁶³ Nino Catic, an amateur radio operator in Srebrenica, on 10 July, reported to the Bosnian radio that the situation was dramatic. He reported that battles were raging all over the enclave, that tanks were shelling the city, that large numbers of dead and wounded had been reported, and that the Bosnian Serbs had torched houses during their advance.¹⁸⁶⁴ Osman Suljic was more precise in his outgoing communications, and told the media in Sarajevo that, since the start of the VRS offensive, eight civilians had been killed and 27 wounded.¹⁸⁶⁵

Osman Suljic claimed to have been the last to have radio contact with President Izetbegovic. Suljic at the time told Izetbegovic that Srebrenica had been lost, that he was abandoning the PTT building, and that he would try to keep the president updated from elsewhere.¹⁸⁶⁶ According to Hakija Meholic the last radio contact with Sarajevo from the PTT building took place at 05.00 hours on 11 July. Suljic however claims that he had left the PTT building at 02.07 hours. All those present in the PTT building could listen in on the conversation between Suljic and Izetbegovic over loudspeakers. The president sounded sleepy, which meant that he had been woken up and could not have been briefed on the most recent events. Suljic asked him and the international community to protect the women and children. Izetbegovic asked them to hold on for another two hours, as air support was coming. Izetbegovic failed to react when Suljic announced that that would be the last radio contact as Srebrenica was falling. He also did not mention the possibility of aid from the ABiH.¹⁸⁶⁷

Earlier that evening, at 21.00 hours, Suljic also had contact with Premier Haris Silajdzic. The Premier stated that they should fight to the last bullet and that help would arrive. Suljic then asked who would send help once the last bullet had been fired, to which Silajdzic responded with silence. Suljic had only limited faith in Silajdzic. Suljic questioned what Izetbegovic and Silajdzic could actually do and what kind of help could be expected. They did not have access to the necessary resources and could do

¹⁸⁶⁰ Karremans, *Srebrenica*, p. 189 and 192; TK, Conference Year 1995-1996, 22 181, No. 128 (30/10/95).

¹⁸⁶¹ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 10/07/95, Source: Radio Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo, in Serbo-Croat 0900 GMT 09/07/95.

¹⁸⁶² Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35(1998), § 288.

¹⁸⁶³ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 11/07/95, Tuesday, Source: Radio Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo, in Serbo-Croat 1700 GMT 09/07/95.

¹⁸⁶⁴ AP Worldstream, 10/07/95; 08:32 ET.

¹⁸⁶⁵ *The Commercial Appeal* (Memphis), 10/07/95, Final Edn.

¹⁸⁶⁶ Interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98.

¹⁸⁶⁷ Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98, 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

little more than to alert the international community. Suljic did not believe that both officials wished to sacrifice the population of Srebrenica.¹⁸⁶⁸

There was a significant amount of confusion regarding the role of Premier Haris Silajdzic. According to author Chuck Sudetic, Silajdzic had assured Ramiz Becirovic via a radio communication that the UN would defend Srebrenica. Author David Rohde too thought that Silajdzic had assured Becirovic that NATO air strikes would be forthcoming. At the time Silajdzic did make Becirovic promise not to take any peacekeepers hostage, nor to disarm or hurt them.¹⁸⁶⁹ Silajdzic said to Radio Bosnia that he had had contact with Srebrenica at 06.00 hours on 11 July, when he had been asked whether the population had been condemned to death. His anonymous contact had purportedly been furious and disappointed when Silajdzic told him to keep up the struggle.¹⁸⁷⁰

Later on 11 July, at around 15.00 hours, Silajdzic accused the UN on TV BiH of intervening too little and too late. Everything was too late and Silajdzic said that he had spoken to people in Srebrenica who had asked him whether they had been condemned to death and whether the enclave had been sold out in a prior agreement.¹⁸⁷¹ According to author Chuck Sudetic, the Bosnian Government had however made no plans to intervene in the event of failure of the UN intervention. In an ABiH radio communication from the ABiH headquarters in Kakanj, President Izetbegovic told Osman Suljic that there was nothing he could do for Srebrenica – in the words of the president, the survival of Srebrenica was in the hands of the UN. According to Sudetic the Commander of the ABiH, Rasim Delic, and the Commander of the 2nd Corps in Tuzla, Sead Delic, did not do anything to get the VRS from Srebrenica.¹⁸⁷² As mentioned in Paragraph 8, that is not correct.

After that Osman Suljic failed to re-establish contact with the Bosnian Government in Sarajevo. Chief of Police Hakija Meholic said from Susnjari (via which the men tried to reach Tuzla after the fall of Srebrenica) that he had tried to contact Izetbegovic, but that the latter had been at an SDA rally in Zenica on that day.¹⁸⁷³ The Commander of the ABiH, Rasim Delic, stated to the newspaper, *Dani*, that his organisation had last established contact with Srebrenica at 14.43 hours on 11 July.¹⁸⁷⁴ There are however records of later contact (see the Chapter entitled ‘The Road to Tuzla’ in Part IV).

The rally of the executive committee of the ruling SDA, which Izetbegovic had attended, was also attended by ABiH Commander Rasim Delic. The latter made the notable comment that there were enough weapons in Srebrenica. The ABiH had made sure that there were more weapons in Srebrenica in recent months than there had been in the three previous years. According to Rasim Delic, four VRS tanks constituted nothing in the face of an adequate supply of anti-tank weapons (Red Arrows and RPGs). He also claimed that there were more than enough soldiers available – the only problem was the inability to organise a coherent defence strategy. In his view the problem was that the enclave lacked a strong enough personality to organise a coherent defence. The delegates did not ask the question as to why Naser Oric, the only personality who did have the proven skills and personality to do so had been removed from the enclave. According to Delic the VRS advance had been stopped wherever it encountered ABiH resistance. Unfortunately the morale was low in the enclave and it was oppressed by an atmosphere in which everyone wondered how they were going to make it to Tuzla. According to Rasim Delic, in the last three months thirty soldiers had fled to Tuzla.¹⁸⁷⁵

The possibility that the Bosnian Government might have ordered the evacuation of the enclave or that a withdrawal had been agreed upon at the highest political level were the subjects of widespread rumours in Bosnia. There is however no concrete evidence to that effect, and the parties involved,

¹⁸⁶⁸ Interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98.

¹⁸⁶⁹ Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, p. 278; Rohde, *Srebrenica*, p. 138.

¹⁸⁷⁰ National Public Radio: All Things Considered (NPR 4:30 pm ET) 11/07/95.

¹⁸⁷¹ *Dani*, Special Edition Dossier Srebrenica, Sarajevo, September 1998.

¹⁸⁷² Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, p. 278.

¹⁸⁷³ Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98, 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

¹⁸⁷⁴ *Dani*, Special Edition Dossier Srebrenica, Sarajevo, September 1998.

¹⁸⁷⁵ Rohde, *Srebrenica*, p. 164-5, p. 404, n. 20; *Dani*, Special Edition Dossier Srebrenica, Sarajevo, September 1998.

including a high-ranking Bosnian Intelligence officer denied this. Ramiz Becirovic, the Commander of the 28th Division, also claimed not to have been aware of any requests for or dismissals of a complete evacuation. He had participated in all Opstina deliberations, and all communication between the Opstina and Izetbegovic had always been brought up in those meetings. Becirovic himself never had contact with the civilian authorities in Sarajevo.¹⁸⁷⁶

17. 11 July: No Air Strikes

After the meeting with the 28th Division and the Opstina Karremans returned to the B-Company compound, where he informed his personnel that air strikes could be expected from 06.00 hours. From that point on, the enormous air assault was the main subject of discussion in the compound.

Karremans spoke of a massive attack on a number of familiar hard targets. He described it as the last straw, which is also how Company Commander Groen saw it. Close Air Support was the only thing that could change the dangerous situation in which Dutchbat currently found itself.¹⁸⁷⁷ It was now simply a matter of waiting for dawn; however, some people continued to hope that the VRS would heed the warnings and refrain from pushing the advance towards the city. Once again, during that wait, Groen heard from the Battalion Staff that the UN would not tolerate a VRS attack. For that reason he continued to take the air strikes into account. After all, in spite of the relative calm of the previous night (as in the case of the previous days), it was clear that the VRS were setting up an attack.¹⁸⁷⁸

After Karremans' meeting, Company Commander Groen issued orders related to the proposed air strikes that were due to hit approximately sixty targets around the enclave at 06.00 hours the following morning. Forward Air Controller Voskamp was also present when the orders were given. He had been brought down from the mountain blocking position at breakneck speed, travelling without lights, to the B-Company compound by the British Joint Commission Observers (JCOs). Voskamp claimed that there was nothing for him to do before the air strikes, as all targets were known and had been signalled through, and that all the pilots knew exactly what to do. All he needed to do was to switch on his radio half an hour ahead of time to be able to intervene in the case of problems arising. By 02.00 hours Voskamp was back at the blocking position from where he issued a report.¹⁸⁷⁹

Shortly before midnight, on the night of 10 to 11 July, Lieutenant-Colonel De Ruiter in Sarajevo updated Colonel Brantz in Tuzla about the availability of Close Air Support on 11 July. According to Brantz he had made it clear that Close Air Support would be initiated from there. Brantz called Potocari, but Dutchbat had already been updated by Sarajevo, and the chain of command, via the headquarters of Sector North East, had once again been thwarted. By the time the message from Brantz reached Potocari, Karremans had already left for the PTT building to update the leadership of the 28th Division and the Opstina. At 06.50 hours, the identified targets or part thereof were to be hit by an air strike; at least, that was the idea. Dutchbat and Sector North East were both completely convinced of that.¹⁸⁸⁰ The next chapter will elaborate on the air strikes that never came.

The weather report for Bosnia was relatively good on 11 July. There were some scattered clouds at altitudes between 3,000 and 18,000 feet. Visibility was good up to six to eight kilometres, but could vary from 500 metres to three kilometres locally due to morning mist.

A meeting of the Crisis Action Team was scheduled in Zagreb at 06.00 hours. From that point on, Zagreb reported, aircraft would be airborne for rapid reaction to a call for Close Air Support. Zagreb also asked 'to ensure that this information is passed on so that safety measures can be taken by

¹⁸⁷⁶ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98. Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, p. 278 states that Siladjic had assured Becirovic over the radio that the UN would defend Srebrenica.

¹⁸⁷⁷ Confidential information (81); interview J. R. Groen, 05/07/99.

¹⁸⁷⁸ Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 297.

¹⁸⁷⁹ Interview R. Voskamp, 08/10/98.

¹⁸⁸⁰ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary, (version August 1999), p. 141.

exposed or isolated troops'.¹⁸⁸¹ It is conceivable that the latter warning had unintentionally contributed to the general notion that a decision had already been taken with regard to Close Air Support.

In preparation of the arrival of the anticipated air strike, Dutchbat kept a close watch on the VRS artillery positions from its observation posts. Many of the targets were visible with the naked eye. As a result, the tension increased, and a common thought was what would happen after the air strikes. It was not inconceivable that, once the air strikes had dealt the first blow, VRS support could emerge from positions beyond the crests of the hills. For that reason, at nightfall, they had double-checked the bunkers to make sure there was sufficient food and water, that the communications worked, that the toilets were complete, and that they would be able to stay in the bunkers for at least six hours.¹⁸⁸² Dutchbat was sure that air strikes were the only salvation – failing that, they believed they were lost, as they did not have the resources to resist the VRS.¹⁸⁸³ Based on their meagre numbers and limited supply of armament, there was virtually nothing they could do in the face of the overwhelming force of the VRS. The prevailing notion amongst Dutchbat was not so much so that Close Air Support was coming, but that air strikes had been promised because the Bosnian Serbs had entered the Safe Area.¹⁸⁸⁴

However, by the early hours of the morning of 11 July there was little happening at the NATO headquarters to suggest imminent air strikes. Intelligence summaries indicated that NATO, in spite of the threat to the enclave, thought it unlikely that air strikes were due at any moment. According to NATO, threats of air strikes would ring hollow as long as the VRS held Dutchbat personnel hostage in Bratunac (especially in view of previous experiences following air strikes at Pale). The VRS would be equally aware of that fact.¹⁸⁸⁵ As a result there was no sign of the impending air strikes Dutchbat was so eagerly awaiting. The AFSOUTH logbook in Naples mentioned very little of any significance about Close Air Support on the morning of 11 July. The nightshift of 10 July closed the logbook with a report of no special events and no high-level communication. Only in the early hours of the morning (02.05 hours local time) was there mention of a number of changes in flight schedules. The first note in the logbook that might have been related to Close Air Support was that, at 06.20 hours, two Dutch F-16s had been instructed to remain near the tanker aircraft for another hour.¹⁸⁸⁶ In other words, by the time the NATO aircraft were supposed to be appearing in the airspace above the enclave, they had not even left their bases.

The logbook of the Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force in Vicenza yielded very much the same impression. At 01.30 hours Sector North East sent a list of the positions of the remaining Dutchbat OPs to the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo, which reached the Intelligence Cell in Vicenza via the liaison cell of the Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force in Zagreb. It was not treated with great urgency and was only sent from Zagreb to Vicenza by 06.50 hours. At the same time Vicenza heard from Sarajevo that as soon as the Forward Air Controllers had obtained a view of the terrain the 'target positions' would follow. The only thing that occurred in the interim was that, at 05.00 hours, Sarajevo confirmed to Sector North East that there had been no changes in the flight schedules.¹⁸⁸⁷

Meanwhile the VRS started the day calmly – so calmly in fact that the UNMOs characterised the enclave as 'unusually, but creepily, calm and quiet'. 'The usual hail of shells that have been greeting our mornings is surprisingly absent today. We view this as a positive change in the current circumstances, which undoubtedly have [sic] come from the NATO ultimatum even though it has not been implemented yet. We hope things remain as it is now until a peaceful solution to this problem is

¹⁸⁸¹ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Fax COS UNPF-HQ to Comd UNPROFOR, 102316B Jul 95. NIOD Coll. Brantz; Brantz Diary, (version August 1999), p. 141.

¹⁸⁸² Interview J. Otter, 26/05/99.

¹⁸⁸³ Interview C.J. Matthijssen, 11/10/99.

¹⁸⁸⁴ Interview E. Wieffer, 18/06/99; SMG, 1007/25. Debriefing report Capt. Wieffer, 22/07/95.

¹⁸⁸⁵ Confidential information (6).

¹⁸⁸⁶ DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log for 11/07/95.

¹⁸⁸⁷ DCBC, Box 59. Overview of Citations Logbook Air Operations Control Center, Annex A to Klu replies to Questions by the Chamber on Srebrenica.

reached. We are presently doing fine but remaining in our bunkers. The air strike is supposed to take place in the next quarter of an hour.¹⁸⁸⁸

However, by 06.00 hours that morning the skies above the enclave were still silent. At first the morning mist was taken as a delaying factor for the arrival of the aircraft, then the thought occurred that the air strikes had been called off and that the battalion had taken them for a ride.¹⁸⁸⁹ The disappointment on the part of the Dutchbat soldiers was enormous when the air strikes failed to materialize, and interpreter Omer Subasic could not fail to notice this. According to Subasic the officers were able to conceal their emotions, but some of the Dutchbat troops were almost in a state of shock and seemed to need help.¹⁸⁹⁰ Dutchbat no longer had matters in their own hands, and it was beginning to look as though the UN was not planning to do anything for either the battalion or the enclave. That left some Dutchbat personnel with the feeling that they were on their own and needed to do whatever they could to save their own skins.¹⁸⁹¹

The ABiH too kept their eyes on the skies. When the aircraft failed to show up, those volunteers that had still been willing to fight disappeared one after the other. Karremans' news of air strikes had delivered the death knell to any plans of a final counter offensive. According to Police Chief Hakija Meholic, all that the ABiH could do after that was to await the air strikes.¹⁸⁹² The morale in the lines was revived briefly by the news of the air strikes, but when nothing happened, the morale collapsed. At that point all control was lost over the ABiH soldiers. No one was capable of issuing further orders. More than likely only someone like Naser Oric could have succeeded in that desperate situation.¹⁸⁹³ Almost everyone was thoroughly disillusioned. The ensuing sense of chaos and apathy was reinforced by everyone's fear for the safety of their families.¹⁸⁹⁴ Ramiz Becirovic retained control only of those ABiH soldiers that wanted to stay on and fight; however, it seemed most were more inclined to flee. The main reason for this was the dearth of weapons, ammunition and food. The remaining ABiH soldiers were surrounded and looking for ways of escape. The majority of the population was already fleeing the city.¹⁸⁹⁵ There were no UNMOs or interpreters left in the PTT office. The only remaining sign of an international presence in Srebrenica was the Dutchbat armoured vehicles at the UNHCR Warehouse in the centre.¹⁸⁹⁶

There was no contact between Dutchbat and the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo in the early hours of the morning. Zagreb assumed that, when the aircraft were airborne, the two Forward Air Controllers had assumed their positions in the enclave (one in the east and one in the west) and two in the Potocari compound.¹⁸⁹⁷ That was only partially accurate.

Commandos and JCOs as Forward Air Controllers

At 06.00 hours on 11 July the commando team (First Lieutenant A.A.L. Caris, Sergeant 1st Class F.C. Erkelens and Corporal M.J. Smit) were posted on the roof of the Potocari compound. While they were not Forward Air Controllers, they had followed a two-week basic training and were familiar with the procedures even though that normally did not qualify one as an independent Forward Air Controller. One of the Dutchbat Forward Air Controllers could not be deployed (he had collapsed) and reports

¹⁸⁸⁸ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Capsat TA to TX, 110755B Jul 95.

¹⁸⁸⁹ Interview E. Wieffer, 18/06/99; SMG, 1007/25. Debriefing report Capt. Wieffer, 22/07/95. Sergeant-Major Van Meer stated that Karremans had called and that he too had heard that the request was to have been submitted in writing. (SMG 1007/25. Kamp Pleso, 22/07/95).

¹⁸⁹⁰ Interview Omer Subasic, 19/10/97 and 20/10/97.

¹⁸⁹¹ Interview E. Wieffer, 18/06/99.

¹⁸⁹² Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98, 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

¹⁸⁹³ Interview Sadik Vilic, 06/02/98.

¹⁸⁹⁴ Interview Ilijaz Pilav, 22/10/97.

¹⁸⁹⁵ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

¹⁸⁹⁶ Interview Ekrem Salihovic, 02/12/98.

¹⁸⁹⁷ Interview Major General A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

had reached the Ops Room (the command post) that the other at the blocking position (Voskamp) might have problems related to anxiety and stress.¹⁸⁹⁸

Caris and Erkelens found their order to sit and wait on the roof of the compound senseless, as experience had taught them that the entire area was invariably covered in mist until about 08.00 hours. At 06.00 hours the hilltops were in fact covered in mist. Erkelens therefore thought that there must have been some confusion. He thought this might have been due to the fact that UNPROFOR and NATO used different time zones.¹⁸⁹⁹ Erkelens thought that might have explained the two-hour difference.¹⁹⁰⁰

The fact that the commandos were used as Forward Air Controller was based on Dutchbat's plan to position them and the British JCOs on the roof of the Potocari compound. However, at 23.00 hours on 10 July, the JCOs had received instructions from their headquarters in Sarajevo to provide a Tactical Air Control Party in the city in case Dutchbat should request Close Air Support. Dutchbat however stuck to the plan of situating the Forward Air Controllers and the JCOs on the compound. The commander of the JCOs in the enclave resisted that notion. He preferred to find a position in the city in order to be able to report the events from there and, if necessary, lead the Close Air Support from there. The JCO commander was unable to persuade Dutchbat to that effect. The order remained standing – they were to be on the roof of the compound at 06.00 hours with the Dutchbat Forward Air Controller.¹⁹⁰¹

Once the JCOs had occupied their posts on the roof of the compound in Potocari at 06.00 hours, they too realised that the thick mist made their presence there superfluous. The JCO team used a portable satellite connection to report the weather conditions to Sarajevo. Sarajevo replied that Close Air Support was not possible at the time due to the weather, and the current location of the Forward Air Controllers. Sarajevo had thus arrived at a decision based on different considerations than Dutchbat. The commander in Sarajevo instructed them to relocate to the city and to find a location from where they could guide the aircraft to their targets. Sarajevo updated Karremans to that effect, and instructed him to position the Forward Air Controllers in the city. Karremans agreed to that for the time being. The JCOs asked the commandos to accompany them as back-up. According to the British, the commandos were initially not prepared to do so, but were subsequently ordered by Major Franken to do so.¹⁹⁰² The commandos and the three British soldiers then loaded a Mercedes and a Land Rover with Forward Air Controller equipment, water, ammunition and two anti-tank weapons and left for the PTT building where they tried to find Ramiz Becirovic to provide them with a guide.¹⁹⁰³

Ramiz Becirovic confirmed that Karremans had called him with the news that two JCOs would come by and that they were to be pointed to important targets for air strikes. Becirovic replied that Dutchbat was already familiar with all the targets. Karremans again explained in that conversation that massive air strikes were about to be executed and that he needed more targets. Becirovic said he then showed Franken and the JCOs suitable air strike targets at Zeleni Jadar.¹⁹⁰⁴ Becirovic instructed Ekrim Salihovic, who was acting as the ABiH liaison officer, to assist the JCOs and the Forward Air Controllers.¹⁹⁰⁵

Salihovic's account of the events is that he had been present in the PTT building at around 07.00 hours when two British JCOs suddenly entered. They told him that they were the aircraft contact team and that they were going to organise the air strikes. The ABiH had no interpreter available, and

¹⁸⁹⁸ Interview Major E. Wieffer, 18/06/99. MvD, Cie Dapperheidsonderscheidingen. Also see Report FAC Missies Srebrenica, 23/08/00.

¹⁸⁹⁹ Zulu time used by the AOCC and Bravo time used by Dutchbat.

¹⁹⁰⁰ SMG, 1007/25. Debriefing Sgt. 1 Erkelens and First Lieutenant Caris, 22/07/95. SMG/Debrief, Statement of Facts § 3.7.5.

¹⁹⁰¹ Confidential information (1).

¹⁹⁰² Confidential information (1).

¹⁹⁰³ SMG/Debrief. Feitenrelaas § 3.7.5.

¹⁹⁰⁴ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

¹⁹⁰⁵ ABiH Tuzla. Supplementary statement by Ramiz Becirovic, 16/04/98, based on prior statement of 11/08/95.

the British did not take anyone with them. They hastily launched a search for a girl who could speak English; she had previously worked as a bar lady at B Company.

All descriptions subsequent to the point at which this group (the JCOs, the commandos, Salihovic and the girl) went on the road are confusing. This is due to the fact that (based on all available reports) the British and the Dutch went their own separate ways and no longer referred to one another after they had left Srebrenica city. They did however leave together and described identical activities. The tasks were divided as follows: Lieutenant Caris and Corporal Smit were assigned to gather target information, Sergeant Erkelens was in charge of the radio procedures and responsible for drawing the targets in on the map, while the British JCO officer did the verification, one JCO took care of communications with Sarajevo, and the other JCO was to defend locality.¹⁹⁰⁶ That morning the APCs and crews left the market square for their blocking position of the previous day. Forward Air Controller Voskamp was therefore also back in that area, but he was now at blocking position Bravo 1 and worked separately from the group of commandos and JCOs.

Salihovic guided the group via the centre of the city to a hill east of the city. The vehicles remained on the market square. Radio and satellite connections were taken along. The JCOs said that they would be able to obtain excellent contact with the aircraft from that point. To his amazement one of the British asked Salihovic to draw the exact positions of the ABiH on a clean sheet of A4 paper instead of on a map.

From that position the JCOs sent a briefing to Sarajevo and searched the terrain for possible targets. Ekrem Salihovic was nervous due to the proximity of the VRS and asked for ABiH support. It appeared that the VRS had already advanced to within a few hundred metres of the position.

The JCOs were in constant contact with someone, but Salihovic could not figure out with whom. After twenty to thirty minutes Salihovic saw clear relief on the faces of the British. The girl who was acting as interpreter asked what was going on and they said that they could not contact the aircraft because their batteries were flat.¹⁹⁰⁷ The JCOs did not mention anything about flat batteries. Their version of the story was that there had been a misunderstanding due to the limited knowledge of English on the part of Salihovic and the girl.¹⁹⁰⁸

The JCOs saw the VRS infiltrating the eastern section of the city as well as the ensuing skirmishes between the VRS and the ABiH; at which point the JCOs also came under fire. As far as Ekrem Salihovic could remember, the British then ducked right into the trenches with the ABiH soldiers who had no idea what they were doing there.

The JCOs obviously felt safe and relaxed in the trenches and took off their helmets and flack jackets. According to Salihovic they then pretended to make radio contact, but remained seated and did not appear to be planning any further action. According to Salihovic the British saw everything happen – the VRS infantry were visible with the naked eye and were moving in on the city. Ekrem Salihovic decided to leave for the city, leaving the JCOs and Dutch commandos behind and hoping that Dutchbat would still do something.

Salihovic's vision of the event could be tainted by the fact that he did not have any insight into the working methods of the Forward Air Controllers. As long as there was no approved request for Close Air Support, and no aircraft were approaching, they did not need to expose themselves. In those conditions they only needed to make occasional observations to identify potential targets.

At around 09.00 hours the JCOs wanted to move to a better position. They decided to go to Height 469, west of the city, a place that was well defended by the ABiH. The position was located one kilometre north of the position that the Bravo 1 blocking position had occupied the day before. That position commanded a good view of the areas to the south and east of the city. For that reason it was a potential target for the VRS; which did indeed happen.¹⁹⁰⁹ The JCOs therefore first made contact with

¹⁹⁰⁶ See Distinctions, CDO. Report FAC mission Srebrenica, 23/08/00.

¹⁹⁰⁷ Interview Ekrem Salihovic, 02/12/98.

¹⁹⁰⁸ Confidential information (1).

¹⁹⁰⁹ Confidential information (1); Interview Ekrem Salihovic, 02/12/98.

the ABiH to seek information about a new position. They were taken to a position located three hundred metres from the VRS front lines. Here the JCOs were notified from Sarajevo that Close Air Support might be deployed if the Bosnian Serbs continued their attack on the city. The JCOs then signalled 41 targets varying from command posts to artillery and tanks to the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo.¹⁹¹⁰ No list of 41 targets could be found in the archives.¹⁹¹¹ In any event, at 09.30 hours, Sarajevo sent an ‘updated target list’ to Vicenza (see below).¹⁹¹²

The experience recounted by the commandos was identical to that of their British colleagues. They had found a hilltop where they were able to command a view over the mist (identical height: 469). The group remained in that position for the rest of the day. They shared the position with five ABiH soldiers.¹⁹¹³

Tensions did emerge that morning between Salihovic on the one hand and the JCOs and Dutchbat commandos on the other. There was some bickering, which was partially due to Salihovic’s ignorance of the work method of Forward Air Controllers.¹⁹¹⁴ In an interview with a Bosnian author, Sefko Hodzic, Becirovic mentioned problems on that occasion with two Dutch officers. The ABiH had shown them the positions of the tanks and VRS infantry, but the Dutch responded that they could not see the infantry from that position. According to an unnamed ABiH officer (most probably Ekrim Salihovic), who was acting as Becirovic’s spokesman, the Dutch simply did not wish to see the VRS infantry, whereupon the said officer decided to kill them. He asked Becirovic’s permission, but permission was refused.¹⁹¹⁵ According to Becirovic it was also hard to work with the British JCOs - Salihovic had informed Becirovic that they could not see the tanks although they had been pointed out to them.¹⁹¹⁶

The JCOs and Dutch commandos remained in those positions in anticipation of future events.

Meanwhile in Sarajevo, Zagreb, Vicenza, Naples...

There was still very little news from the NATO front about Close Air Support. The first update of the target list from the JCOs and commandos came at 07.30 hours. At that point there were 25 targets varying from command posts to artillery and troop concentrations and tanks. Based on those targets Sarajevo identified as priority targets the positions of the infantry and artillery at Pribicevac that had repeatedly fired at the city.

The most notable targets were those on the western side of the enclave, including the headquarters of the Milici Brigade. Those targets were located far outside the enclave and were therefore not visible, as a result of which it was not possible to target them with Close Air Support. Those targets appeared to have been included based on ABiH reports – it was one of the rare instances in which the ABiH provided information to UNPROFOR. The liaison cell of the Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force in Zagreb sent the list to the Director of the CAOC in Vicenza at 08.45 hours.¹⁹¹⁷ The logbook of AFSOUTH in Naples (the Air Desk Log) first mentions activity pertaining to Srebrenica at

¹⁹¹⁰ Confidential information (1).

¹⁹¹¹ The following were found: DOPKlu, STAOOPER. Target List Real Time as at 0730B.

¹⁹¹² NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. Memorandum Maj. Frenztz, AOCC Sarajevo to LtCol De Ruiter, no date.

¹⁹¹³ SMG 1007/25. Debriefing Sgt. 1 Erkelens and First Lieutenant Caris, 22/07/95; interview Captain A.A.L. Caris, 03/03/00; SMG/Debrief. Statement of Facts § 3.7.5. Lieutenant Caris felt that the demand became a threat when a loaded Kalashnikov was aimed at him.

¹⁹¹⁴ Confidential information (1).

¹⁹¹⁵ Sefko Hodzic, *Otpjecaceni koverat*, p. 264.

¹⁹¹⁶ ABiH Tuzla. Supplementary statement by Ramiz Becirovic, 16/04/98, based on a prior statement of 11/08/95.

¹⁹¹⁷ DOPKlu STAOOPER, no number. Fax 5ATAF Cell to Intel/CAOC, 110450Z and to CAOC Director, 110645Z; DOPKlu STAOOPER, no number. Logbook CAOC 5ATAF, 11/07/95, 0440Z.

12.02 hours when a new packages of aircraft had been put together for potential Close Air Support action.¹⁹¹⁸

To the frustration of the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo, the key for Close Air Support in Zagreb had not been turned as yet. The locations of the remaining Dutchbat OPs were sent by telex to Bookshelf, the airborne command post. Vicenza did not have an update of the moving targets in the terrain and was waiting for the Forward Air Controllers to get into position. At the time it was 07.15 hours. At 07.25 hours the position of Windmill 03 (of the Dutchbat commandos) became available. That Tactical Air Control Party then signalled a tank as a priority target. At that point Srebrenica was under fire, but not Dutchbat.

Meanwhile the APCs, back in their blocking positions, were marked with orange to render them visible from the air. At that point (for security reasons), all 'soft skinned vehicles' (non-armoured vehicles) had to be inside the compounds.

At 07.50 hours Windmill 03 took some distance from the ABiH and reported that he had compiled a detailed target list of VRS weaponry and wanted to signal it through as quickly as possible. Meanwhile the weather had become workable and the communications were good. That notwithstanding, it took until 08.45 hours for a fax to be sent with the targets selected by Windmill 03. At 09.30 hours an additional list of six targets reached Vicenza from Sarajevo. The latter list included two artillery positions, two rocket launchers and a tank. A few minutes later a report reached Vicenza to the effect that Windmill 03 would send a new target list with viable targets identified by the commandos (this was the list of 41 targets the JCOs and commandos had compiled from their current location).

Contact had by then been established with three Tactical Air Control Parties: Windmill 02 (Voskamp), Windmill 03 (of the commandos) and Windmill 04. The latter caused some confusion in Vicenza where it had been assumed that the latter unit had split off from one of the other Tactical Air Control Parties.¹⁹¹⁹ That was however not accurate, as that unit consisted of Second Lieutenant M. Versteeg, who had remained in the Potocari compound as back up. It had initially been assumed that his radio was unserviceable; however, that turned out later not to be the case. Dutchbat Major Wieffer had therefore alerted the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo that surface-to-air contact might not be possible. He was thereupon informed that the absence of an Forward Air Controller on the ground would not necessarily present a problem, as a Forward Air Controller was available in the air.¹⁹²⁰

Dutchbat meanwhile awaited what it continued to view as the promised arrival of the aircraft. On several occasions, when asked by his staff and the local population what was happening, Captain Groen said that the air strikes were still coming – only to be forced to contradict that some time later. As a result, confidence began to fail; tension rose and everyone began to doubt that the air strikes would ever come.¹⁹²¹ Captain Hageman, too, had promised the local population that NATO help would be forthcoming.¹⁹²² On several occasions the Battalion Staff also reported that aircraft were on their way; however, on every occasion that turned out to be untrue.¹⁹²³

A VRS Attack on the Forward Air Controllers

At about 10.00 hours the VRS advanced to within five hundred metres of the position occupied by the British and Dutch. They withdrew in steps; the Dutch commandos into a bunker, and the JCOs into an ABiH trench. The ABiH became impatient and threatened to shoot the British and Dutch if the aircraft

¹⁹¹⁸ DCBC, Box 59. Overview of Citations Logbook Air Operations Control Center, Annex A to Klu replies to Questions by the Chamber on Srebrenica.

¹⁹¹⁹ DOPKlu STAOOPER, no number. Logbook CAOC 5ATAF, 11/07/95, 0515Z - 0750Z.

¹⁹²⁰ Interview E. Wieffer, 18/06/99.

¹⁹²¹ Interview A.M.W.W. M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99; interview David Last, 05/07/00.

¹⁹²² SMG/1007. Debriefing Capt. Hageman, 22/07/95.

¹⁹²³ SMG/Debrief, Feitenrelas § 3.7.5.

failed to arrive soon. That pattern was repeated when, later, the ABiH threatened the Dutch commandos when no second wave of Close Air Support materialised. Lieutenant Caris then saw the demand for Close Air Support pressed home with the threat of a loaded Kalashnikov.

The JCOs persuaded the ABiH not to shoot at them, as that action would have given away their position to the VRS. At about 11.00 hours the ABiH opened fire with their machine guns and a double-barrel anti aircraft gun (type ZSU 23/2) from the top of the hill, presumably in an effort to compel UNPROFOR to engage in battle with the VRS.

The consequence was that the VRS opened fire on the bunker with mortars, a tank (type T-55), small-arms fire and snipers. The bunker took a direct hit, but no one was injured. The Dutch commandos remained in the bunker, as they were still expecting the aircraft. Another explosion occurred directly in front of the trench in which the JCOs were hiding.

From that point on the position of the JCOs was under constant fire from tanks and Howitzers. The JCO team then learnt from Sarajevo that Close Air Support had been refused, presumably because the UN troops were under no direct threat, whereupon one of the JCOs announced that they were indeed under direct fire.

The JCOs also claimed to have come under fire at 12.30 hours when fighting started around the city. The ABiH soldiers panicked and asked the JCOs to call in immediate Close Air Support. The JCO commander feared that the ABiH might shoot them in the absence of Close Air Support. The JCOs renewed their call for Close Air Support – this time they were told that it had been authorised and would arrive within twenty minutes.¹⁹²⁴

18. The Situation in the Early Morning Hours of 11 July

Zagreb, at dawn on 11 July, had no idea that this was to be the day of the fall of the enclave. From a military point of view UNPROFOR was in an extremely weak position, but still had an ace in the hand in the form of Close Air Support. Zagreb did not believe that Mladic would dare to push his tanks straight through the blocking position or act directly against the UN soldiers, as that would have been a step too far. There was however no certainty about this, as no one had succeeded in compiling a coherent profile of Mladic's worldview. No one however expected that he would actually go as far as to occupy Srebrenica and thereby turn world opinion against him.¹⁹²⁵ The UN political vision also could not accommodate the possibility that a Safe Area could simply be overrun.

On the other hand, no one was completely convinced that Srebrenica would not be overrun either. For Dutchbat the real uncertainty started on 11 July: The VRS were on the fringes of the city and there was no indication that the ABiH were setting up a determined last line of defence. Although, on the whole, there was very limited fighting during the night, B Company did receive reports of explosions and troop movements in the early hours of the night of 11 July. There was a report that fifty ABiH troops were pulling back. Another report stated that approximately four hundred ABiH soldiers were moving in the direction of Potocari.

At that time the position west of the blocking positions was occupied by approximately two hundred ABiH soldiers that had been situated around the market square that night; two hundred on the front, and one hundred to the east of the city. They were armed with rifles, machine guns, and light anti-tank weapons. During the night a number of passing Muslims stole items from one of the APCs. The B-Company logbook stated that thousands of ABiH soldiers, one third to half of which appeared to have been armed, initially moved towards the west, but later turned back and moved in towards Srebrenica.

The ABiH reported the presence of VRS infantry and three or four tanks in Pusmulici, as well as infantry and artillery on the opposite side of the road on the ridges of the Olovina hills. A VRS infantry

¹⁹²⁴ Interview Ekrem Salihovic, 02/12/98; SMG 1007/25. Debriefing Sgt 1 Erkelens and First Lieutenant Caris, 22/07/95; interview Captain A.A.L. Caris, 03/03/00; SMG/Debrief, Feitenrelaas § 3.7.5; Confidential information (1).

¹⁹²⁵ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

company was positioned at Crni Guber. Battle noise was on the increase again after 02.00 hours. At OP-H, the VRS threw hand grenades and launched a small-arms attack. The ABiH no longer responded to that fire. An ABiH lorry passed the Bravo 3 blocking position, presumably to deliver troop supplies to the troops. Soon thereafter twenty armed ABiH soldiers returned past the Bravo 3 position. On other locations three to four hundred ABiH troops moved in a south-westerly direction towards OP-C.¹⁹²⁶ Dutchbat had no insight into the reasons for those ABiH movements.

At around 03.30 hours, OP-H established contact with a local ABiH commander. He gave the OP permission to withdraw to reinforce the APCs in the city; but with instructions to leave all equipment behind. Ramiz Becirovic confirmed this to Groen, who then gave the OP personnel permission to withdraw if necessary.

At 04.00 hours a report came that four ABiH soldiers had been spotted walking from the direction of Potocari towards the centre carrying a mortar; however, they soon pulled back in a northerly direction. That appeared to be in response to instructions given by means of a very light fired from behind the PTT building.

After that the Bravo 1 blocking position received information from a Muslim that the VRS with a unit of two to three hundred strong were planning to launch an attack on the city within six hours from the area of Crni Guber in the east. To do so they would have had to pass OP-H. Almost immediately after that the OP personnel became aware of the sound of heavy machine gun and small arms fire. After consultation with the police Commander, Hakija Meholic, the personnel abandoned OP-H. Twenty minutes later the OP personnel were split up over the vehicles at the blocking position on the market square.

At first light B Company discovered that there had been an increase in the number of refugees seeking safety in the city. Remarkably, some people were also following a southerly route. Dutchbat personnel speculated that they were going home to fetch their possessions. Later those people returned with green cans that could have contained emergency rations.¹⁹²⁷ It turned out that they were civilians who had broken into the municipal food storage. To everyone's amazement, and in spite of the dire needs of the population, there was still a supply of twenty to thirty tons of rice, flour and relief goods in the warehouse that had not been distributed to the population.¹⁹²⁸

At dawn the fighting flared up again and the shelling increased. The VRS continued their advance; however reports to that effect did not make sense. Groen received news about a number of VRS positions and wanted Bravo 1 blocking position to verify the VRS positions. Groen wanted to avoid unjustifiably asking for NATO help and provoking retaliation or escalation by bombing the Bosnian Serbs. He therefore sent the APCs back to the south to confirm the presence of the VRS infantry and armoured vehicles previously observed at the radio tower.¹⁹²⁹

Hageman initially received orders to advance along the road to Zeleni Jadar with one section, and later with a second. One section remained in the city to keep an eye on the eastern approach. If nothing untoward was found in the southern section of the city, OP-H would be reoccupied. At 05.50 hours Groen instructed the two Bravo 1 APCs to return to their former positions.¹⁹³⁰

The departure from the UNHCR *Warehouse* did not occur without incidents. When Lieutenant Egbers reversed his APC, he ran into ABiH resistance – they were under the impression that Dutchbat was withdrawing. The APC was forced to a halt by ABiH personnel yielding an anti-tank rocket (type RPG-7). After endlessly pleading and explaining their intentions by pointing to the map, the ABiH finally realised that they were not actually running away, and let them go. Although the APC crew were

¹⁹²⁶ SMG 1004/65. Logbook B Coy, 11/07/95, 00.06 to 03.30.

¹⁹²⁷ SMG 1004/65. Logbook B Coy, 11/07/95, 03.38 to 06.13.

¹⁹²⁸ Rohde, *Endgame*, p. 142.

¹⁹²⁹ Interview J. R. Groen, 05/07/99.

¹⁹³⁰ SMG 1004/6. Logbook B Co, 11/07/95, 05.50.

uncertain as to how they would get away from the market square, it turned out not to be a problem, as most of the ABiH soldiers had already departed.¹⁹³¹

It was probably at that point, near the market square, that a Dutchbat soldier used his weapon. The said soldier was guarding the rear of one of the APCs when he saw a man emerging from behind a house and line up his weapon to shoot at the APC. The Dutchbat soldier, thinking it was an anti-tank weapon, fired and hit the potential assailant, who fell to the ground. The APC immediately drove away. The Dutchbat action supposedly went unnoticed due to the fact that the warring factions were firing all around at the time.¹⁹³²

On their way south the Dutchbat APCs passed the earlier abandoned APC perched on the edge of the precipice. Smoke was visible above the town of Petrovici. An hour later the panicking inhabitants of the town told the APC personnel that the VRS were approaching the city. ABiH soldiers notified Bravo 1 blocking position of the presence of a tank at Bukova Glava, another at Pribicevac, and two at Bojna. A column of smoke smelling of gunpowder hung in the air and could be smelled as far away as the compound in Srebrenica. Rumour had it that the smoke was intended to mark targets for the aircraft;¹⁹³³ however, according to ABiH Commander Ramiz Becirovic, the VRS had created the smokescreen. That turned out to be accurate – apparently Mladic had personally instructed his units to set fire to piles of hay to create a smokescreen. Purportedly that would have made it harder for the aircraft to find their targets.¹⁹³⁴

The ABiH also reported that a VRS artillery unit and a tank were positioned at the radio tower; however, the commandos, who had a good view of the southern section of the enclave from their Bravo 1 blocking position, could not confirm that report. They were only able to report targets at Pribicevac. The ABiH also reported that the VRS infantry had occupied positions at Height 424, at the perimeter of the city, and in the vicinity of the radio tower. The only location where the ABiH still occupied positions in the proximity of the VRS was near Bojna, where the ABiH had an anti-tank weapon.¹⁹³⁵

Heading south, an APC of the Bravo 2 blocking position came under small-arms fire. The fire was most probably issued by VRS troops still positioned at Height 664. Meanwhile the units in the blocking position had determined that the VRS were occupying positions along the Height 664 line.¹⁹³⁶ Groen was thereby able to report with certainty to the Battalion Staff the presence of VRS armoured vehicles and lorries at the radio tower, and that one of his vehicles had come under VRS fire.¹⁹³⁷ The question was whether that constituted sufficient reason to ask for NATO assistance.

19. The Morning of 11 July: Is Close Air Support Coming?

Once the mist had lifted, at around 08.00 hours Dutchbat submitted the first request for Close Air Support that day on two targets that were threatening Srebrenica. The VRS were still south of Horizontal 84, which the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo viewed as the final line of the VRS advance.

Major Wieffer maintained contact with the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo from the Ops Room (although that was contrary to the prevailing rules, which, in the case of imminent bombing, required him to take shelter in the compound in Potocari). The Ops Room was however calmer than the so-called 'bobo bunker' that had been set up for command purposes, and where all radio traffic and satellite communications with the outside world came in.

¹⁹³¹ Interview R. Voskamp, 08/10/98.

¹⁹³² OM Arnhem. KMar Brigade Soesterberg, 'sebra-Care-Team', 28/10/98, No. P. 462/99.

¹⁹³³ Interview Dzermaludin Becirevic and Sefket Hafizovic, 21/10/97.

¹⁹³⁴ ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 399/a bis, Interview of Radislav Krstic, 18/02/00, p. 13; SMG 1004/6. Logbook B Coy, 11/07/95, 06.23 to 10.14; ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 399/a bis, Interview of Radislav Krstic, 18/02/00.

¹⁹³⁵ SMG 1004/6. Logbook B Coy, 11/07/95, 07.45 to 10.00.

¹⁹³⁶ SMG 1004/6. Logbook B Coy, 11/07/95, 09.47, 10.07.

¹⁹³⁷ SMG 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 11/07/95, 10.01.

To his amazement, Wieffer was unable to arrange Close Air Support by telephone and was informed that he had to do so in writing. He did however talk to the Air Operations Coordination Center about targets and priorities. The two targets mentioned were the VRS artillery positions in the north that directly threatened Potocari, and the VRS tanks in the south. The request was then sent to Tuzla and Wieffer contacted the headquarters of Sector North East. He was initially put through to a captain, then a major, and finally to a section chief. After that Major Franken took over the conversation.¹⁹³⁸

Wieffer was extremely angry about the delays in Tuzla. Franken then talked to the officer in charge of operations (the G-3) of Sector North East, the Pakistani Lieutenant-Colonel Rachid Sadiki. Franken was told that Tuzla too had to follow the set procedures – he first had to send a new fax, as the wrong forms had been used for the request. Franken immediately instructed his personnel to complete the correct forms, whereupon the staff hurriedly compiled a handwritten fax and sent it to Tuzla.¹⁹³⁹ Sadiki however established that only ten of the required fifteen items had been filled in (he had not been briefed that that only the most important items needed to be filled in before sending the request to Sarajevo). He then sent the form (in military terms: the format for an Air Request) back to Srebrenica. An extremely angry Franken then called Brantz and recounted his experiences with the staff at Sector North East. Brantz thereupon assigned the military engineer, Captain Emiel Post to handle the request procedure.¹⁹⁴⁰

The application procedure between Tuzla and Potocari created a delay. The delay was exacerbated by the absence of an Air Liaison Officer in the office where the request was being processed as well as the fact that the officers from the non-NATO countries insisted on strict observance of their orders; which resulted in delays, mutual misunderstanding and irritation.

Dutchbat also heard a rumour that a broken fax machine had caused additional delays; however, Brantz claimed that this had had no effect on the procedure. The crypto fax of the staff of Sector North East in Tuzla had indeed been out of order, but the Communication Centre there also had a crypto fax, and the request for Close Air Support came in via the latter machine.¹⁹⁴¹

Tuzla sent the request directly to Sarajevo. At 08.39 hours Sarajevo confirmed receipt of the request and Brantz let them know that the aircraft could arrive at their targets about thirty minutes after they had been authorised.¹⁹⁴² Karremans interpreted the latter message as meaning that the attacks on the hard targets south of Horizontal 84 would be forthcoming and that everything in the kill box south of Srebrenica would be attacked – he had been under that impression from 9 July.¹⁹⁴³

At 09.45 hours Tuzla however received a message from Sarajevo the request had been refused. Brantz was not clear about the reason.¹⁹⁴⁴ Karremans in his book claims that he had heard from Brantz that Zagreb had refused the request; however, that was not the case. The request never reached Zagreb – only the target list made it there.¹⁹⁴⁵ Karremans heard from Nicolai in Sarajevo that the conditions had not been fulfilled, as neither Dutchbat nor the city were under attack.¹⁹⁴⁶

¹⁹³⁸ Interview E. Wieffer, 18/06/99; SMG 1007/25. Debriefing report Capt. Wieffer, 22/07/95. Sergeant-Major Van Meer stated that Karremans had called and that he too had heard that the request needed to be submitted in writing. (SMG 1007/25. Kamp Pleso, 22/07/95). Franken said that he was the one who had called.

¹⁹³⁹ Interview R.A. Franken, 18/05/01.

¹⁹⁴⁰ Interview C.L. Brantz, 11/06/99.

¹⁹⁴¹ Interview C.L. Brantz, 11/06/99.

¹⁹⁴² DCBC, 648. Sitrep Brantz to Sitcen BLS 110800B and 110839B Jul 95.

¹⁹⁴³ CRST. C-13 Infbat Lumbl, 15/1195, No. TK95.213. Addressee not specified.

¹⁹⁴⁴ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary (version January 2001).

¹⁹⁴⁵ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. G3 Air to SO1 for FC, 16/07/95, CAS in Srebrenica. Chronology of Events. Brantz reported in this diary that he had heard from Sarajevo that the request of 08.00 hours had not resulted in a release in Zagreb.

¹⁹⁴⁶ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who cares?*, p.193.

The VRS Push On: New Requests for Close Air Support

At 08.45 hours, the Commander of the Drina Corps, General Milenko Zivanovic, from his headquarters in Vlasenica, issued an order to the VRS in Srebrenica to accelerate the operation. Based on radio traffic, the ABiH in Tuzla were able to determine that the VRS were coming closer to the city.¹⁹⁴⁷

At around 10.00 hours the VRS brigade commanders reported to the Forward Command Post in Pribicevac that all set objectives had been taken. With the occupation of Bojna, which dominates the southern access to the city, and Mount Kak and Alibegovac, Srebrenica had effectively been cut off from Zepa. That was the original goal of Operation Krivaja '95. At that point Mladic was present at the command post in Pribicevac, and issued an order to continue the advance with an attack on the town of Srebrenica.¹⁹⁴⁸

B Company then established that, at that point, the VRS were located one kilometre within Horizontal 84. Captain Groen saw this as sufficient cause to submit a new request for Close Air Support.¹⁹⁴⁹ For NATO in Vicenza that was the critical point at which 'the fog of war' set in. There were reports of several tanks occupying the higher ground of Mount Kak - in other words, to the west, and at a significant distance from the Bravo 1 blocking position. However, based on a briefing by Nicolai, Vicenza had understood that the infantry and armour were concentrated just above the city.

Vicenza was also familiar with the fact that a Dutchbat patrol had been fired upon, had fired back and had returned to the city during a mission to survey the situation. This probably referred to the incident concerning the APC (Bravo 1) of Lieutenant Egbers. At that point all attention in Vicenza began to focus on Srebrenica. The only locations still needed in Vicenza at that moment were those of the Forward Air Controllers in Srebrenica, and they were known to all parties concerned.¹⁹⁵⁰

At about 10.00 hours, Karremans submitted his second request of the day to the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo. This request only included a single target, namely a tank south of Srebrenica. Karremans called Tuzla directly, but was informed that the request had to be submitted in writing.¹⁹⁵¹ Karremans explained that, according to Brantz, the responsible staff official in Sarajevo was required to show that the attack directly concerned UNPROFOR units. A great deal of time had been lost in the process of establishing an agreement between Dutchbat and UNPROFOR - by which time Sarajevo reported that no aircraft were available, as they had all returned to their bases in Italy at 10.35 hours (in military terms: had terminated their airborne alert).

Potocari was apparently surprised by that decision. In Brantz' view Dutchbat had limited understanding of the Close Air Support policy as applied after the bombings at Pale.

Nicolai had consented to the aircraft returning to their base, as he had heard almost nothing more from Srebrenica on that morning, and had assumed that the situation had stabilised. Brantz however said that he had been alerted by Sarajevo that a request was on its way. Nicolai denied that.¹⁹⁵²

Shortly after that there was a notable speeding up of the handling of requests for Close Air Support in both Sarajevo and Zagreb. At 10.50, the Dutchbat request handed in at 10.00 hours, reached Sarajevo.¹⁹⁵³ By 11.15 the Deputy Commander of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command, General Gobilliard, had signed the Blue Sword Request and asked Force Commander Janvier to do the same.¹⁹⁵⁴ By 11.17 hours the staff of the Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force in Vicenza heard that a Dutchbat request for Close Air Support in Sarajevo had been approved. Vicenza was however not sure at that time what

¹⁹⁴⁷ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa, 11/07/95, Str.pov.br. 02/8-01-1221.

¹⁹⁴⁸ ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 399/a, Interview of Radislav Krstic, 18/02/00, p. 12.

¹⁹⁴⁹ SMG 1007/25. Report debriefings Captain Groen and Hageman, 22/07/95.

¹⁹⁵⁰ DOPKlu STAOOPER, no number. Logbook CAOC 5ATAF, 11/07/95, 0910Z.

¹⁹⁵¹ SMG 1007/25. Debriefing Sergeant-Major Van Meer, 22/07/95; Debriefing statement Lt-Col J.A.C. Ruiter, 27/09/95.

¹⁹⁵² NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary (version August 1999), p. 101; Rohde, *Endgame*, p. 114 and n. 8; NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. Chronology of Events CAS Missions Srebrenica.

¹⁹⁵³ NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. Memorandum Maj. Frentz, AOCC Sarajevo to Lt-Col de Ruiter.

¹⁹⁵⁴ NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. 'Chronology of Events CAS Missions - Srebrenica', 11/07/95.

the listed target was, as it was located in the furthest northern tip of the enclave, and it was not known whether OP-N had been attacked. Clearly Vicenza was still operating on the basis of the previous request of that morning in which this target had been listed. It was also clear to Vicenza at that point that fifty VRS soldiers, one armoured and three other vehicles were concentrated on the southern edge of the city preparing for an attack.

Nicolai in Sarajevo informed Gobilliard by telephone that UN troops were now under attack. At that point Vicenza learnt from one of the NATO liaison officers in Zagreb that Sarajevo was putting pressure on Janvier to authorise Close Air Support: 'If not approved now, it never will be'. Fifteen minutes later, news arrived in Vicenza from Sarajevo that pressure was still being applied on Janvier to sign the request. At that point the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo listed the first target as a tank, even though it was not actually firing at that time. As a result it became necessary to send out a Forward Air Controller to determine whether there was an actual 'smoking gun' to target.¹⁹⁵⁵

Sarajevo was of the opinion that there were too few targets in the north of the enclave. De Ruyter requested Dutchbat in Sarajevo to list more targets in the north of the enclave to supplement the listed targets in the south already listed. According to Zagreb those additional targets caused further delay.¹⁹⁵⁶ That was however not clear from the logbooks, which only stated that an 'updated target list' had been received at 12.30 hours.¹⁹⁵⁷

At approximately 11.15 hours, once Zagreb had confirmed receipt of the request, the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo received a report that the VRS were attacking Dutchbat.¹⁹⁵⁸ At about the same time Zagreb too realised that the attack had been continued and that the VRS had not pulled back.¹⁹⁵⁹ The Bosnian Serbs had most probably noticed on their radars the aircraft leaving Bosnian airspace after they had been ordered to return to base at 10.35 hours - which enabled the VRS to continue their advance into Srebrenica.¹⁹⁶⁰

At that point the 182nd Brigade of the ABiH regrouped in the south-eastern corner of the enclave. In the first hours after dawn the Commander of the Brigade, Ibro Dudic, reported that the VRS were holding the lines but were not firing. According to the report he had matters under control and the situation was normal. This was rather encouraging in view of reports from the previous day stating that the brigade was in a fairly desperate state and many troops had fled.

At around 11.00 hours Dudic reported that the VRS were attacking. The Bosnian Serbs were at the gates of the city, Dudic had lost control of his troops and was forced to withdraw. At that point chaos broke loose as scores of ABiH soldiers fled with their families. Dudic received an order from Becirovic not to withdraw and was sent a company to reinforce his unit. He ordered the 28th Division Forward Command Post and communication centre in the Hunter's lodge to relocate to the PTT building. The personnel asked permission to set fire to the building upon evacuation, but Becirovic refused because he was still not expecting the fall of Srebrenica. He was afraid that burning down the Hunter's lodge would cause more panic amongst the population who could take this as a sign that the VRS had occupied the building. As a result documents of the 28th Division were left behind and fell into the hands of the VRS.¹⁹⁶¹

Once the 28th Division communication centre had been set up in the PTT building, Becirovic had a short discussion with General Budakovic, the Chief of Staff of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH in Tuzla, in which he reported that the situation at the city entrance was beginning to assume dramatic proportions.

¹⁹⁵⁵ DOPKlu STAOOPER, no number. Logbook CAOC 5ATAF, 11/07/95, 0820Z, 0917Z, 0932Z, 0946Z.

¹⁹⁵⁶ NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. 'Chronology of Events CAS Missions - Srebrenica', 11/07/95.

¹⁹⁵⁷ NIOD, Coll. De Ruyter. Memorandum Maj. Frenzt, AOCC Sarajevo to Lt-Col de Ruyter.

¹⁹⁵⁸ DCBC, Box 59. Overview of Citations Logbook Air Operations Control Center, Annex A to Klu replies to Questions by the Chamber on Srebrenica.

¹⁹⁵⁹ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

¹⁹⁶⁰ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

¹⁹⁶¹ Sefko Hodzic, *Otpjeceni koverat*, p. 265.

VRS snipers were firing into the city from high positions, which prevented all ABiH movement. The population had already abandoned the city. On 10 July nine civilians were reported dead and thirty wounded, and on 11 July eight had been wounded. While NATO aircraft had still not gone into action, UN personnel were on their way to guide aircraft to potential targets.

Budakovic issued an order to regroup and to stop the VRS at the entrances to the city. He emphasised that the Red Arrow anti-tank weapon should be used. Unfortunately it had been rendered unserviceable by unskilled users. Budakovic also wanted the War Presidency of the Opstina to make an effort to calm the public and to regain control of the population. Becirovic however considered those orders unexecutable. All communications were being conducted by courier and no one knew with any certainty whether the couriers would be able to locate the Command Posts they had been sent to.¹⁹⁶²

With the exception of the struggle between the VRS and the ABiH for possession of Mount Kak (which was taking place outside Dutchbat's view), there were no dramatic developments in the southern section of the enclave before 11.00 hours. In the north things were however different: At 11.01 hours OP-N was shaken by mortar and heavy machine-gun fire, the crew of the OP took cover. The shelling continued with intervals over a period of thirty minutes, while a VRS tank fired at nearby ABiH soldiers. After that the situation calmed down with limited further sightings of either ABiH or VRS until eight ABiH soldiers unexpectedly forced their way into the OP and demanded Dutchbat's withdrawal so that they could occupy the OP. The OP commander, in consultation with the Commander of C Company, Matthijssen, finally persuaded the ABiH to leave with the agreement that, increase of a next mortar attack, the Dutch would pull out so the ABiH could take over the OP. It took another half hour to actually get the ABiH to leave.

The day before, a supply team that had come to fetch two anti-tank weapons (Dragons) and a weapon sight from OP-N had also been confronted by armed ABiH soldiers bent on ensuring that the OP personnel did not beat a premature retreat.¹⁹⁶³

The personnel of the Bravo 1 blocking position spotted a VRS presence to the west of Srebrenica in the form of a small lorry (a TAM 110) moving on the tarred road from Zeleni Jadar to Srebrenica, as well as an armoured vehicle, two cargo lorries and some infantry in the hairpin bend on the same road.

At 10.44 hours Franken issued an order to relocate the blocking position to a location 500 metres further south, and to use an 81 mortar and the .50 machine guns to 'persuade' the VRS in the vicinity of the radio tower to pull back. At that point the personnel of the blocking position also saw two Jeeps, a lorry, an ambulance and an armoured vehicle on the same road. Approximately fifty VRS infantry were moving in column along the road.

At 11.17 hours Franken authorised his units to fire at their own discretion,¹⁹⁶⁴ however, there were no indications that Bravo 1 did indeed open fire. For some time there was no communication with the blocking position, most probably due to the fact that the vehicles had been moving.¹⁹⁶⁵

Reports of anti-tank fire and firing from north to south probably related to ABiH activities. Subsequently a report came in of a VRS tank near the radio tower on the way from Zeleni Jadar to Srebrenica, of gunfire in Crni Gruber to the east of the enclave, new reports of anti-tank fire, and of fire fights between the ABiH and VRS. Missile hits and explosions indicated renewed VRS artillery action. A tank opened fire on the APCs from Pribicevac. The withdrawal of the APCs from the Bravo 1 blocking position towards Srebrenica drew close fire from the VRS.¹⁹⁶⁶ The commander of the ABiH artillery (the M-48 Howitzer that was still positioned above Bravo 1) suffered a serious abdominal wound during the shelling and needed to be evacuated.¹⁹⁶⁷

¹⁹⁶² Sefko Hodzic, *Otpecaceni koverat*, p. 265-6.

¹⁹⁶³ SMG 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 11/07/95; Debriefing statement Sergeant 1st Class Klinck, 12/09/95; information based on confidential debriefing statement (41).

¹⁹⁶⁴ SMG 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 11/07/95, 11.17 and 10.32.

¹⁹⁶⁵ SMG 1004/65. Logbook Coy, 11/07/95, 11.59.

¹⁹⁶⁶ SMG 1004/65. Logbook Coy, 11/07/95, 10.21 to 12.06.

¹⁹⁶⁷ Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, p. 276.

Lieutenant Egbers was not at Bravo 1 at that point. He had temporarily handed over the command to Sergeant Visser so as to return to the location where Forward Air Controller Voskamp and Sergeant Struik had remained after a previous round of shelling.¹⁹⁶⁸ The three men were making their way forward over the two to three hundred metres to the APCs when a VRS tank opened fire on them. Grenades exploded right and left and they were forced to seek cover against the mountain slope. Halfway back the three men were met by the APCs that were withdrawing because of the firing. The APCs picked them up and quickly pulled back to safety.¹⁹⁶⁹ At that moment several grenades exploded directly in front of the APC, which, in Egbers' opinion, would have hit them had the leading vehicle not stopped to pick up the three men.¹⁹⁷⁰

A grenade also exploded near the APCs and one of the two men standing outside the vehicle was thrown against the APC. The driver pulled away so fast that the two men failed to get in on time and were forced to hang onto the rails as the APC made its way down the slope. The two men concerned later claimed that the APC had run over the legs of a Muslim sitting with his legs stretched across the road. There were several other ABiH soldiers in hiding along this mountain slope.¹⁹⁷¹ The driver, who was partially under armour, failed to notice anything to that effect. One other person suspected that this might have happened; however none of the others noticed anything.

As mentioned before, an ABiH soldier had been wounded, but this was the ABiH commander of the M-48 Howitzer that had been hit by the grenade. The ABiH soldiers in the area however made no mention of such an accident, and there was no subsequent hostility towards Dutchbat. To the contrary, an ABiH soldier later returned a coffee mug dropped by Dutchbats who had been making hot chocolate in the back of the APC when the shelling started. Insufficient evidence was available to justify any hard conclusions about this incident.¹⁹⁷²

After that the VRS concentrated their fire on the north. Four tank grenades exploded at Height 469, more than eight hundred metres from the compound in Srebrenica, at the location of the Forward Air Controllers. Civilians in the proximity of the compound were starting to take flight. The abandoned OP-H was hit by a grenade and three light VRS mortars. The VRS also opened tank and heavy machine-gun fire at OP-H from the radio tower. By that time the VRS were also firing into the enclave and at OP-H from Crni Guber and the radio tower. There was no further visible sign of an ABiH presence and Dutchbat only caught the occasional glimpse of a few isolated ABiH soldiers. The only audible ABiH small arms fire came from the vicinity of OP-H and a few hundred metres south of the market square. The ABiH fired four mortar grenades from near the PTT building. Hundreds of refugees, including some armed soldiers, continued to move towards Potocari.¹⁹⁷³

Towards midday, VRS troops began to concentrate on the crests of the hills south of Srebrenica, but still showed no signs an advance. Shortly after twelve the VRS asked for an interview with Karremans in Bratunac, but failed to disclose the subject of the discussion. Although they guaranteed Karremans' safety, the Battalion Commander failed to react to the invitation - Dutchbat was awaiting the arrival of the requested aircraft.¹⁹⁷⁴ By 13.00 hours (according to the estimates of *Medicins Sans Frontières*), it had become clear that the ABiH would not be able to continue the defence of the city for more than another thirty minutes.¹⁹⁷⁵ The ABiH withdrew from the area around the market square with the VRS close on their heels. The APCs also pulled back gradually from the market square to avoid being surrounded by the VRS.

¹⁹⁶⁸ Interview R. Voskamp, 08/10/98.

¹⁹⁶⁹ Interview R. Voskamp, 08/10/98.

¹⁹⁷⁰ OM Arnhem. KMar Brigade Soesterberg, 'sebra-Care-Team', 28/10/98, No. P. 586/b 006/1998.

¹⁹⁷¹ OM Arnhem. KMar Brigade Soesterberg, 'sebra-Care-Team', 28/10/98, No. P. 586. B 004/1998.

¹⁹⁷² OM Arnhem. KMar Brigade Soesterberg, 'sebra-Care-Team', 28/10/98, No. P. 462/99.

¹⁹⁷³ SMG 1004/65. Logbook Co, 11/07/95, 12.19 to 12.56. .

¹⁹⁷⁴ SMG 1004/56. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 11/07/95, 12.08. SMG 1007/25. Debriefing Sergeant-Major Van Meer, 22/07/95. It is possible that the aim of the invitation had been to threaten Karremans with the death of the hostages; possibly after the VRS had learnt of the request for Close Air Support.

¹⁹⁷⁵ SMG 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops Room Monthly Register, 11/07/95, 11.29 and 12.58.

A grenade hit the compound in Srebrenica, causing several casualties (Dutchbat's reaction to that is described in more detail in the Appendix, 'Dutchbat III and the Population: Medical Issues.' One of the APCs lost a track and wheel in the grenade explosion. Moments later an explosion occurred directly behind the compound. In spite of the fighting and shelling, Major Franken wanted all B-Company personnel to remain in the vicinity of the compound in Srebrenica. The VRS next issued an order that refugees from Srebrenica were not permitted to flee to the compound in Potocari. That notwithstanding, the first lorries with refugees and wounded left for Potocari.¹⁹⁷⁶

The Bravo 1 blocking position was then instructed to pull back to the Srebrenica compound with the .50 machine gun pointing south. One of the two VRS tanks at the radio tower on the road between Zeleni Jadar and Srebrenica kept its barrel aimed at the withdrawal route of the Bravo 1 blocking position towards Srebrenica.

At about the same time as the refugees (estimates of four to five thousand) began to overrun the B-Company compound, the first aircraft arrived above the enclave. The blocking position meanwhile made its way back to the compound at a walking pace.¹⁹⁷⁷ ABiH Commander Ramiz Becirovic visited Groen in the Ops Room. He appeared shaken and said that it was all over. That caused Groen to fear that the ABiH would not let the rest of B Company withdraw, but that the desperate ABiH soldiers would try to entrap them. Groen, with the help of an interpreter, secured Becirovic's permission to evacuate the refugees from Srebrenica city.¹⁹⁷⁸

20. Close Air Support Approved

In the early afternoon Akashi sent his first report of the day to New York on conditions in Srebrenica. Further updates were to follow in the course of the day. He sketched an extremely sombre picture and pointed out that the intention had been to send 779 soldiers in Srebrenica, but that only 470 had eventually been stationed there; thirty of whom were now in the hands of the VRS. Dutchbat was out of fuel, had had no fresh food in days, and no home leave in six months. Dutchbat's isolation had been exacerbated by the fact that periods had passed in which no Close Air Support could be given. The Rapid Reaction Force could not come to their rescue as the Force was being held up at the border by the Bosnian Croats. In the case of a concentrated attack by the VRS, the blocking position would not be capable of holding its ground or defending itself. In short, in Akashi's view Dutchbat could do very little to ward off a VRS attack.¹⁹⁷⁹

Zagreb had meanwhile refused Close Air Support. As a result Brantz thought his only option was to throw a cat amongst the pigeons. After making enquiries in Sarajevo he learnt that the request had been sent to Zagreb. He called Colonel De Jonge in Zagreb and asked him to arrange Close Air Support.¹⁹⁸⁰ Brantz also contacted the Defence Crisis Management Centre in The Hague at 11.43 hours to re-emphasise the gravity of the situation. In Brantz' view, if the one channel failed, he had little other option than to use another; after all, failure to act would certainly result in the loss of the enclave. An urgent request for Close Air Support had been submitted, and Brantz strongly suspected Janvier would fail to take the necessary action.¹⁹⁸¹

If The Hague had been unaware of the situation until then, Brantz' message effectively changed that situation. The Hague too felt that Close Air Support was a matter of extreme urgency after the reports of advancing VRS tanks, the intolerable situation at the blocking position, and VRS shelling of the OPs in the north of the enclave. That however did not mean that The Hague intended to intervene by putting pressure on Janvier or Akashi. The discussions in the bunker at the Ministry of Defence in

¹⁹⁷⁶ SMG 1004/65. Logbook B-Coy, 11/07/95 13.00 to 14.35.

¹⁹⁷⁷ SMG 1004/65. Logbook B-Coy, 11/07/95 13.00 to 14.41.

¹⁹⁷⁸ SMG 1007/25. Debriefing report Captain Groen, 22/07/95.

¹⁹⁷⁹ UNNY, DKPO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1131.

¹⁹⁸⁰ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary (version January 2001), 11/09/95, 10.30.

¹⁹⁸¹ Interview M.P. Wijsbroek, 10/12/97.

The Hague were focused on the options available in the event of further OPs falling. The question was whether Dutchbat should be cut back in strength to a smaller company with the exclusive task of ‘reporting and observing’.¹⁹⁸² That was the idea Karremans had proposed to his superiors the day before, but Janvier did not wish to make any decisions, as he considered that to be the duty of the local commander. That discussion was apparently not continued, as no further evidence to that effect was available.

Thirty minutes after the request for Close Air Support had reached Zagreb, the consultations of the Crisis Action Team were finished. Few questions were posed and there was little further discussion, as this was more a case of collecting Janvier and Akashi’s signatures and sending the request to NATO.¹⁹⁸³ Janvier signed at 12.00 and Akashi at 12.17 hours.

Janvier confirmed telephonically to Admiral Smith that three sets of targets had been approved, viz., (1) VRS units attacking the blocking position south of Srebrenica; (2) heavy weapons shelling the UN positions in Srebrenica and; (3) VRS units attacking the OPs.¹⁹⁸⁴ The Blue Sword Request that Janvier had signed stated that approval had been granted for ‘attacks on any forces attacking the blocking UNPROFOR position South of Srebrenica and heavy weapons identified as shelling UN positions in Srebrenica town.’ To that Akashi added the authority to attack ‘forces attacking UN OPs on the perimeter of the enclave’ (clearly based on the problems encountered by OP-N).¹⁹⁸⁵ At 12.20 hours Zagreb sent a message that the request had been signed. Sarajevo did not notify Tuzla and Srebrenica about the additional instructions from Zagreb; only about the approval of the request.¹⁹⁸⁶

The order for Close Air Support came at an unfortunate moment for NATO, as it fell exactly between two packages. The aircraft had been flying above the Adriatic Sea until 11.00 hours, after which they had returned to their base. A number of aircraft (in military terms: a package) was put on 60-minute alert for the afternoon.

Shortly after the aircraft had returned to their base, news came in from the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo that Janvier had been put under pressure to sign the request. In anticipation of Akashi’s signature, the Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force decided, at 12.02 hours, to put aircraft in the air. At 12.30 hours, the US Navy, which provided the support aircraft, launched its aircraft from the *USS Roosevelt*. The Dutch F-16s from Villafranca took off fifty minutes after receiving the order. In that time they had to be briefed, start their engines, feed flight data into the computers, arm their bombs and taxi out. That fitted into the alert period (Ground Alert) of 60 minutes applicable to the aircraft. The flight time to Bosnia was only 25 minutes. The problem there was that the package for the Close Air Support operation still needed to be assembled, as they were scattered over various bases. They would also have to wait for the much slower command post (a C-130 Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center, ABCCC) and slow American A-10 aircraft; which would add to a total of eighty minutes.¹⁹⁸⁷ Vicenza had failed to put the ABCCC on alert status, which caused an extra delay.¹⁹⁸⁸ At the time there was only one aircraft airborne that could provide Suppression of Enemy Air Defences (SEAD) (a EA-6 Prowler). The Prowlers were used to suppress VRS surface-to-air operations, and were a condition for other aircraft to be allowed to fly overland flights. A similar SEAD aircraft left an aircraft carrier at 13.29 hours.¹⁹⁸⁹

¹⁹⁸² Voorhoeve Diary, p. 106.

¹⁹⁸³ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

¹⁹⁸⁴ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. UNPROFOR/NATO Close Air Support to Dutch Battalion at Potocari, 11/07/95, Chronology of Events.

¹⁹⁸⁵ NIOD Coll. Brantz. Release Authority for Air Request 0109/1107/95.

¹⁹⁸⁶ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary (version August 1999), p. 142-3.

¹⁹⁸⁷ DMKlu M95077091/1617. Director of Operations Klu (MajGen G.F.A. Macco) to MinDef, CDS, 04/10/95, No. DOP95.072.078. Minister Voorhoeve had asked the Commander in Chief RNLAF whether it would be possible for the aircraft to arrive earlier.

¹⁹⁸⁸ Lutgert and de Winter, *Check the Horizon*, p. 406.

¹⁹⁸⁹ NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. Memorandum Maj. Frentz, AOCC Sarajevo to Lt-Col de Ruiter, no date.

A total of six support aircraft were available (types EF-111, EA-6B, F-18C) and eight for Close Air Support (types F-16 and A-10). The aircraft for the Suppression of Enemy Air Defences were immediately authorised to fly over Bosnia ‘to assess the environment’; however, that took until 13.51 hours. The Close Air Support aircraft provisionally remained in the vicinity of the tanker aircraft above the Adriatic Sea. Vicenza had determined the sequence of the aircraft as follows: First the Dutch F-16s, then two flights of American F-16s and, finally, two American A-10s. Contact had been established with two Forward Air Controllers, namely, Windmill 04 (still on the roof of the compound) in Potocari and Windmill 03 at blocking position Bravo 1. Hours earlier, they had identified a tank and artillery at Pribicevac, a tank south of Srebrenica, and a tank east of Srebrenica as targets.¹⁹⁹⁰

Shortly after the targets had been identified, a report came in about a VRS surface-to-air battery (SA-6) in the vicinity of Srebrenica that might be active; however, ten minutes later the news arrived that the ‘target’ was a surface-to-air battery in Hungary.¹⁹⁹¹ That report immediately resulted in a telephone conversation between Admiral Smith and Janvier. Smith asked Janvier’s permission to attack the surface-to-air battery, and Janvier agreed based on considerations of self-defence applicable to NATO and UN units.¹⁹⁹²

On the afternoon of 11 July the Dutch F-16 pilots were as yet unaware of the imminent bombing mission. They had put in a lot of air time the previous day based on an alert (in military terms: alerts and scrambles) with no concrete results. The pilots had no idea in advance that the mission was to be Srebrenica – they were only briefed once they were already in the air. After flying off the tanker for fifteen minutes, the aircraft were assigned a Forward Air Controller, a radio frequency, and a target at Srebrenica. In the view of the Dutch pilots, the CAOC in Vicenza could have issued authorisation for that flight earlier, namely as soon as Vicenza knew that this was a serious mission. In their view, that simple routine would have saved time.¹⁹⁹³ At 13.56 hours the attack package was authorised to realise weapons.¹⁹⁹⁴ At 14.20 hours the F-16s established first contact with the Forward Air Controllers. At 14.42 hours the first bomb fell. Karremans had requested the attack at 10.00 hours, the request arrived in Sarajevo at 10.50 hours; nearly four hours had passed by the time support finally arrived.¹⁹⁹⁵

Akashi let New York know that Close Air Support would only be used if UNPROFOR personnel came under attack – in other words, not if the population or the city came under attack. In as far as the Dutch hostages were concerned, the protection of the Dutchbat units at the OPs and in the blocking position enjoyed priority. After he had approved the request for Close Air Support, Akashi explained to Milosevic that NATO had been called in to ensure UNPROFOR’s safety in the enclave. The policy in Zagreb was to notify the Bosnian Serbs that this was not an air strike, but Close Air Support related to what was happening on the ground. Akashi further explained that this was a consequence of the Bosnian Serbs’ own actions. He described the mission and said that it was a direct result of the VRS’ attacks on Dutchbat OPs. Akashi also confronted Milosevic with the fact that UNPROFOR had issued three warnings to VRS General Tolimir on 10 July. Janvier had tried to contact Mladic, but he had not been available. According to Akashi, had the VRS stopped its offensive, there would have been no reason for Close Air Support. Milosevic promised to contact Mladic immediately. He also added that he doubted whether Mladic would appreciate the difference between air strikes and Close Air Support, and that he expected a strong reaction from Mladic.¹⁹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁹⁰ DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 11/07/95, 1002Z, 1044Z, 1048Z.

¹⁹⁹¹ DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 11/07/95, 1102Z, 1126Z, 1151Z, 1153Z, 1210Z.

¹⁹⁹² NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. UNPROFOR/NATO Close-Air Support to Dutch Battalion at Potocari, 11/07/95, Chronology of Events.

¹⁹⁹³ Lutgert and de Winter, *Check the Horizon*, p. 408.

¹⁹⁹⁴ SMG, 1002. Interoffice Memorandum DCOS LOG/ADM to COS, 02/11/95, Memo 768. Zagreb calculated the time from the moment the request arrived and counted 185 minutes.

¹⁹⁹⁵ NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. Memorandum Maj. Frenzt, AOCC Sarajevo to Lieutenant Colonel de Ruiter, no date.

¹⁹⁹⁶ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. UNPROFOR/NATO Close Air Support to Dutch Battalion at Potocari, 11/07/95, Chronology of Events; interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99; NIOD; Coll. Kolsteren. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1130.

UNPF Chief of Staff Kolsteren in Zagreb was convinced that Mladic and the VRS had a very keen understanding of the difference between Close Air Support and air strikes. Failure on the part of the VRS to recognise a direct connection between the use of air power and their own actions, would have resulted in their viewing NATO's assistance as repression, which, in turn, would have resulted in blind rage. The aim of Close Air Support, as deployed in Srebrenica, was to clearly demonstrate the logical connection.¹⁹⁹⁷

According to Akashi it made very little difference whether this was about Close Air Support or air strikes, as, in his view, any use of air power was a traumatic event for the Bosnian Serbs. According to Akashi, Mladic would much rather have put up with 72 tank grenades, as the Danes had previously done in Tuzla, than an attack from the air.¹⁹⁹⁸ At 15.00 hours Milosevic called Akashi back with an update on the situation. Milosevic said that the Dutch soldiers held in the Bosnian-Serb territory had been able to keep their weapons and equipment, and that they had full freedom of movement.¹⁹⁹⁹

Reactions in The Hague

Authorisation of Close Air Support also necessitated intensive telephone traffic with the Netherlands. Voorhoeve called Akashi at the same time as he received the call from Milosevic. When he returned Voorhoeve's call, Akashi said: 'On the recommendation of Janvier, I have given approval for Close Air Support. Planes have taken off and will be in the area in one and a half hours.' Voorhoeve too felt that Close Air Support was appropriate 'if the local commander finds that it is essential for the safety of his blue helmets. My first priority is to avoid unnecessary casualties.'²⁰⁰⁰ Voorhoeve did however confess to Akashi that he feared the action might expose Dutchbat to a concentrated attack by the Bosnian Serbs, and asked him about evacuation plans for Dutchbat.²⁰⁰¹ NATO had prepared plans for the withdrawal of the entire UNPROFOR force, but those plans had not been completed yet. Akashi confirmed that an evacuation should be prepared and that he would consult his military commanders to that effect. Akashi also informed Voorhoeve that he had been in contact with Milosevic and that he would put pressure on the Bosnian Serbs to stop the fighting.²⁰⁰²

At around 12.30 hours, the Chief Defence Staff, Van den Breemen, with Voorhoeve at his side, spoke to Kolsteren via a secure telephone. He also stated that safety was to be the first priority should the task become unfeasible.²⁰⁰³

Akashi agreed; after all, he had already pointed out the uncertainties surrounding the fate of the Dutchbat hostages in his report to New York on authorisation of Close Air Support. At that point there were unconfirmed rumours that the hostages were making their way back to the battalion. Akashi had hoped (assuming the rumours were true) that they would have made it back to safety before actual authorisation of Close Air Support. He added that, in any event, protection of the Dutchbat soldiers in the field enjoyed a high priority.²⁰⁰⁴

At almost exactly the same time Van Mierlo spoke to Bildt. He too promised to put pressure on Milosevic. Voorhoeve then updated NATO Secretary-General Claes on his communications with Akashi and Janvier. He said that Akashi had turned the key for Close Air Support. Claes agreed with Voorhoeve that preparations should be made for the evacuation of Dutchbat.²⁰⁰⁵ During the lunch of the permanent representatives that day he mentioned Voorhoeve's request. Claes was not necessarily happy with the request, as it could result in an embarrassing situation for NATO due to the fact that

¹⁹⁹⁷ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

¹⁹⁹⁸ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 22/07/95, No. Z-1229.

¹⁹⁹⁹ NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1136.

²⁰⁰⁰ Voorhoeve Diary, p. 108.

²⁰⁰¹ NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1130.

²⁰⁰² DCBC, 528. Daily Reports DCBC 11/07/95, 12.43-13.07.

²⁰⁰³ Voorhoeve Diary, p. 106.

²⁰⁰⁴ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1130.

²⁰⁰⁵ Voorhoeve Diary, p. 108.

the operational plan concerned (Oplan 40104) had not yet been approved and as yet no NATO units had been deployed in Bosnia. After consultation with Van Mierlo and Voorhoeve, the deputy Permanent Representative, Feith, explained that a request for evacuation could only be sent to NATO via the UN.²⁰⁰⁶ This is dealt with in further detail in Chapter 9, ‘The departure of Dutchbat from Srebrenica’.

Close Air Support: Execution

At 13.26 hours, Forward Air Controller of the commando’s with call sign Windmill 03 (Sergeant Erkelens) reported two tanks as priority targets. Other targets consisted of infantry units and three armoured vehicles moving along the road to Srebrenica. At 13.40 hours Windmill 03 reported that he was under fire. At that point the aircraft were still flying over the sea.²⁰⁰⁷ At 14.02 hours Windmill 04 (Lieutenant Versteeg), who was still on the roof of the compound, also reported that he was under fire from the artillery positions in Bratunac. One report went as far as to state that one of the Forward Air Controllers had been wounded, but that the other was continuing his work.²⁰⁰⁸

After those reports, Vicenza assigned four extra F-18s to prepare for Close Air Support after the American A-10s. Lieutenant General Mike Ryan, Air Force Commander of NATO’s Southern European Command (in military terms: COMAIRSOUTH), personally confirmed this to the NATO liaison officer in Zagreb. He indicated that the first group would arrive over Srebrenica in ten minutes. The Dutch F-16s arrived above the Forward Air Controller at 14.20, even before Ryan’s announcement.²⁰⁰⁹

The fact that Windmill 03 was to decide on the precise targets for the aircraft was based on the information that he had been under fire.²⁰¹⁰ Both Erkelens and Voskamp were still present near the Bravo 1 blocking position. The Dutch F-16s made contact with the Forward Air Controllers and the authentication procedure was executed correctly – there was some confusion, as both Windmill 02 (Voskamp) and Windmill 03 (Erkelens) were active to a greater or lesser extent and it was not too clear to the aircraft who exactly was who. The JCOs were also still present and claimed to have made contact with the two Dutch F-16s at 14.30 hours. They did not play any role in guiding the aircraft on their targets, as the Dutch Forward Air Controller spoke to the pilots in Dutch.²⁰¹¹ One of the Forward Air Controllers mentioned the taking of a hostage, which precluded the possibility of continuing to work with him. This however appears to have been a misunderstanding, as the statement referred to the threat to the lives of the Dutchbat hostages in Bratunac and not to the possibility of a Forward Air Controller being taken hostage. The gravity of the situation was clear to the pilots at their first radio contact (partly because they had been asked directly whether they were Dutch or not). Initial contact was (as usual) in English, but the pilot promptly switched to Dutch. The leader of the Dutch formation did not wish to complicate matters by switching back to English. The high level of stress was clear from the instructions given to one of the pilots; ‘You can take out anything south of the point at which you just turned.’

Windmill 02 said that the F-16s ‘were put on hold’ for ten minutes (in military terms: a wheel). In that manoeuvre the aircraft circled above the target area to identify the targets in dialogue with the Forward Air Controller. Experience gained during the Gulf War and in a Bosnia had shown that the pilots could operate at medium heights without excessive risk and that these tactics were reasonably effective in fair weather conditions. Experience also showed that time pressure played a less important

²⁰⁰⁶ SMG, 1004/48. Code Feith NATO 1036, 11/07/95.

²⁰⁰⁷ DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 11/07/95.

²⁰⁰⁸ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. UNPROFOR/NATO Close Air Support to Dutch Battalion at Potocari, 11/07/95, Chronology of Events.

²⁰⁰⁹ DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 11/07/95, 1140Z, 1202Z, 1218Z.

²⁰¹⁰ Debriefing statement Lieutenant Colonel J.A.C. Ruiter, 27/09/95.

²⁰¹¹ Confidential information (1).

role, and that communications were more effective than in the case of the low-flying techniques used during the East-West conflict.²⁰¹²

When the F-16s returned to the enclave, Voskamp realised that they were also in contact with Forward Air Controller Erkelens. He was however unable to hear Erkelens, and Erkelens could not hear him - the pilot alerted them to that effect. Voskamp said that he had not realised that the commandos had also been assigned the task of serving as Forward Air Controller.

The main reference point from the ground was the radio tower, but the pilot could not initially see it. Consequently the F-16s flew a circle and then returned. Voskamp then instructed the pilot to fly from north to south, which occurred. At that point, it seemed that the other Forward Air Controller, Erkelens, had taken over. According to a Royal Netherlands Air Force report to the Royal Netherlands Army, he had issued good instructions even though he was under fire at the time.

At 14.40 hours, after a second run over the targets to ensure that they had properly been identified, the first F-16 dropped a bomb from an altitude of 15,000 feet. That was followed by a second bomb after having flown another circle. The second F-16 dropped both bombs in a single run (all four were Mk 84 bombs). One of the pilots thought to have noticed fire from a surface-to-air artillery position.²⁰¹³ In the In-Flight Report the pilots stated: 'Definite hits on road, possibly on tanks.' Vicenza then instructed the American F-16s to attack the tanks in Pribicevac.²⁰¹⁴

Windmill 02 and 03 asked for more assistance. The American F-16s then asked permission from the flying command post to drop their payload. Permission was granted with the proviso that they were in contact with a Forward Air Controller. The authentication procedures between the American F-16s and Sergeant Erkelens failed at first. According to the Royal Netherlands Air Force this was because the American pilots had not executed the procedure correctly.²⁰¹⁵ Erkelens then instructed the Americans to drop a bomb on the former OP-E, as it was occupied by VRS soldiers.²⁰¹⁶ Confusion ensued after the flight controllers in Vicenza had lost contact with the Forward Air Controllers. The JCOs made contact with the two American F-16s (known as Nasty 05)²⁰¹⁷ and tried to guide them to tanks and artillery positions firing at the city. The aircraft passed over several times, but could not locate the targets. After the VRS had fired off a surface-to-air missile, the American F-16s flew away, signalling the JCOs that they needed fuel.²⁰¹⁸

At 15.33 hours the American F-16s signalled via their In Flight Report that they had seen the smoke grenade fired by the Tactical Air Control Party, and that the coordinates given at Pribicevac had been accurate, but that they had failed to drop their bombs. Akashi reported to New York that the second flight by the American F-16s had been called off 'due to obscuration over the target.'²⁰¹⁹ According to Sergeant Erkelens (Windmill 03) the first target was five tanks spotted by the Dutch pilots and later possible VRS positions at height 747 between Srebrenica and Pribicevac. One of the American pilots had first dropped a smoke bomb as a point of reference followed by another, one

²⁰¹² DCBC, 1251. Fiche DOPKlu to CDS, 01/12/95, no number; DCBC, 739. DOPKlu to Mindef for SCOCIS, 13/07/95, DOP 95.050.987/956.

²⁰¹³ DCBC, 739. DOPKlu to Defence Staff, 13/07/95, DOP95.050.987/956. Confi.; Lutgert and De Winter, *Check the Horizon*, p. 407.

²⁰¹⁴ DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 11/07/95, 1252Z, 1259Z.

²⁰¹⁵ DCBC, 739. DOPKlu to Defence Staff, 13/07/95, No. DOP95.050.987/956. Confi.

²⁰¹⁶ SMG 1007/25. Debriefing Sgt 1 Erkelens and First Lieutenant Caris, 22/07/95.

²⁰¹⁷ The JCOs' report is inaccurate on that point. It specified contact with the A-10s, but their call sign was Dumbo, and the call sign of the American F-16s was Nasty.

²⁰¹⁸ Confidential information (1).

²⁰¹⁹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1136. Voorhoeve informed the Second Chamber to the effect that the American pilots had failed to identify their targets due to the rugged terrain and procedural failures. (TK, Conference Year 1995-1996, 22 181, No. 134 (30/11/95)).

kilometre further south and later two more. However the pilots were reported to have had problems finding their bearings.²⁰²⁰

As mentioned before, the situation was not that simple – according to a report, the VRS had launched an SA-7 (shoulder launched, heat-seeking surface-to-air) missile. It is not clear who issued the report, but apparently the missile had been dead on target, did not react to the flares fired by the F-16 (to mislead the heat-seeking device) and narrowly missed the tail of the American F-16. That disrupted the entire operation and contact was lost. After that incident the Americans did ask permission to drop their bombs with the agreement of the Forward Air Controller. At that point the CAOC in Vicenza was unsure as to whether they were talking to Windmill 02 or 03. An alternative was to seek authentication between the American F-16s and Windmill 04 on the roof of the compound in Potocari. The authentication procedure however failed again. AFSOUTH in Naples then intercepted with the announcement that the American F-16s were neither authorised to work with Windmill 04 nor to drop their bombs.²⁰²¹ The American F-16s were exclusively authorised to bomb their targets in the case of a direct attack on Windmill 04, which was not the case.

Ten minutes later authentication succeeded and AFSOUTH asked Windmill 03 and 04 whether they still needed Close Air Support. Windmill 04 in Potocari indicated that he had identified a good target for bombing.²⁰²² The American A-10s were still in the target zone and the F-18s that followed were waiting to enter the target zone. The A-10s flew over the southern section of the enclave between 15.50 and 16.18 hours and remained in contact with Windmill 04.

At 16.37 hours the CAOC in Vicenza asked Windmill 03 whether he still needed Close Air Support.²⁰²³ Windmill 03 was then (16.40 hours) instructed by Sarajevo via Vicenza and the flying Command Post to withdraw as soon as a suitable opportunity arose. Sarajevo had lost contact with Windmill 03.²⁰²⁴ Windmill 04 responded that he had a good target in sight. At 16.58 hours the American F-16s were again authorised to drop their bombs at the request of a Forward Air Controller provided he was under fire. At 17.05 hours Windmill 04 requested the aircraft to leave the enclave based on the situation with the hostages in Bratunac. That request had been issued by the Dutchbat Ops Room (Command Post) (see below).²⁰²⁵ After having received confirmation that Windmill 04 no longer needed Close Air Support, AFSOUTH instructed the F-18s to climb to a higher altitude, but to maintain contact with the Forward Air Controller and to remain in the area. The F-18s were subsequently instructed once more to enquire about Windmill 04's situation, but no reply was logged. After that all aircraft were directed back to the Adriatic Sea and instructed to stay near the tanker aircraft. At 18.30 hours the operation was called off.²⁰²⁶

The effect of the Close Air Support

The staff in Zagreb had listened in and reported that two targets had been identified and attacked, and that the American F-16s had failed to identify their targets.²⁰²⁷ The fact that the guidance of the aircraft had not been conducted spotlessly, had not escaped Zagreb's notice.²⁰²⁸ Zagreb's frustration was exacerbated by the fact that the 'dumb' bombs had failed to have much effect; which led to the belief that it signalled an end to the Srebrenica Safe Area.²⁰²⁹

²⁰²⁰ SMG/Debrief. 'Military Analysis of the action taken by Dutchbat during the Srebrenica crisis; Assen, 28/09/95, Compiled by Lt Col A. de Munnik, see: ERKEF150.1

²⁰²¹ DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 11/07/95, 1434Z, 1437Z, 1439Z, 1441Z, 1443Z, 1445Z, 1447Z.

²⁰²² DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 11/07/95, 1435Z, 1458Z, 1504Z.

²⁰²³ SMG 1007/25. Debriefing Sergeant-Major Van Meer, Kamp Pleso, 22/07/95.

²⁰²⁴ DCBC 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 11/07/95, 1443Z, 1504Z.

²⁰²⁵ SMG 1007/25. Debriefing Sergeant-Major Van Meer, Kamp Pleso, 22/07/95.

²⁰²⁶ DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 11/07/95, 1505Z, 1506Z, 1600Z, 1630Z.

²⁰²⁷ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

²⁰²⁸ Interview R. Theunens, 08/02/00.

²⁰²⁹ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

Five minutes after the bombing, Janvier ordered Dutchbat to abandon all OPs and withdraw to the compound in Potocari. Janvier added that this was to be done without engaging in combat with the ABiH. Janvier was at that point clearly still haunted by the events surrounding OP-F, Van Renssen's death, and later problems with the ABiH. What Janvier had clearly not realised was that the ABiH were at that point preparing to leave the enclave. Karremans however kept the OPs in place for the time being, as he thought it too risky to execute the order at that stage.²⁰³⁰

To the NATO liaison officer in Zagreb's question as to what to do next, Janvier replied that the Forward Air Controllers could be withdrawn. Janvier then left the Situation Center in Zagreb and did not return.²⁰³¹ At 17.16 hours, NATO liaison officer Rudd notified Admiral Leighton Smith that Close Air Support could be terminated, but added that Janvier had asked to keep the aircraft in the air as long as possible. In the event of further Close Air Support being needed in the framework of the approved Blue Sword Request, Janvier would contact Admiral Smith personally to that end.²⁰³² At 18.30 hours, Vicenza instructed the aircraft to return to their bases.²⁰³³

Due to a shortage of information, AFSOUTH in Naples was unable, in its Situation Report of 17.22 hours, to determine the extent of the damage and whether the operation had in fact stopped the VRS advance. For those reasons attention was to remain fixed on Srebrenica, as well as on Zepa, as a potential next Bosnian Serb target. The NATO headquarters in Naples considered VRS retribution against UN personnel a probability.²⁰³⁴ The UNHCR also put all its posts on the alert against retaliatory and hostage-taking operations.²⁰³⁵

The VRS did indeed issue a threat. At 15.50 hours, Dutchbat received an ultimatum from the VRS via the radio of one of the hostage APCs in Bratunac. Failure to stop the aerial attacks would result in the death of the thirty Dutchbat hostages in Bratunac, and all available weapons systems would be aimed at and used against the compound in Potocari and Srebrenica. Shortly after that (16.20 hours) Dutchbat observed from the compound in Potocari that the VRS had indeed set up the weapons systems.²⁰³⁶ Franken stated that Dutchbat did not attach much value to the threats. In his view, Mladic would not allow the VRS to kill UN soldiers (mainly because it had not happened before). On the other hand, the VRS had previously fired at refugees and had also fired mortars into the square near the bus station while occupied by numerous refugees. Undoubtedly further mortar attacks would have resulted in scores of dead and wounded.²⁰³⁷

Within ten minutes of receiving the ultimatum, Karremans reported it to Sarajevo and Tuzla.²⁰³⁸ Colonel Brantz in Tuzla reported the news to the Defence Crisis Management Centre (DCBC) in The Hague. The Hague then attempted to stop further deployment of Close Air Support. How that went and the extent of the success of those efforts is discussed in Chapter 7, paragraph 5: All Further Close Air Support Called off on 11 July.

In terms of actual losses inflicted on the VRS, the effect of the Close Air Support was limited, as only one tank had been damaged. At the time the only certainty was that the road had been hit; however, no one could tell for sure whether any tanks had been hit.²⁰³⁹ The Dutch F-16s initially reported that one tank had been eliminated, and their information appeared to have been compiled

²⁰³⁰ DCBC, 528. Daily Reports DCBC 11/07/95. The news came from Colonel Brantz at 15.07 hours. General Kolsteren had notified the DCBC of the assignment two minutes earlier.

²⁰³¹ Interview David Last, 05/07/00, diary entries.

²⁰³² DCBC, 664. Letter Lt Gen B. Janvier to Admiral L. Smith, 11/07/95.

²⁰³³ DCBC, 665. Fax NLO AFSOUTH (Col. J. Beks) to OCHKKlu, 11/07/95 19.00 LT.

²⁰³⁴ Confidential information (153).

²⁰³⁵ CRST. Fax Zagreb (UNHCR) 11 Jul 95 1515Z.

²⁰³⁶ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. 'short Overview of Recent Events' compiled by Lieutenant Colonel Karremans, 17/07/95, No. TK195118; Karremans, *Srebrenica: Who Cares*, p. 196.

²⁰³⁷ Interview R.A. Franken, 18/05/01.

²⁰³⁸ Karremans, *Srebrenica: Who Cares*, p. 196.

²⁰³⁹ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Banbury Diary. SRSg's meeting 11/07/95.

quite thoroughly.²⁰⁴⁰ Later reports appeared to claim more damage than had actually been inflicted. The *Leeuwarder Courant* (a Dutch daily newspaper) reported that at least one tank and possibly a second had been destroyed (the F-16s originated from the Leeuwarden Airbase, which explains the local interest). The Squadron Commander, Lieutenant Colonel J.L.H. Eikelboom, after studying video images of the attack, expressed the same view in the *Defensiekrant* (the Armed Forces newspaper).

Later reports from the JCOs stated that an artillery position and a bunker had also been eliminated.²⁰⁴¹ The JCOs reported to the UNMOs that a tank, an artillery position and a bunker had been hit.²⁰⁴² This was a notable statement, especially in view of the fact that they, like the commandos, did not have a direct view of the tanks positioned five to six hundred metres away. The commandos could only see smoke emanating from the tanks' barrels when firing – not the tanks themselves. After the Close Air Support the direct fire on the commandos ceased; however, at that point they were surrounded by the VRS.²⁰⁴³ Forward Air Controller Voskamp and Sergeant Struik only witnessed the effect of the first bomb. It appeared to be a direct hit, as one of the tanks was blown one metre into the air. Voskamp failed to report this, as his group came under fire after that. Voskamp then took cover in a APC and did not see the other two bombs being dropped.²⁰⁴⁴

According to the Bosnian Serbs the tanks were slightly damaged, but the explosions had no further effects.²⁰⁴⁵ Deputy Mayor Hamdija Fejzic and Police Chef Hakija Meholic were able to follow the bombing. Fejzic saw a bomb miss the tank, and the bombs dropped by the second aircraft explode in the forest. Meholic saw VRS soldiers abandon the tanks, apparently happy to have survived the attack. He also saw a bomb miss the tank and explode in the river nearby. The VRS did not take refuge but opened fire on the aircraft. The tanks also fired grenades to create a smokescreen against further attacks from the air. The smoke and the bombs dropped from the aircraft exacerbated the panic and resulted in major chaos in the city. The population took flight and the War Presidency of the Opstina was unable to regain control of the crowds.²⁰⁴⁶

The Close Air Support thus had limited effect other than anger on the part of the Bosnian Serbs. Mladic, during negotiations with Karremens the following day, directly attacked the latter because he had requested Close Air Support without due cause, as a result of which, Mladic claimed, twelve of his soldiers had died. It was not possible to obtain independent verification of that claim, whereby it would be fair to assume that Mladic had been bluffing.²⁰⁴⁷ The claim is further contradicted by the statements of Fejzic and Meholic above. Mladic during discussions with General Rupert Smith in Belgrade on 16 July reiterated his anger about the Close Air Support mission. According to Mladic one of the bombs nearly hit him, whereupon Smith merely replied: 'What a pity it missed you'.²⁰⁴⁸

Shortly after the Close Air Support operations, the UNPROFOR Chief of Staff in Sarajevo, General Nicolai, and VRS General Gvero conducted a telephone conversation during which Nicolai explained that Dutchbat had called for Close Air Support in self-defence. Gvero however denied that the VRS had attacked UNPROFOR positions. According to him the ABiH (the party that UNPROFOR protected) was responsible for those attacks. In Gvero's view, Nicolai, as a human being and experienced soldier, could not justify an unjustifiable attack on the VRS. It was untrue that the UN

²⁰⁴⁰ DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 11/07/95, 1259Z.

²⁰⁴¹ Lutgert and de Winter, *Check the Horizon*, p. 409. Reference was made to *De Leeuwarder Courant*, 12/07/95, *Defensiekrant*, 27/07/95 and *Friesch Dagblad*, 29/07/95; P. Gerritse, 'We wilden vooraan vliegen, commandant Eikelboom en de nadagen van Srebrenica', *De Opmaat*, December 1995, p. 10.

²⁰⁴² NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Capsat TA to TX, 112049B Jul 95.

²⁰⁴³ Interview A.A.L. Caris, 03/03/00.

²⁰⁴⁴ Interview R. Voskamp, 08/10/98.

²⁰⁴⁵ ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 399/a, Interview of Radislav Krstic, 18/02/00, p. 14.

²⁰⁴⁶ Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98, 19/04/98 and 21/05/99 and Hamdija Fejzic, 03/02/98. Westerman and Rijs found remnants of bomb craters in a garden on the shoulder of the road in June 1996. (*Het zwaartste scenario*, p. 254).

²⁰⁴⁷ Interview Petr Uscumlic, 14/09/99.

²⁰⁴⁸ Interview Rupert Smith, 12/01/00. Captain Caris heard from a JCO source during a later deployment in Bosnia that Mladic had been standing three hundred metres away. (Interview A.A.L. Caris, 03/03/00).

had been attacked and consequently there was no just cause for Close Air Support. Gvero called it an ‘unprovoked attack’ and demanded an immediate end to Close Air Support. Failing that, the VRS would hold Nicolai responsible for the consequences with regard to his troops as well as the population. Gvero thus clearly assumed that Nicolai was acting as deputy UNPROFOR commander.²⁰⁴⁹

At 16.23 hours, Gvero reported his conversation with Nicolai to Karadzic. According to Gvero, Nicolai wanted all VRS activities against UNPROFOR to be stopped, but Gvero added that this most likely concerned Muslim activities. In Gvero’s view, if the UN had been hit, it had been hit by the very people it was protecting. He also told Karadzic that he had asked Nicolai to stop the aerial activities. Gvero also told Karadzic not to worry, as the operation was running according to plan. Gvero added that the UN presence was extremely disruptive with regard to VRS movements. Twenty minutes later Gvero again called Karadzic to tell him that the NATO aircraft were still in the air.²⁰⁵⁰

Two hours after the conversation with Nicolai, Gvero learnt that not Nicolai, but Gobilliard had been appointed as General Smith’s deputy. Gvero immediately contacted Gobilliard. In a telephone conversation conducted at 18.10 hours, Gobilliard confirmed that the NATO aircraft had been withdrawn. He stated that, while the aircraft were no longer flying over Srebrenica, they remained available over the sea to protect both Dutchbat and the refugees.²⁰⁵¹

Gobilliard added that Karremans had been instructed to arrange a local ceasefire. Gvero supported the notion of direct contact with the local VRS commander, whose cooperation would be needed to negotiate a ceasefire. Gvero failed to mention that the VRS commander in question would be Mladic. He promised Gobilliard to do his utmost to keep the situation in Srebrenica under control. Gvero stated that he could not foresee any serious problems in that respect due to the presence of ‘competent soldiers’ there. At the end of the conversation, Gvero again pointed out that the VRS had not fired at UNPROFOR, and that the blame fell squarely on the ABiH. In Gvero’s view this was a typical scenario, and he added

that the ABiH routinely used stolen UN vehicles to attack the VRS.²⁰⁵² The ‘blame-it-on-the-ABiH’ scenario pursued by Gvero in that conversation had by then become standard VRS fare.

The effect of Close Air Support for the blocking positions

In the meantime, the VRS kept moving forward.²⁰⁵³ After the F16s appeared above the enclave at 14.45 hours,²⁰⁵⁴ their attack on the VRS tanks had an unintentional effect: within the hour, the VRS made a strong push towards the city.

Now, everything gained momentum. The blocking positions and the rest of B-company had to be pulled back: a Dutchbat presence within the town of Srebrenica could no longer be maintained. The commandos, the FAC team, and all APCs had to withdraw at full speed.²⁰⁵⁵

Neither the commandos nor the JCOs could make contact with the aircraft or with Sarajevo. Their radio antennas had been damaged by a shot from a VRS tank. The fleeing ABiH had inflicted damage on the antennas too. This marked a difficult phase for the blocking position. The tension increased enormously, which manifested in swearing during B-company’s radio transmissions and unrest in the battalion’s Ops room (the Command Post).²⁰⁵⁶ During the shelling, ‘quite chaotic shouting’ could

²⁰⁴⁹ NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. Telephone Conversation General Nicolai - General Gvero, 11/07/95, 16.15 hrs. The ABiH intercepted this conversation. Also see ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa, 11/07/95, Str.pov.br. 02/8-01-1224.

²⁰⁵⁰ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa, 11/07/95, Str.pov.br. 02/8-01-1224.

²⁰⁵¹ NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. Letter Lieutenant Colonel J.A.C. de Ruiter to Commodore Hilderink, personal, 27/01/97.

²⁰⁵² NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. Telephone Conversation General Gobilliard - General Gvero, 11/07/95, 18.10 hours.

²⁰⁵³ SMG 1007/25. Captain Groen’s debriefing report, Camp Pleso, 22/07/95.

²⁰⁵⁴ This is also the moment from which the logbook of B-Coy was no longer kept.

²⁰⁵⁵ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

²⁰⁵⁶ SMG 1007/25. Debriefing Captain Wieffer, S2/Ops room, 22/07/95.

be heard over the radio and the feeling arose among the Battalion Staff: 'this is going wrong'.²⁰⁵⁷ Under fire from the VRS, which luckily missed, commandos and JCOs withdrew to the road while running and firing, where an APC awaited them.²⁰⁵⁸ Shortly before getting on, the JCO commander was the last one firing at the onrushing VRS soldiers, which were now at a distance of 100 to 200 metres away.²⁰⁵⁹ Upon arrival, the commandos were almost fired upon by their own troops because B-company thought for a moment that they were VRS military dressed as UN personnel. However, the commandos were recognized at the last minute.²⁰⁶⁰

Due to the firing and fighting in the rear, the position of blocking position Bravo-1 could no longer be maintained. The Commander of B-company, Groen, thus ordered Egbers to give up his position.

The Close Air Support did have a short-term effect in that part of blocking position Bravo-1 could more easily withdraw via a route that was previously fired at VRS tanks. Nevertheless, the blocking position was visible from Pribicevac and could still be fired at from there by the VRS. The crews of the other blocking positions were already withdrawing with their vehicles towards the B-company compound in Srebrenica.²⁰⁶¹

The Bravo-1 crew drove full-throttle down the hill on the way to the city. Soldier Hagenaars saw ABiH soldiers come towards the road, and he saw one of them fire at him. At that moment, he sat on top of the APC's turret as gunner. Hagenaars heard a tap on the turret, felt an impact on his left arm, and saw blood dripping. He went inside the APC for cover. There he was bandaged, and could continue to function normally. The incident was immediately reported to the APC in front of them so that the gunner there could also take cover.²⁰⁶²

Upon arrival in Srebrenica, the personnel of blocking position Bravo-1 encountered indescribable chaos. The Dutchbat vehicles were damaged due to the impact of a shell on the compound. Artillery- and mortar fire had damaged buildings in the area. The refugees were desperate and asked the Dutchbat military what to do.²⁰⁶³ At the same time, the APCs from the other blocking positions also arrived at the compound in Srebrenica. Hageman's APC collided against Van Duijn's APC in the midst of the chaos.²⁰⁶⁴

When the APCs from the blocking positions arrived at the back gate of the compound, the first VRS soldiers were already coming down the hill towards the compound. It came to an assembly of Dutchbat vehicles at the compound. Captain Groen stood at the back gate. Lieutenant Mustert beckoned him to his vehicle that was equipped with several radios, so that he could stay in contact with the battalion and vehicles from his own company.²⁰⁶⁵ Groen made a last round through the compound, took the discs out of the computers and, after he had ensured that none of his own personnel was still in the compound, rode in Mustert's APC towards Potocari.²⁰⁶⁶ With the departure of this APC, the last Dutchbat personnel left the town of Srebrenica.

After returning to Potocari, Lieutenant Caris reported to Major Franken around 15:00 hours. He then learned that all Close Air Support activities were suspended.²⁰⁶⁷ Only after returning to Potocari did the JCOs learn that Mladic had demanded that Close Air Support be suspended, because otherwise the compound would have been shelled and the hostages killed. Due to the rumour

²⁰⁵⁷ Major E. Wieffer interview, 18/06/99; Debriefing statements First Lieutenant L.C. van Duijn, 12/09/95; Information based on confidential debriefing statement (4).

²⁰⁵⁸ Confidential information (1) and (81).

²⁰⁵⁹ See Onderscheidingen, CDO. FAC missions Srebrenica report, 23/08/00.

²⁰⁶⁰ SMG 1007/25. Debriefing Sergeant I. Erkelens and First Lieutenant Caris, 22 /07/95.

²⁰⁶¹ Confidential information (81).

²⁰⁶² Information based on confidential debriefing statement (15).

²⁰⁶³ Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, Egbers report p. 297.

²⁰⁶⁴ SMG 1004. First Lieutenant Van Duijn debriefing, 22/07/95.

²⁰⁶⁵ J.E. Mustert interview, 18/06/99.

²⁰⁶⁶ Confidential information (81).

²⁰⁶⁷ See Onderscheidingen, CDO. FAC missions Srebrenica report, 23/08/00.

circulating that the VRS were looking for three British, they stayed at the compound the rest of the time.²⁰⁶⁸ The JCOs destroyed their radio equipment, so as not to have it fall into the hands of the Bosnian Serbs because of the secret crypto equipment, as a result of which an important source of additional information was lost for Sarajevo and Tuzla.

21. The VRS occupy the city – the population moves to Potocari

The effect of the air support for Dutchbat meant was that it had to pull back from the town of Srebrenica, the effect was negligible for the VRS, and the effect for the population was that it created further panic, due to which the fall of Srebrenica seemed to be precipitated sooner. People fled because of it, often without taking anything, and many assembled at the hospital.²⁰⁶⁹ The Commander of the 28th Division, Ramiz Becirovic, thought that the air support operation was also a meaningless action from a military point of view, because the VRS simply changed position.²⁰⁷⁰

After that, the Opstina lost all control of the fleeing population. Loudspeakers that had been set up in the market square could no longer play a role in informing the population, and the radio station in the House of Culture had only limited reach.²⁰⁷¹ At 15.00 hours, 90% of the population had left Srebrenica for Potocari or Tuzla.²⁰⁷²

After the Close Air Support, when Ramiz Becirovic saw that Dutchbat was also preparing for a hasty departure from the compound in Srebrenica, it was clear to him what was about to happen. He returned to the PTT building but it was already deserted. After that, he had no more contact with Karremans or Franken. There was no longer hope for the continuation of the defence of Srebrenica, and Becirovic commanded his soldiers to move towards Potocari and make contact with the civil authorities; he wanted the ABiH to fight their way into a free area (the area of the Muslim-Croat Federation around Tuzla). He was one of the last to leave Srebrenica around 3pm, on the way to Susnjari in the Northwest of the enclave, even though he did not know then that plans had been made in the meantime to go to Tuzla from there. He realized that there was no other choice but to leave the town of Srebrenica and to put the thoughts of continued fighting behind him.²⁰⁷³

At 16.00 hours UNMOs reported that the stream of refugees and wounded on the way to Potocari comprised countless people. The number of people that arrived at the compound grew steadily. The bombardment of the city continued even after the Close Air Support. At that time, the UNMOs expected the arrival of even more aircraft: 'the air strikes on the North part of the enclave have not yet taken place.' The VRS were now everywhere in the enclave and the UNMOs estimated their numbers between 1,000 and 3,000. That was a rough estimate; the number was lower in reality.

The UNMOs predicted that the refugees would be close to desperation within 48 hours, because the battalion itself only had food for a few days. Rumours were spreading that a large group of ABiH soldiers were fighting their way out of the enclave. It was still not entirely clear what number was involved. The VRS ceased the shelling of the city, but did start to bomb Budak and Gradac in the North of the enclave with rockets and grenades. The impact caused panic in the refugees because these places were located close to the compound. However, the VRS did not shell the compound itself or the surrounding area where the refugees were.²⁰⁷⁴ The information from the UNMOs got to Janvier by way of a note. Janvier got to hear which orders General Gobilliard had issued to Dutchbat as well

²⁰⁶⁸ Confidential information (1).

²⁰⁶⁹ Interview Abdula Purkovic, 4/02/98.

²⁰⁷⁰ ABiH Tuzla. Additional statement from Ramiz Becirovic, 16/04/98, based on an earlier statement from 11/08/95.

²⁰⁷¹ Interview Omer Subasic, 19/11/97 and 20/10/97.

²⁰⁷² Interview Dzermaludin Becirevic and Sefket Hafizovic, 21/10/97.

²⁰⁷³ ABiH Tuzla. Additional statement from Ramiz Becirovic, 16/04/98, based on an earlier statement from 11/08/95; interview Ramiz Becirovic 02/02/98 and 05/02/98.

²⁰⁷⁴ SMG 1002. Updates 111600B, 111730B and 111910B, July 1995; NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Capsat TA to TX, 112049B, July 1995.

(humanitarian aid to the population and bringing about a local cease fire).²⁰⁷⁵ How Dutchbat executed these orders will be discussed in Part IV.

At 16.55 hours the ABiH in Tuzla intercepted a message from the VRS: the Serbian flag had been raised over the destroyed Orthodox Church of Srebrenica.²⁰⁷⁶ Shortly before that, Gvero had let Karadzic know by phone that the flag had been raised over the Orthodox Church, and that the spire of the tower had disappeared.²⁰⁷⁷ Another message made mention of the suggestion that the Greek mercenaries that fought for the VRS had to hoist their flag too, and that this had to be recorded on video 'for marketing purposes'.²⁰⁷⁸ The enclave had definitely fallen into the hands of the Bosnian Serbs.

When the VRS troops arrived in the centre of the city, Mladic together with Generals Zivanovic and Krstic decided to go there too. That resulted in the well-known images of Mladic and his people walking through the deserted city congratulating each other on the results, and where Mladic offered the city to the Serbs as a gift. On this occasion Mladic spoke the words: 'Hereby I return Srebrenica to the Serbian people, on the eve of yet another holy day. I return the city in the tradition of the Serbian struggle against the Turks, as we have overcome the Dahije.'²⁰⁷⁹

In the centre, Mladic, Zivanovic and Krstic met the VRS Brigade Commanders Andric and Pandurevic. Mladic ordered both Brigade Commanders to advance to Potocari, but they both objected to that. Mingling in with the citizens near the UN compound did not seem like a good idea to them, and moreover, contact with the 28th Division of the ABiH had been lost. It was about to get dark and the whereabouts of the ABiH were unknown. After some discussion, Mladic gave in and ordered all VRS units to remain in their current positions.²⁰⁸⁰

Following this, Mladic ordered his units to assemble at 22.00 hours at the Bratunac Brigade's command post in Pribicevac, where he would issue orders. During the evening in Pribicevac, Mladic told Karremans about this meeting but did not elaborate on the details of the meeting. Mladic also mentioned that Karadzic had named Miroslav Deronjic Civil Commissioner of Srebrenica. He also disclosed that the 10th Sabotage Detachment that reported directly to the General Staff of the VRS had arrived in the area, as well as the detachment of Special Police of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mladic further ordered all units of the Drina Corps to leave their positions that same night and move to Viogor, a higher situated area in the centre of the enclave, to prepare for a march toward Zepa the next morning.

On 12 July at 13.00 hours, all Drina Corps units had again left the area of the former enclave. No other regular VRS soldiers were located around Srebrenica or Bratunac any longer, only the so-called 10th Sabotage Detachment and a detachment of the Special Police. These units cut off access to Potocari during the night of 11 July.²⁰⁸¹

Numbers of victims from 6 to 11 July

The exact number of casualties amongst the population in the period between 6 and 11 July, as a result of the fighting between the warring factions is not certain. It must be somewhere around 20 or more. Aside from the numbers that the UNMOs collected, there is only one known Bosnian source that lists the number of casualties, but this source does not give an overview and is from a later date.²⁰⁸² During

²⁰⁷⁵ DCBC, 670. Col. F. Dureau to FC, Point de situation fait par le Commandant de la FORPRONU (11.19.09B July 95).

²⁰⁷⁶ ABiH Tuzla. Komanda 2. Korpusa, 11/07/95, Str. Pov. Br. 02/8-10-1223.

²⁰⁷⁷ ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa, 11/07/95, Str.pov.br. 02/8-01-1224.

²⁰⁷⁸ ABiH Tuzla. Komanda 2. Korpusa, 11/07/95, Str. Pov. Br. 02/8-10-1224; interview Semsudin Muminovic, 17/05/99.

²⁰⁷⁹ Mladic referred to the 12th of July: the day of St. Peter and to the murder of four Ottoman representatives (Dahije) in Belgrade early in the nineteenth century. The footage of Mladic in Srebrenica can a.o. be seen in the film 'Cry from the Grave'.

²⁰⁸⁰ ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 399/a bis. Interview Radislav Krstic, 18/02/00, p. 14-15.

²⁰⁸¹ ICTY, (IT-98-33), OTP Ex. 399/a bis, Interview Radislav Krstic, 18/02/00, p. 15-18 and 47.

²⁰⁸² ABiH Tuzla. 28 Div, 4 /06/97, nr. 06/2-138/97, Interview Murat Siljkovic (ABiH dossier about war crimes in Srebrenica and the period in the Batkovići camp).

these days, 14 men should have been killed on the ABiH side, but perhaps more, according to Ramiz Becirovic.²⁰⁸³ Police Chief Hakija Meholic estimated that in the week of the attack approximately 30 citizens and 10 to 15 soldiers were killed. Concerning the losses of the VRS, Meholic had no idea, as opposed to Becirovic.²⁰⁸⁴ According to Becirovic, 40 VRS soldiers were killed during the counter attack alone at Zeleni Jadar. On 9 and 10 July, a total of some 60 VRS men should have been killed.²⁰⁸⁵ Confirmation of these casualty numbers has not been obtained from any other source. The VRS never made public how many men they lost at Srebrenica.²⁰⁸⁶

In view of the enormous number of artillery grenades that descended on the enclave between 6 and 11 July, the number of victims amongst the population of the enclave and the ABiH military was relatively small. Given, as a possible explanation for this from the UNPROFOR side was the poor quality of the ammunition, and especially the quality of the fuses, due to which the explosions were not effective and only made small craters with limited effect. In addition, the guns were outdated and available meteorological data was limited, so the outgoing fire was less accurate.²⁰⁸⁷

The majority of the VRS grenades landed along the edges of the enclave and seemed specifically intended to intimidate the population and drive them North. That was a tested formula in ethnic cleansing and made it easy for the VRS in that the town of Srebrenica did not have to be cleansed with risky fighting in built up areas.

General Krstic, who led the attack of the Drina Corps on Srebrenica, later denied that the population was a deliberate target of the shelling. That not one single grenade had fallen on the city and that no buildings were damaged, as was argued by the Bosnian-Serb side, does not correspond with reality however. Still, no evidence could be provided during the trial against General Krstic that the population formed a direct target. The primary objective of the shelling did indeed appear to be to frighten the population and to drive them out of the city. That fitted within the long-standing objectives of the Bosnian Serbs: ethnic cleansing, with which military means were used to threaten and terrorize the population to instigate a hasty flight from the area.²⁰⁸⁸

22. From Srebrenica to Potocari

Thousands of frightened people of all ages flocked towards Potocari. Incoming radio reports made the threats increasingly clear according to B-company Commander Groen. He ordered some of his people to walk to Potocari amongst the refugees to give them the feeling that the UN was protecting them. According to Groen, however, this was no more than 'showing the flag' to the population.²⁰⁸⁹

People were standing or sitting on anything mobile.²⁰⁹⁰ An old man on a stretcher was carried into the APC and an old woman was helped inside. Many people were riding on the APC.²⁰⁹¹ Some had to be left behind as well, even though Dutchbat tried to take as many people as possible. People left each other behind and were hanging on to the vehicles. There were people on the front of the APC that fell off the vehicle and were probably run over.²⁰⁹² Part IV will come back to the later investigation in the Netherlands on incidents of people being run over.

The APCs had to move very slowly due to the large stream of refugees. All that time, the crews rode above armour. They stopped a few times to take exhausted people that were sitting on the verge

²⁰⁸³ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 02/0298 and 05/02/98.

²⁰⁸⁴ Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98, 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

²⁰⁸⁵ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 02/02/98 and 05/02/98.

²⁰⁸⁶ Interview Zoran Petrovic-Pirocanac, 31/03/98 and 02/04/98.

²⁰⁸⁷ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 434, File special reports 4, box SNE 1. Note from Major C. Bradley RA, Task Force Alpha, 8/06/95, No. MIO.ARTY/002.

²⁰⁸⁸ ICTY, (IT-98-33), Krstic Judgement, 02/08/01, para 122-5.

²⁰⁸⁹ Confidential information (81).

²⁰⁹⁰ Dijkema, *Dutchbat in Vredesnaam*, Egbers report p. 297.

²⁰⁹¹ Confidential information (77).

²⁰⁹² SMG 1004. Debriefing First Lieutenant Van Duijn, 22/07/95.

with them. Shots and impacts were heard in the surrounding mountains.²⁰⁹³ The VRS did not shoot at the refugees during the journey to Potocari, but overhead. Groen had given the order to drive behind the refugees, using the six APCs from the blocking position as a shield.²⁰⁹⁴ Lieutenant Van Duijn did not see any ABiH soldiers on the trip from Srebrenica to Potocari. He did not see VRS soldiers either. However, grenades impacted and they also seemed to come closer. The impacts seemed to follow the procession.²⁰⁹⁵ Yet the firing did gradually decrease after the departure from Srebrenica.²⁰⁹⁶

Franken first planned to establish a new blocking position on a football field along the way from Srebrenica to Potocari. Just as he relayed the message, Groen saw two mortar impacts approximately 100 metres from the road. He also heard gunfire. Thereupon, the order came to continue towards the compound at Potocari. Approximately three kilometres before reaching Potocari, Groen received the order from Franken to establish a new blocking position with four vehicles at the turn off to Susnjari, just south of the factories at Potocari. This new blocking position came under Groen's command.²⁰⁹⁷ The APCs arrived there at 16.00 hours after a one and a half hour trip.²⁰⁹⁸ The order was to continue giving the population that would possibly follow some feeling of security with four APCs, and to form a buffer between the population and the VRS.²⁰⁹⁹ At Groen's request, he received permission to move the position 150 metres north, because the intersection had previously been a favourite for VRS artillery to find the range.²¹⁰⁰ At that intersection, Dutchbat had a reasonably good view of the road to Susnjari, and to the south and the east. Indeed some people passed, but not in numbers worth mentioning.²¹⁰¹ Around 23.30 hours, the APC from OP-M came by, loaded with and surrounded by a large number of refugees (more about this below).²¹⁰²

The Dutchbat soldiers saw about a hundred ABiH soldiers assemble at this intersection: they were the last ABiH soldiers that Dutchbat saw. Their presence led to some concern because they attracted fire from the VRS.²¹⁰³ a piece of VRS artillery had started firing at the ABiH soldiers and the ABiH answered, due to which they attracted even more fire, endangering the refugees present.²¹⁰⁴

The fighting stopped after that. The first VRS soldiers now cautiously moved towards the blocking position. Groen made contact with the commander. There was some conversation and the VRS disappeared again, only to return later. At that point, any remaining affability was gone: the VRS military made it clear to the Dutchbat soldiers that the gloves were off by aiming weapons and cocking pistols. They made it clear that the UN no longer had a say in the matter, and that the VRS would determine what was to happen. The VRS soldiers signalled the Dutchbat soldiers to put down their weapons so that everyone was disarmed. The Dutchbat soldiers were wearing bulletproof vests, which is why the VRS military had been ordered to make their first 5 cartridges armour piercing, and those cartridges were actually in the clips too: the VRS could have shot right through the vests with those. The Bosnian Serbs proudly showed these magazines and ammunitions to Lieutenant Musters as his section was being disarmed.

Following this, the Bosnian Serbs took what they deemed useful or handy. Initially, that was the pistols and Uzis. The VRS soldiers apparently found them quite nice, left the rest of the weapons behind, and kept walking towards Potocari. An hour later, a few Bosnian Serbs reappeared and repeated this ritual with regard to the weapons left over. The blocking position personnel thus allowed

²⁰⁹³ Debriefing statement Soldier 1st Class A. Hagenaars, 14/09/95.

²⁰⁹⁴ Debriefing statement Soldier 1st Class J.L. Portegies Zwart, 07/09/95.

²⁰⁹⁵ Debriefing statement First Lieutenant L.C. van Duijn, 12/09/95.

²⁰⁹⁶ SMG, 1007/25. Debriefing statement Captain Groen, 22/07/95.

²⁰⁹⁷ Confidential information (81).

²⁰⁹⁸ Debriefing statement Soldier 1st Class A. Hagenaars, 14/09/95.

²⁰⁹⁹ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

²¹⁰⁰ SMG 1007/25. Debriefing statement Captain Wieffer, 22/07/95.

²¹⁰¹ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

²¹⁰² Debriefing statement First Lieutenant L.C. van Duijn, 12/09/95.

²¹⁰³ Interview J. R. Groen, 05/07/99.

²¹⁰⁴ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (15).

the disarmament but drew the line at personal possessions that were found in a little bag inside the APC. Therefore, an implied agreement was made that the VRS would not be allowed to enter the vehicles. If the VRS wanted something from the vehicles, they would take it out.²¹⁰⁵

This was contrary to the order that General Gvero had issued to the Drina Corps immediately after the occupation of Srebrenica on 11 July. It read: ensure the best and correct treatment of the UNPROFOR soldiers, who are our guests, and prevent provocation despite their behaviour. The VRS must understand, stressed Gvero, that the attention of the UN commander and of international public opinion is focussed on the treatment of Dutchbat.²¹⁰⁶ Gvero's orders did not speak of attention to the correct treatment of the *population*. The safety of the UN military was indeed the responsibility of General Janvier too; this comes up in the next chapter.

This blocking position crew had hardly slept in four days. Groen made sure that some Dutchbat soldiers from Potocari were relieved on the night of 11 and 12 July.²¹⁰⁷

The Dutchbat soldiers were forced in this way – with or without being threatened with a weapon – to surrender their personal weapons, their vehicles, bulletproof vests and helmets. In most cases in which this happened, Dutchbat was forced to do this by the VRS, but in a few cases by the ABiH as well. Upon departure from Srebrenica, Dutchbat III had lost 199 rifles in total, which included 25 Uzis, 38 pistols, 18 .30 machine guns and 11 .50 machine guns.²¹⁰⁸

23. The fate of the remaining OPs

After the fall of the enclave, there were still seven OPs left: OP-A, OP-C, OP-N, OP-P, OP-Q and OP-R. OP-M was still manned as well. The evacuation will be discussed in brief here. During these activities, the number of Dutchbat soldiers in the hands of the VRS would ultimately rise to 51. Not all Dutchbat soldiers that fell into the hands of the VRS were indeed taken hostage: in an isolated case, Dutchbat soldiers were also taken to the compound in Potocari by the VRS military.

In the meantime, Zagreb was poorly informed of the actual situation in the enclave with regard to the OPs. That was made evident from the announcement from Janvier to Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen when he visited Janvier on the night of 11 July. Janvier told him that the VRS and the ABiH were still fighting for OPs C, M, N, P and R. That proved to be wrong, but Janvier was of the opinion that the occupation of the remaining OPs and the hostages no longer posed a risk: after all, the VRS had obtained its objectives. But Janvier was of the opinion that air support might still be needed, and he was prepared to allow that in case a warring faction were to attack an OP. An air support was then intended as assistance for the evacuation of OPs.²¹⁰⁹

The capture of OP-R

OP-R and OP-Q were relatively quiet OPs in the Eastern part of the enclave. They were near the compound in Potocari but were also the closest of all the OPs to the VRS lines. They had virtually no contact with the ABiH.

In the days prior to the fall, these OPs had reported no fighting activity within their area. OP-R had a special position because there was a telephone line there with the so-called 'Dragan bunker', a private residence within the Bosnian-Serb territory a bit further away where a VRS battalion-command post was located. Not many ABiH soldiers were in the area of the OP and there were contacts with the

²¹⁰⁵ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

²¹⁰⁶ ICTY, (IT-98-33) D 80/a. Glavni SAB Vojske Republike Srpske to Komandi DK IKM-1 DK, 11/07/95, str.pov.br. 03/0-1617.

²¹⁰⁷ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

²¹⁰⁸ NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. Dutchbat fax to lkol de Ruiter, 182130B July 1995, with list of weapons as appendix. Also see SMG/DEbrief. Factual account of the Debriefing (Feitenrelaas), § 2.4.1, where lower numbers are mentioned.

²¹⁰⁹ SMG, 1004/85. Short report on the meeting of CDS and PBLs at FC UNPF (also present, COS UNPF) 11/07/95.

VRS via the telephone. Appointments for meetings were made by telephone, of which the VRS usually took the initiative. During these meetings, VRS soldiers stated that there would come a time when the Bosnian Serbs would invade the enclave, and that the VRS would then let UN personnel leave via Bratunac. After the fall of OP-E at the beginning of June, these meetings became less frequent by order of the Battalion Staff.

On 6 July, OP-R noticed the movement of troops and tanks, armoured vehicles and artillery. But only on 12 July at the crack of dawn did the crew notice seven VRS soldiers near the OP, who were heading towards the OP. As day began to break between 40 and 50 VRS soldiers could be seen. They had probably spent the night close-by. The Bosnian Serbs waved to the OP personnel and two hours later around 30 men came walking over to the OP. The gate to OP-R was closed, but the VRS commander spoke in English through the fencing. These Bosnian Serbs wanted to go up Zanik Mountain to get a view of the area. They asked the OP crew whether there were still ABiH soldiers in the neighbourhood, to which Corporal Ouwens answered that the VRS should go and take a look themselves. The VRS Commander then walked away, talked on his radio, and gave a signal at which Ouwens was pushed to one side, the VRS opened the gate and about 20 VRS soldiers took over the OP. The Dutchbat soldiers were forced to surrender their weapons and leave the OP. The VRS led the crew to the 'Dragan bunker' located 500 metres away. This all went quite cordially. In the meantime, the OP and the accompanying APC were plundered. The APC had already been partially loaded in order to leave upon orders from the battalion command. However, documentation from the OP had not yet been destroyed and the anti-tank weapon (the TOW) had not been disabled, but had not been functional for some time.

Thereafter, OP Commander, Sergeant T.P. Lutke and his driver returned to the APC. They wanted to convince the VRS to return sleeping bags and some personal gear. After that, the VRS moved the APC and the crew to Bratunac, where one of the Bosnian Serbs was dressed in a UN helmet and fragment vest. In fact, several VRS soldiers were wearing the blue UN helmet. They paid no attention to the comment from the Dutchbat soldiers that this was not allowed. During the crew's stay in Bratunac, they even got a visit from Mladic. He gave the Corporal a hand, asked him how things were going and if he had anything in particular to report. The Corporal then referred him to the Battalion Commander.²¹¹⁰

The capture of OP-Q

After the VRS had taken over OP-R, it was the more northerly situated OP-Q's turn. The VRS approached the OP in such a manner that the road returning to the compound was cut off, so that OP Commander Sergeant M. Davids would have no choice. He could not fulfil the order given earlier by the C Company Commander to let go of the position.

Approximately 25 VRS soldiers penetrated the OP and about a hundred surrounded it. Here, the crew had the opportunity to destroy documents, maps and targeting equipment for mortar before the VRS came towards the OP. The Bosnian Serbs seized personal weapons and accompanying ammunition from the Dutchbat soldiers. The VRS then ordered the crew into the APC and it went to Bratunac as well. In Bratunac, the weapons still in the APC were taken and the six Dutchbat soldiers were taken to a school. No force was used during any of this.²¹¹¹

²¹¹⁰ SMG/Debrief. 'Military Analysis of the action taken by Dutchbat during the Srebrenica crisis; Assen, 28/09/95, Compiled by Lt Col A. de Munnik, see: OP-Area, BOERE038.1; OUER023.1; VISE652.1 and unknown account; Feitenrelaas § 3.7.6; SMG 1004/61. Dutchbat Ops room monthly register, 12/07/95. The first name of the concerned VRS Commander was 'sava' and of his replacement, 'Rade'.

²¹¹¹ SGM, Debrief. 'Military analysis of the actions of Dutchbat during the Serbian crisis', Assen, 28/09/95, compiled by LCol A. de Munnik, see OP-Q, OTTEM 206.01, DAVM113.1 and unknown account; Feitenrelaas § 3.7.6.

The capture of OP-P

OP-P fulfilled an important role as intermediary between Dutchbat and the VRS, because it was located on the border of the enclave on the road from the compound in Potocari to Bosnian-Serb territory. The OP formed an important link to the world outside the enclave.

After hostilities began south of the enclave on 6 July, the VRS started to fire mortars over and along OP-P from the north. On 10 July, three tanks (type T-54) took up positions near the OP and executed shelling of Budak village near the compound in Potocari, and ABiH positions. OP-P itself was not fired upon.

Tanks approached the OP for days afterwards. The crew had received a message via telephone from Jovan Ivic (Jovo), the Commander of the VRS check point at the entrance to the enclave at 'Yellow Bridge', near the OP. Jovo announced that the VRS were advancing, but that the OP would not be fired upon if the crew did not fire at the VRS. From contact with the Ops room of the battalion the day before a message had already been received from Karremans stating that the remaining OPs should adopt a passive approach and was not to fire in the vicinity of the fleeing population. The Commander of the OP, Sergeant R. Tjerks, decided to comply with the VRS's demand and allow the crew to be disarmed because the OP was already surrounded by tanks and infantry. A large number of well-equipped 'Rambo-type' troops surrounded the tanks.

On the morning of 12 July, while VRS soldiers entered the OP, the .50 machine gun of the OP was still manned. The VRS soldiers demanded those operating the weapon to come down, and 'this seemed [to me] to be the most sensible thing to do at that moment', according to the person involved. The VRS soldiers searched the OP and took some private property as well. The VRS military immediately put the Dutch weapons to use themselves, and continued to cleanse houses in the surrounding areas. Other VRS soldiers later arrived to stay behind with OP-P.

Earlier, this OP had fulfilled the role of notifying Karremans of meetings in Bratunac. Karremans said at one of these meetings that if OP-P were to be taken by the Bosnian Serbs, its crew would be transported to Bratunac too. Unlike the other OP crews, the VRS did not take the OP-P crew hostage. The VRS did take the APC that was with this OP; it came in handy to the VRS that this OP crew had previously given them driving lessons on the vehicle.

On 12 July at 10.00 hours, the VRS brought some of OP-P crew's personal possessions back to the gate of the compound in Potocari with a small truck.²¹¹²

The capture of OP-C

Prior to 11 July, the situation at OP-C remained unchanged for a few days. The crew followed the way in which the VRS had captured the closest OP (OP-K) to the south via the radio, and the crew that departed towards the Bosnian-Serb Milici. Furthermore, it could be seen from the OP how the VRS searched, plundered and set fire to various houses within the village of Podgaj. Its population moved to Potocari, or south to Zepa.

On the morning of 11 July, the ABiH indicated that they would seize any weapons still at the OP in case of an emergency.

After that, Sergeant Ceelen, who had been taken hostage by the VRS in Milici, suddenly made contact with OP-C in English via the radio. He announced that the VRS would come to pick up the OP-C personnel. Initially, a slight panic arose at OP-C because it was not clear whether the OP would have to deal with the VRS or with the ABiH. The crew was able to burn the maps and documents here too, just before the arrival of the VRS. However, the anti-tank weapon (the TOW) was not disabled. The APC was already loaded by order of OP Commander, Sergeant E.P. Smid. Departure from the OP did not take

²¹¹² Debriefing statement Soldier 1st Class I.J. van der Werke, 11/09/95; SGM, Debrief, 'Military analysis of the actions of Dutchbat during the Serbian crisis', Assen, 28/09/95, compiled by LCol A. de Munnik, see OP-P, AUFDA032.1;JONGD004.1;TJER172.1; SMG/Debrief. Feitenrelaas § 4.5.11.

place that day, apparently because the VRS no longer wanted to undertake anything in the dark. The Bosnian Serbs left, so the crew stayed another night at OP-C.

Following this, a group of 15 to 20 unorganized ABiH soldiers attacked the OP around 20.00 hours, under the deception of a white flag. A number of ABiH soldiers stood guard around the OP, and one wanted to talk to the Commander. The OP crew was afraid that they would be taken hostage. The Bosnian Muslims stole their weapons, ammunition, food, drinks, clothing, backpacks and their personal possessions at gunpoint. One Dutchbat soldier had to surrender his bulletproof vest after they put a gun to his head. The OP had no weapons after this. The ABiH only left the heavier weapons behind. A few older Muslim men later came by the OP asking for a little understanding regarding the actions of the youngsters. They were given two UZIs and some ammunition. There had been contact with Company Commander Groen over the question of what to do: he had said cooperate for the sake of self-preservation.

On 12 July, the VRS returned with an armoured vehicle and found the OP crew robbed of clothing and shoes. The Bosnian Serbs displayed a friendly attitude and tried to put the Dutchbat soldiers at ease. They did make it clear however that they needed to work quickly. Accompanied by the Bosnian Serbs, the crew headed towards Milici with their own APC and the remaining heavy weapons and munitions, where the Dutchbat soldiers arrived late at night and found the personnel of OP-K. Afterwards, Sergeant Ceelen wrestled with the question of whether he had gone too far by aiding the attempts of the VRS to 'empty' OP-C, OP-D (see paragraph 8) and OP-A (see below). In the end, he did not see this as helping one of the warring factions and adopted the viewpoint that he acted only as a 'middleman'.²¹¹³

The capture of OP-A

After Dutchbat had left the other OPs in the area, the crew of the most Western OP, OP-A, constantly kept in mind that they had to quickly leave the post too. Nothing appeared to be less true.

In the days prior to 11 July, the ABiH were situated close to the OP and ABiH soldiers were shooting towards the VRS to provoke fire. Indeed, the VRS shot at the OP regularly. On 11 July, the OP crew fired another smoke grenade as a point of recognition for the aircraft landing Close Air Support.

Some young Muslim men hurriedly appeared at the OP that evening. One of them was a man named Zulic from Slatina; he had been at the OP gate before, amongst others, with a man who claimed that the VRS were using chemical weapons in the fight for Kak Mountain in the southern part of the enclave. He had previously tried to put Dutchbat soldiers up to smuggling money and he had given a demonstration on producing forbidden dum-dum bullets. The small group of Muslim men now demanded shoes and food so they could get out of the enclave. The OP crew gave them some old shoes, emergency rations and bags. Once the men received these things, Zulic displayed a hand grenade and declared that he was happy he did not have to use it.

On the night of 11 - 12 July, one or two mortar grenades hit in the vicinity of OP-A every hour. On 12 July, there were shellings during the day as well, and the OP crew saw how the VRS cleansed the Muslim village of Musici. During these days, the OP also acted as a relay station for radio traffic between the Battalion Staff at the compound in Potocari, and for the Dutchbat vehicles that accompanied the convoys with refugees on the way to Kladanj. The OP crew wondered how long it would take before the VRS would take over the OP.

By VRS order, Sergeant Ceelen also made radio contact here with the OP. The VRS wanted the crew to come to them with all weapons and ammunition. OP Commander, Sergeant E. van der Hoek, refused this because the crew would have had to cross a minefield.

²¹¹³ Debriefing statement Soldier 1st Class R. Ruesink and Soldier 1st Class R. Jagt, 11/09/95 and 08/09/95; information based on confidential debriefing statement (44); interview W. A. Ceelen, 02/07/99.

Following this, the VRS Commander wanted to come and pick up the Dutch; a meeting point was arranged, indeed only on 14 July. Van der Hoek gave the route that he would follow to the agreed upon meeting point. The nine crewmembers that left the OP wanted to do this with APC casualty-transport vehicle, among other things, but it had a defective track (wheel mechanism on the vehicle). This vehicle was then disabled by smashing the fuel filter, as well as the anti-tank weapon (the TOW) and the mortar, after which the nine men left the OP in an APC. Captain Matthijssen, C-company Commander, gave authorization for this.

The APC got stuck on an incline while following the agreed upon route. The tracks were still equipped with rubber pads (rubber blocks for protecting the road surface), so they did not provide much traction on the soft path. If the pads had been removed from the APC, as the OP crew had requested, they could have climbed the slope. The vehicle could no longer move, so the crew was not able to reach the point agreed upon with the VRS. Moreover, it was starting to get dark. The crew tried to make contact with the compound in Potocari and with the Dutchbat personnel that was being held by the VRS in Milici. To that end, four crewmembers walked up a mountain with a radio but were unsuccessful in making contact. After that, a hidden bivouac was set up in a riverbed, which was secured by Dutchbat soldiers with two machine guns.

Early in the morning on 15 July, the nine crewmembers walked back to OP-A under the protection of a white flag and a UN flag. They chose an early hour in order to safely pass the village of Slatina, without the danger of a confrontation arising with Bosnian-Serb plunderers. There was no one present at the OP.

Contact with C-company was made again around 17.30 hours. They ordered them to remain at the OP and make contact with the VRS. It was agreed that the crew would still report to the VRS during the course of the day. Around 19.50 hours the group walked to the village of Musici following orders from the Company Commander. First, the night-vision sights goggles and the thermal-imaging systems there were disabled, after which contact was made with the VRS. The VRS military arrived and took weapons and bulletproof vests from the crew. A VRS truck then took the group to Milici, where they were given food. After listening to some propaganda and the announcement that the continuing skirmishes between the ABiH and VRS made it too dangerous to continue driving, the crew spent the night in a school, along with the VRS. The crew did not notice the presence of any Bosnian Muslims that day; a Dutch APC driven by Bosnian Serbs was observed though. The following day, 16 July, the group returned to Potocari via Bratunac. In the meantime, the other Dutchbat soldiers held hostage by the VRS were on their way from Belgrade to Zagreb.²¹¹⁴

The capture of OP-N

On 12 July 1995, the day after the fall of the enclave, the Bosnian Serbs took the most northern OP, OP-N.

The VRS had threatened to attack this OP earlier, which was reason for considering the use of air support there. The VRS had shelled ABiH positions around OP-N with mortar fire over a three-day period. The shots were coming increasingly closer because the ABiH were closing in on the OP. However, the VRS always fired next to the OP and the Dutch military felt safe in the bunker.

On 9 July, two local ABiH-military Commanders named Delic and Cele, or Zele, had been at OP-N. There they received lessons on operating the anti-tank weapons and a mortar. The idea behind this, according to some crewmembers, was that when the OP had to be unexpectedly abandoned, the crew could hand these weapons over to the ABiH in exchange for a safe withdrawal to Potocari. However, this picture is not consistent, because other Dutchbat soldiers indicated that the TOW was to be destroyed and the AT-4 anti-tank weapons would be left behind: they could not be taken in the APC. Although it is

²¹¹⁴ Information based on confidential debriefing statements (38) and (45); interview W. A. Ceelen, 02/07/99; Dijkema, *Dutchbat in vredesnaam*, p. 285-6.

certain that Dutchbat and ABiH had explained the working of each other's weapons during patrols in the previous days. The same thing occurred on 10 July when OP Commander Sergeant 1st Class S.N. Pattiwael van Westerlo together with several others explained how the weapons at the OP worked. If the crew suddenly had to leave the OP, then the weapons would fall into the hands of the ABiH and they would be able to make use of them. Only afterwards did one or two realize that this was contrary to the neutral stance of the UN.

On 10 July, the local ABiH Commander, Delic, came to the OP again with a number of his men, after they had cut a hole in the barbed-wire entanglement in the back. Delic wanted to fight the VRS from the OP. The OP Commander was able to change his mind.

During a VRS shelling on 11 July, Delic panicked and wanted to takeover OP-N to fight the VRS from there. He then went to the OP with a group of six men and an imam, and accused the crew of not doing anything to oppose the VRS. The OP crew was unable to clarify that they were not in a position to influence the situation under the given circumstances. The imam protected the OP personnel however, after which Delic and the imam threatened each other with weapons. The imam remained behind at the OP when Delic and his men left again; he said that he felt threatened and made it known that he wanted to flee to Tuzla with his father during the night. He received a bag of food from the OP crew and a watch from a Sergeant. The imam also stated that approximately 300 ABiH soldiers from the region around OP-N were departing for an assembly point.

On the evening of 11 July 1995, the order came from C-company Commander Matthijssen that the OP crew should not fight back when the VRS tried to capture the OP. The crew had to remain at the OP and continue to observe instead. In the meantime, the crew had already packed a machine gun (MAG) and placed a cover over another machine gun (a .50) as a sign that no resistance would be offered. According to Matthijssen, the crew themselves had to indicate whether they wanted to leave the OP, and whether they wanted to go to the VRS- or the ABiH-side. However, the crew could not leave at all because the only way back was cut off. The crew felt that their only option was to go north to Bosnian-Serb territory: that seemed to be the safest. The VRS were deemed trustworthier than the ABiH, who were panicking. Following this, the order came from the Company Commander to wait until the VRS came to pick them up.

On 12 July, a mortar shell landed in the vicinity of OP-N around 14.30 hours. After that, the VRS fired three salvos with a rocket-launcher (RPG type) at an ABiH bunker, which was located 400 metres from the OP. An attack from the VRS followed, and they cleansed the area surrounding the OP while firing. The VRS had already plundered the village of Cizmici and set houses on fire.

Subsequently, the OP crew saw around 20 VRS soldiers with two cows and three horses coming up the hill on which the OP stood. They held their weapons in the air, as a sign that they meant no harm.

A VRS soldier signalled the crew to come outside to open the gate. The OP Commander did this with his weapon above his head, together with a soldier who opened the gate. The VRS asked whether ABiH soldiers were still around and whether there were mines. When both questions were answered negative, the VRS entered the OP area, after which the crew came out and put their weapons on the ground. A student who served as an interpreter for the Bosnian Serbs said that they would be treated well, but would have to have patience.

During these actions of the VRS, the crew was in continuous communication with their own Company Commander. The VRS military did not appear to be malicious but they did take everything they wanted, both military as well as personal things. The Dutchbat APC was packed and ready to move. However, this was first plundered and emptied by the VRS, and the mortar was taken as well. The OP crew felt as if they were made prisoners of war, and they were evacuated in the APC accompanied by two VRS soldiers. Their route took them by OP-P, which had already been taken by the VRS and where there were tanks and artillery. The trip ended in Bratunac, where the VRS confiscated the APC. There, the crew first received something to eat in a barracks where they found the crews of OP-Q and OP-R. Afterwards,

everybody was put into a small school where many dogs roamed outside at night. The Dutchbat soldiers were not treated badly.²¹¹⁵

The abandoning of OP-M

The days of the fall of the enclave were also very exciting for the OP-M crew. The OP, located at Jaglici in the northwest, was in a remote corner of the enclave. The population here consisted entirely of indigenous people: the village did not harbour any refugees.

Shelling of OP-M took place earlier on 6 and 8 July, mainly with mortars from a distance of 1,800 to 2,000 metres. An ABiH trench was located not more than 10 metres from the OP, where the local Bosnian Muslims ostentatiously paraded with their weapons, apparently in an attempt to draw fire.

On 8 July, the VRS fired upon the village of Jaglici. As a result, OP Commander, Sergeant 1st Class M.A. Mulder, asked the C-company Commander for permission to return to the compound at Potocari. However, the answer to Mulder's request was that 'they were probably testing capability'. When Mulder stated that he still wanted to give up the post, he was granted permission. However, the crew later returned. Mulder then announced that if the VRS fired, the crew could take aim and return fire. It never went this far though. On 9 July, the VRS shifted the fire from Jaglici to OP-M. The impacts came increasingly closer until a grenade demolished the OP gate. With Company Commander Matthijssen's consent, the crew left the OP. The OP did not have a well-equipped shelter that offered sufficient safety, and it had no more than one layer of sand bags placed around it. Therefore, the APC served as shelter.

The crew's orders were to return to the compound in Potocari with the APC and any equipment. The radio was left behind at the OP with the thought of a possible return.

Shortly after the crew had left the OP, it received a direct hit and was fired at with a heavy calibre machine gun. After the crew had driven about 100 metres in the APC, approximately 100 armed ABiH soldiers surrounded the APC. They tried to disarm the Dutch, but they refused to hand over their weapons.

The local ABiH Captain (known as Envir) wanted the APC crew to fight with them against the VRS. This Envir had been an officer in the JNA before the war; he was wealthy, and probably earned his money by trading with the Ukraine UN personnel in Zepa, which he visited regularly. Envir led a company of approximately 110 men; it mainly consisted of farmers with shotguns.

Dutchbat Corporal M. Doze was handed a Kalishnikov and a hand grenade from the ABiH, but gave them back. The crew received the specific order from the Ops room (Command Post) not to fight them. The threat of staying at the village was noted by the crew, even though contact with the population had been positive and the Dutchbat soldiers had received food and other things from them.

The crew was troubled over the question of how to get away from there. We could force our way through with the .50 machinegun, 'but you cannot do that', said Mulder. Only once was there contact with the higher echelon concerning this situation; Captain Matthijssen told Mulder that he had to act on his own discretion.

To appease the ABiH soldiers present, Mulder rode with the local Commander to an ABiH position near two houses. The .30 machinegun was set up behind a few trees, 50 metres in front of the APC. There was nothing left for the crew to do but wait because an ABiH soldier was constantly in the immediate area with an anti-tank weapon to ensure that the APC could not leave without permission from the local Commander. Thus, the OP crew was in fact taken hostage by the ABiH, a situation that would last two days.

From where they were, the crew saw small groups of six to eight ABiH soldiers, who indeed were not from Jaglici, escape from the enclave (to what later proved to be Tuzla). That continued the

²¹¹⁵ SMG/Debrief. 'Military analysis of the actions of Dutchbat during the Serbian crisis', Assen, 28/09/95, compiled by LCol A. de Munnik, see OP-N,PATTS132.1 and unknown account; SMG/Debrief. Feitenrelaas, §§ 2.4.3, 2.4.4, 3.2.1, 3.4.3, 3.6.6, 3.6.8, 3.7.4, 3.7.5, 3.7.6, 4.5.2, 4.5.4, 4.5.8, 4.5.11.

entire day. At one point even infighting between ABiH soldiers occurred north of Jaglici; Mulder assumed that it was about their responsibility for the enclave. It struck him that strange soldiers with entirely new uniforms and new looking weapons clashed with the people of Jaglici. Mulder got the impression that there was a plan for an escape: everybody was lined up, and he caught statements like; 'first to Zvornik and then to Tuzla'. Rumours started to circulate that the Bosnian Serbs were already in the enclave 'and were killing all Muslims'.

Mulder was asked despairing questions from the population about what would happen to them, but he could only say that an air support would come. At one point, Mulder saw soldiers standing around the APC crying. He decided to size up the situation in Jaglici because he got the feeling that something was wrong: there were a number of men that were unaccounted for. He walked to the village and found these men saying goodbye to their wives and children. 'Meanwhile you could hear around you: we are going to Tuzla'. Envir had also gone to the village: he pushed his two children into Mulder's arms so that he could say goodbye to his wife. Mulder kept the children with him and decided that the OP crew now had to leave. That departure was prompted by the gunfire that was now coming very close, and one could hear bullets whistle.

The departure of the OP crew in the APC became chaotic. The APC almost immediately got stuck in a ditch. Mulder tried to manoeuvre it out, but that alarmed the 'guards' with the anti-tank weapon. A substantial discord amongst the Muslims present then arose: one group of them wanted to allow the departure of the APC, one group did not, and yet another group wanted the women, children and elderly to take the APC. Someone from the ABiH took a weapon from the APC and aimed it at the vehicle, which Mulder thought would be shot at the APC to prevent the Dutchbat soldiers from leaving. Envir then appeared and shot the man in cold blood in the head, after which the APC could leave without interference. After feeling as though they had been held hostage for two and a half days, they could finally leave early in the evening of 11 July. The crew did have to hand over their personal weapons and the AT-4 anti-tank weapon.

The APC manoeuvred out of the ditch towards the refugees that were there. Suddenly a cow walked onto the road, which had possibly been turned loose during the flight to Tuzla. The APC could not avoid the cow and drove right over it. After that, the APC caught up with the refugees; Mulder sent the approximately 75 village inhabitants remaining along the north side of Jaglici to the south, so they would not have to walk in front of the VRS positions. He took the road along the front of the VRS positions and then rejoined the group.

The trip to Potocari turned into an outright nightmare. The group of refugees around the APC quickly grew because the refugees from the OP-A area, who saw that Jaglici was being evacuated, joined the group too. Hundreds of refugees also came from the hills with horses, carts and on crutches. Everyone tried to secure a place on the APC. Mulder took people off again that were able to walk. Mothers threw their children onto the vehicle but they would fall off. In the meantime, mortar fire from the VRS continued in full force, resulting in the APC quickly being piled up with wounded people, due to which some of them had to deal with a lack of oxygen. The medic on board tried to do what he could. People fell off the APC during the trip, and a woman even gave birth on top of the APC's hatch.

Meanwhile, the crew saw hundreds of ABiH soldiers pulling back in the opposite direction. They seemed to be going to an assembly point according to plan, with heavier weapons and mortars and such. That indeed went quietly, although they did threaten the APC along the way. From the hills on both sides of the road, the VRS continued firing over the refugees.

The armoured vehicle stopped at one point: Mulder tried to contact the Ops room (the Command Post in Potocari) to discuss the retreat of the refugees. Three Dutchbat soldiers went outside the APC to keep the refugees calm, and had the group sit down on the ground.

Suddenly, the VRS fired a few salvos at the APC. The impacts ended up in the side of a mountain next to the APC, upon which the APC crew quickly went inside. Mulder, who also acted as driver because there was no other driver with the group, quickly drove on and stopped again later. The group of refugees tightened up again behind the APC and it continued towards Potocari. There were possibly mines too: it

struck Mulder along the way that the procession sometimes fanned out, and sometimes were very frightened staying on the road; apparently the population knew where the mines were, concluded Mulder.

Run over incidents?

It turned out that everything could get even worse. The APC was past Milacevici. Mulder, who drove, sat in the APC with the signaller and the gunner. Two soldiers walked behind the APC and one walked in front. The trip was not progressing and Mulder was afraid all the refugees would cut him off from the compound, there was also the threat of running out of fuel: it was driving, stopping, driving, and stopping. Mulder tried to lead the procession with the APC. He had been ordered to keep the people behind the APC. He stopped occasionally to climb on top of the APC to show that they were still there: 'if we stood still, everybody stood still.' However, the APC was not able to stay out front because more and more people joined the procession along the way. Therefore, there were gradually many refugees in front of the APC too.

At this stage of the trip, a steep wall ran along the right side of the road and there was water with a steep slope behind that on the left. Mulder was just standing on top of the APC again to reassure the people when shots were fired from the north with a .50 machinegun. Refugees fell from the APC; Mulder was unable to judge whether that was due to the scare or because they were hit. A huge panic arose. Mulder called his personnel inside, turned on the APC's lights and sounded the horn. When the road was reasonably clear, Mulder started to drive while honking the horn over a distance of approximately 300 metres. He drove fast to escape the fire, which, according to him, was aimed at the APC and this presented danger to the refugees as well. However, people were still walking in front of the APC at that point. They had nowhere to go on the narrow road and the APC drove faster through here than the refugees could walk.

Mulder felt as if he was driving right over people. When the APC stopped, he reported via the radio that he had possibly hit people with the APC during the move. Upon arrival at the road between Potocari and Srebrenica, Mulder reported to Captain Groen who maintained the blocking position there. He ordered him to continue driving directly to Potocari, where refugees had also arrived in the meantime. Ultimately, between 3,000 and 4,000 people arrived in Potocari with the group from OP-M, including quite a few able-bodied boys between the age of 16 and 17, according to Mulder. The wounded were dropped off at the sickbay, and then the British JCOs received Mulder with a cup of tea.²¹¹⁶

An ABiH soldier later said that the possible run over incidents occurred at Brosevici, at a place called Dervisevac, or Libina Voda. On the way to OP-M, it was also very busy in the opposite direction because everybody going to Susnjari would pass too; that was the point of assembly for what would become the journey to Tuzla.

However, nobody from the local ABiH unit had returned to the place where the run overs were to have occurred. The ABiH soldier involved heard about it for the first time in the VRS prisoner-of-war camp at Batkovic, from someone who was one of the last to go to Jaglici. There was even a rumour that around 40 people were to have died as a result of this. However, this soldier himself had not heard anything from the people of Jaglici, where he knew everybody. According to him, it could have concerned people going from Srebrenica to Jaglici.²¹¹⁷

The Public Prosecutor back in the Netherlands would investigate possible run overs. Part IV will return to this, as well as to the adventures of the Dutchbat soldiers taken hostage in Milici and

²¹¹⁶ Debriefing statement Corporal M. Doze, 12/09/95 and 13/09/95; information based on confidential debriefing statements (51) and (52); interview M.A. Mulder, 06/10/98.

²¹¹⁷ Confidential information (55). This ABiH soldier had also heard that the VRS had run over people with a truck close to the compound between Potocari and Srebrenica. But that was also no more than a rumour.

Bratunac after 11 July. There, the events are picked up again from the time that the refugees arrived in Potocari.

This chapter will close with two reviews. The first one deals with the number of victims between 6 and 11 July, and the second one with the questions of whether the Bosnian Muslims were prepared for the VRS attack and how the causes of what happened in these six dramatic days were considered in Bosnian Muslim circles. The following chapter in its entirety is an elaborate review of the matter of air support in those same days, among other things.

24. The ABiH reaction to the VRS attack

This chapter has already dealt in length with the question of how much planning existed within the VRS for the capture of the enclave. At the end of this chapter, the question of how much the ABiH had anticipated a VRS attack will be discussed. From there, the question arises as to whether plans existed that would be implemented in case the Bosnian Serbs were to attack the enclave, and whether plans existed in anticipation of how to deal with the population.

Unlike the previous paragraphs, where the sources were mostly from the period of the attack, this paragraph mainly concerns data that came from interviews held later and thus afterthoughts. Following a search for plans from the Bosnian-Muslim side, it will change to a reflection on the military action of the ABiH in the days of July 1995. Hence, it shall be primarily about the opinions concerning the ABiH actions according to Bosnians involved; a more detailed opinion on the actions of Dutchbat will be discussed in the next chapter.

Some prudence in handling Bosnian-Muslims' views on ABiH actions is advised. As mentioned briefly in the introductory paragraph of this chapter, the interests of the Bosnian Muslims involved in the fall of Srebrenica that stayed within the enclave can differ from the interests of the political and military leaders outside the enclave. Written sources about what occurred within the Bosnian Government during the fall of Srebrenica are scarce. Although the ABiH did conduct some investigation into what had happened, after the fall, in the form of a debriefing of some of the people involved, this –according to ABiH information – never lead to a comprehensive report.

There was confusion on the Bosnian-Muslim side about the existence of plans at ABiH in Srebrenica and Tuzla, which should have become effective in an attack on the enclave by the VRS. Several people seemed to know of the existence of such plans, while others denied the existence of them, or were of the impression that plans made previously still had certain validity. The reality was that the ABiH had not made many preparations when the VRS knocked on the gates of the enclave in July 1995.

Plans for the defence of the enclave?

The former ABiH Commander in Srebrenica, Naser Oric, told Chief of Police Hakija Meholic upon being asked that a plan did exist for the defence and evacuation of the enclave. However, Oric added that this was a military secret. The question of whether that plan and this secrecy were a matter for the 2nd Corps in Tuzla or for the 28th Division in Srebrenica remained unknown to Meholic as well. In any case, such a plan had not been announced to the local council or the population.²¹¹⁸

Deputy Mayor Hamdija Fejzic was also under the impression that there was a plan from the 2nd Corps of ABiH for the defence of Srebrenica in case of a VRS attack on the enclave. The existence of the plan was to have been confirmed by soldiers in Tuzla and by the Commander of the 2nd Corps, Sead Delic. If indeed such a plan did exist, the question would then be why it was never executed.

²¹¹⁸ Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98 with additions from 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

Supposedly, thought Fejzic, it did not regard a plan as such, but more of a method for the ABiH to execute the defence.²¹¹⁹

ABiH Officer Sadik Vilić was of the opinion that something like a defence plan had existed, even though he only knew of it through hearsay. However, that dated back to when Naser Orić was still staying in the enclave (thus, before April 1995). The idea would have been that the ABiH were to defend the enclave to the best of their ability, to take the weapons from Dutchbat, to attack Bratunac, and then to advance to Tuzla step by step, via attacks on various places. The VRS would have then been able to flee to Serbian territory from Bratunac, and that might have offered more room for negotiations. Naser Orić might have attempted a plan to attack Bratunac, according to Vilić, but such a plan had no chance of succeeding after he had left.²¹²⁰

The former Bosnian Minister without Portfolio in charge of UN issues, Hasan Muratović, said to the NIOD in 1998 that a strategy to attack the VRS toward the Drina had indeed been discussed in Sarajevo, partly because there were entire areas there that were unoccupied by the VRS.²¹²¹ However, that was not the same as a separate defence- and evacuation plan, which Muratović mentioned in 1997 to Minister Voorhoeve and the Dutch Ambassador in Sarajevo, V. Sluijter. According to Muratović, both plans were there, but they had not been executed.²¹²²

Although, the question here must be whether the plans were so concrete that those responsible for executing those plans knew about them. This displays that the executioners of the plans knew nothing, and there are no indications that concrete plans actually existed.

When the Opština wanted to know whether the ABiH had made such plans in case of an attack, differences of opinion arose amongst the ABiH leadership about that question, according to a source within the Opština. It was argued that it was not customary for military plans to be accessible to the Opština as a civil authority. The fight for power within the enclave also played a role thereby. The ABiH wanted to play first violin in the enclave, while the Opština wanted to maintain its voice as well.²¹²³

In any case, the Opština expected to obtain instructions from the ABiH as to how to handle a VRS attack. According to War President Osman Suljić, there were however no military plans that took into account an attack. At least he had no knowledge of any, and plans for an evacuation of the population did not exist either, according to him.²¹²⁴

Mayor Fahrudin Salihović also said that he had asked Ramiz Bećirović, as Military Commander of the 28th Division, about plans for the defence of the enclave and evacuation of the population at the beginning of June 1995. Fahrudin Salihović was of the opinion that there was something of a plan, but if it was already in place, he did not know who was responsible for it within the ABiH chain of command, thus he let the NIOD know.²¹²⁵ Chief of Police Hakija Meholjić confirmed that the War Presidency of Opština had requested plans for an evacuation.²¹²⁶

However, the ABiH Commander within the enclave itself, Ramiz Bećirović, denied that defence plans existed for the enclave in July 1995. He had to acknowledge this during the meeting in the PTT building on 10 July 1995, when Chief of Police Meholjić asked him to make the plan known to the civil government. On the basis of his own statements, Bećirović then had to admit that no plan existed, and that no preparations had been made in case of a VRS attack.²¹²⁷

²¹¹⁹ Interview Hamdija Fejzic, 03/02/98.

²¹²⁰ Interview Sadik Vilić, 06/02/98 and 15/04/98.

²¹²¹ Interview Hasan Muratović, 30/01/98.

²¹²² DCBC, box 68. 'Conversation with Mr. Hasan Muratović on 20/10/97 in Sarajevo about the fall of Srebrenica', compiled by J. Voorhoeve, 29/10/97.

²¹²³ Interview Ilijaz Pilav, 31/01/98.

²¹²⁴ Interview Osman Suljić, 04/03/98.

²¹²⁵ Interview Fahrudin Salihović, 04/02/98.

²¹²⁶ Interview Hakija Meholjić, 02/02/98 with additions from 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

²¹²⁷ Interview Ramiz Bećirović, 18/04/98.

The General Staff of the ABiH did not expect a serious attack. Thus, there was no reason to send instructions to the defenders in 1995. According to Army Commander Rasim Delic, this view was based on information from the area itself. Most of this information on the situation in Srebrenica came via the 2nd Corps, though the General Staff received information from other military and civil circles as well.

Instructions from Sarajevo or Tuzla for the execution of the defence were not received in Srebrenica. In April 1995, Ramiz Becirovic was part of a military and civil delegation from Srebrenica that was taken to Tuzla by helicopter to analyse the situation in joint sessions with the 2nd Corps headquarters. Becirovic had hoped to receive instructions in Tuzla, but when he returned from those meetings, he had the feeling that he had not received any form of instruction. From his point of view, the trip seemed to be intended for him to say that he had received instructions. Becirovic did say that he was promised military support at the meeting: in case of a VRS attack, the 2nd Corps would launch a counter attack from two directions: from Kladanj and from Medjedja (at Nesuk).²¹²⁸ That indeed happened, but only when the column of men fleeing to Tuzla after the fall of Srebrenica reached Bosnian territory near Medjedja.

The outcome of the joint analysis was that without international support, defence of the enclave was not possible. The General Staff then proceeded with what had been said at that meeting.²¹²⁹

In reaction to the claim that the 2nd Corps had offered insufficient help to Srebrenica during the VRS attack, Sead Delic said: 'What can you do for a large group that is 35 km away and separated from the 2nd Corps by two VRS frontlines and minefields. My conscience is clear, because there was nothing we could do. I personally come from the area. I wanted to do everything, but this was simply not possible from a military point of view'.²¹³⁰ A UN translator, who attended the deliberations between the 2nd Corps and Sector North East during the days surrounding the fall, sang a different tune. She felt that the 2nd Corps did not know what to do during the attack on Srebrenica. The 2nd Corps were involved in fights in the Orasje pocket and were not able to leave their lines there, while a substantial part of the 2nd Corps occupied Sarajevo.²¹³¹

Following the Dayton Agreement at the end of 1995, the Bosnian Parliament indeed considered to the causes of the fall of Srebrenica and then Zepa. Army Commander Rasim Delic reported to Parliament. He gave an elaborate overview of the measures that were taken to militarily strengthen Srebrenica before July 1995. Delic said that he expected a higher level of resistance, but that the Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica had not listened to suggestions and orders from higher up, and had not acted according to anticipated plans. However, as the most important reason for the fall of Srebrenica, Delic also mentioned 'the betrayal by the international community'. According to him, the ABiH within the enclave had difficulty defending themselves in the given circumstances and expected too much from UNPROFOR (see below under 'Attempts of the ABiH to get Dutchbat on its side'), while the General Staff had correctly warned that little would come of that. Delic also pointed out that the population had been prepared to leave the enclave since March, and he further pointed at the poor leadership and organization of the 28th Division.²¹³²

According to Minister Hasan Muratovic, the Bosnian Government tried to make an analysis of the events in Srebrenica by evaluating these events two times with the fifteen most important people from Srebrenica, including circles of ABiH officers, police, political leaders and opposition. The most important people from Srebrenica (the Military- and Police Commander and the members of the War Presidency) had been able to escape the enclave. SDA politician, Ibran Mustafic, took part in these meetings as well; he fell into Bosnian-Serb hands but managed to survive. During these meetings, issues

²¹²⁸ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 02/02/98 and 05/02/98.

²¹²⁹ Interview Rasim and Sead Delic, 16/04/98 and Rasim Delic, 21/04/99.

²¹³⁰ Interview Sead Delic, 10/03/99.

²¹³¹ Interview Nadia Skokic, 04/02/98.

²¹³² MID, DIS97005661. HMID note to the Minister of Defence, 10/11/97. The date of the debate in the Bosnian Parliament is not mentioned.

were discussed such as why the defence of the enclave failed, what the expectations were regarding air support, and what the situation was like around the compound in Potocari. The trip to Tuzla came up for discussion as well: it was asked why no other route was taken to Tuzla, why part of the population wanted to go to Zepa, and how that was accomplished. It was also discussed that Ramiz Becirovic had enemies in Srebrenica, and that there had been infighting amongst the ABiH. However, no real answers to these questions were obtained during these meetings. According to Minister Hasan Muratovic, no reports on these meetings existed, and no conclusions were reached either.²¹³³

Views from the UN and NATO

The UNPF staff in Zagreb had little insight into the actual balance of power of the warring factions around Srebrenica. Estimations of that balance of power from the beginning of June tended to underestimate the numbers of the ABiH, and to overestimate those of the VRS. The difference in number of heavy weapons for the warring factions was enormous, to the advantage of the Bosnian Serbs. However, what is striking in the explanation that was given in Zagreb for the defeat of the ABiH, is that the military balance of power was not named so much as a factor as were the psychological factors. The Bosnian-Serb artillery, tanks, rocket launchers and mortars could easily find targets, against which the ABiH had no defence. Those VRS weapons had influence on the morale and stamina of the soldiers and citizens on the Bosnian-Muslim side, which was the analysis in Zagreb.

That the ABiH could defend the enclave on their own, like Bosnian circles believed (Ministers such as Sacirbey and Muratovic and also Army Commander Rasim Delic expressed this feeling, as did General Budakovic, the Chief of Staff of the 2nd Corps²¹³⁴), proved to be fiction. The defence did not function as the ABiH leadership had expected. The ABiH leadership was too optimistic, as was evident from the statements of Rasim Delic before the Bosnian Parliament, based on the weapons that were supplied in reasonable number via 18 helicopter flights to Zepa and that were then smuggled into the enclave in spring 1995. However, they were sparingly used, partly because the ABiH did not know how to operate these weapons. The approximately 6,000 strong ABiH had a substantial shortage of weapons, and not more that a third possessed a weapon, but there was no shortage of ammunition. At the onset of the hostilities, the ABiH disposed of over 450,000 cartridges. Most of the ammunition was not used.²¹³⁵

Question marks were placed beside the actions of the ABiH within the UN as well. Under Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Military Advisor of the Secretary-General of the UN, Van Kappen, openly asked themselves at the end of September 1995, why the 3,000 to 4,000 lightly armed Muslims around Srebrenica had not played a role. They put that question to Sacirbey, but they received no real explanation from him. He only said that there was not enough ammunition and weapons, and only rhetorically asked himself what else the ABiH could have done then. He thus blamed the UN for the loss of the enclave.²¹³⁶

NATO Secretary-General Claes also asked Sacirbey why the ABiH units in Srebrenica did not better defend themselves. In answer to that question, Sacirbey then pointed to the passivity of Dutchbat. That led Claes to disbelief.²¹³⁷

Janvier was under the impression that the enclave could have maintained the defence for 30 days. It appears plausible that Janvier based that opinion on the optimistic expectations that the Bosnian Muslims themselves had. The Bosnian President, Izetbegovic, thought that the Bosnian

²¹³³ Interview Hasan Muratovic, 30/01/98.

²¹³⁴ General Budakovic told Colonel Brantz this on 06/07/95, subject to the ABiH taking back the weapons from the Weapon Collection Point. (NIOD. Coll. Brantz. Brantz Diary, August 1999 version).

²¹³⁵ Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98. According to Meholic, this number was also brought out by ABiH Commander Rasim Delic and was correct in his view.

²¹³⁶ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05279. Code Biegman 860, 25/09/95; interview F.H. van Kappen, 21/06/00.

²¹³⁷ DCBC, 778. Code Feith Navo 1049, 13/07/95.

Muslims could defend themselves for 30 days as well. This did not happen due to a lack of morale and the psychological situation in which the population found itself, according to Izetbegovic: the Bosnian Serbs led a powerful and hostile propaganda campaign, according to the Bosnian President. The weak within the enclave fled and tried to convince the rest to do the same. Izetbegovic said that he knew the enclave could not be defended for more than 30 days. It was also pointed out that all attempts to establish a corridor between Tuzla and Srebrenica had failed previously, and the ABiH did not possess enough military means to try that again. If the international community had bombed the VRS, the ABiH positions might have been held, according to him. But that did not happen and therefore a tragedy arose, according to Izetbegovic.²¹³⁸

Political machinations?

Izetbegovic stated that the Bosnian Government never intended to give up Srebrenica. However, he added that the fate of the enclave had been decided a long time ago, meaning that it could not be defended.²¹³⁹ Izetbegovic admitted that there had been meetings about trading areas where Srebrenica was concerned, but these had never lead to any results, according to him.

After the fall of Srebrenica, the rumour started circulating that Srebrenica was part of a deal to obtain a convoy route through Vogosca (Bosnian-Serb territory near Sarajevo). In this cynical theory, the Bosnian Government had much to gain from the fall of the enclave and therefore such a deal would be part of an orchestrated attempt to discredit the West, in an attempt to obtain support from the Islamic countries. That would have also been the reason that Oric had not returned to Srebrenica and that the 6,000 ABiH men hardly put up a fight.²¹⁴⁰

There were no grounds for such rumours that were often heard, namely, that there was a deal to give up the enclave in one form or another, or that they consciously offered little resistance, or that orders were even given to leave the enclave. The rumour that Izetbegovic had 'sold' the population of Srebrenica to save Sarajevo had circulated before the fall of the enclave as well.²¹⁴¹ All such rumours are highly unlikely because giving up Srebrenica not only would have meant supporting ethnic cleansing, but also would have robbed the Bosnian Government of a useful pawn in the propaganda war.

In addition, no trace of evidence can be found for these intriguing theories, neither political nor military. Izetbegovic opposed these theories by stating that the Bosnian Government would not have sent weapons and doctors to Srebrenica if it planned to leave the city.²¹⁴² What the citizens of the enclave did not take into account was that neither Srebrenica nor Zepa held priority in the Bosnian play for power. Almost all attention was devoted to Sarajevo. The question was asked several times within the 2nd Corps where the attention should be focussed: the Posavina corridor at Brcko (the small corridor that linked the Western and Eastern parts of the Republika Srpska) or Srebrenica. The answer was increasingly: the Posavina corridor.²¹⁴³ In May 1995, during a Commanders' meeting in Central Bosnia in which Izetbegovic and other political leaders were present, Srebrenica would have been discussed as the primary problem. The Commander of the 2nd Corps, Sead Delic, gave a briefing there in which he was to have presented the situation as better than it really was: there was enough ammunition to resist an attack for at least 10 days and helicopters flew regularly to Srebrenica. That

²¹³⁸ Alija Izetbegovic, *Govori, Pjisma, Interjui '95*, p. 86 (interview 05/08/95) and p. 107 (interview 13/08/95).

²¹³⁹ Alija Izetbegovic, *Govori, Pjisma, Interjui '95*, p. 86 (interview 05/08/95) and p. 107 (interview 13/08/95).

²¹⁴⁰ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. UNMO HQ SNE, 'Postscript to Srebrenica', 26/07/95, MIO.SREB.002. Secret. SDP member Zlatko Dukic would also have been of the opinion (<http://serbianlinks.freehosting.net/srebrenica>, consulted 29/04/99).

²¹⁴¹ ICTY (IT-98-33) D66/a, D61/a. ABiH Command of 28th Division (Asst. Commander for Morale, Captain Nijaz Masic) to the Command of 2nd Corps Morale Department, 30/06/95, No. 04-113/95; ABiH 285 IBibr, 23/06/95, No. 08-21-208/95.

²¹⁴² Interview of David Harland with President Izetbegovic, 16/07/99.

²¹⁴³ Interview Andjelko Makar, 12/06/00.

would have been the reason why Izetbegovic and Army Commander Rasim Delic thought that there were no problems.²¹⁴⁴

Minister Hasan Muratovic placed a large part of the blame on a lack of fighting spirit as well. He thought that when the VRS were attacked, they would stop. Another reason why the defence collapsed so quickly would have been that the ABiH defenders also expected air support.²¹⁴⁵

Former ABiH Army Commander and opposition politician Sefer Halilovic found that President Izetbegovic and Premier Haris Silajdzic could have done more to save Srebrenica by keeping the enclave higher on the agenda and strengthening the enclave even further. According to him, more weapons and ammunition could have been sent to Srebrenica. There were 12,000 men that could fight, of which not more than 4,000 were armed. A strong defence was simply not executed. According to Halilovic, the VRS could have captured the city with 500, maybe even 300 men. Another point that Halilovic brought up was that the attempts to break the siege of Sarajevo should have only been attempted after Srebrenica and Zepa were safe. Instead, soldiers from Zepa and Srebrenica were sent to execute a diversionary attack on the VRS, which gave Mladic an easy excuse to attack the enclave.²¹⁴⁶

The meaning of the organization of the ABiH

It was said that political and military leaders were not always well informed about the actual situation in the enclave due to poor communication. ABiH Commander Rasim Delic said that it had been a problem to know what the actual situation was in Srebrenica, and especially what the exact internal relations were in the enclave: 'The psychological situation and the level of morale were completely unclear'. In addition, he pointed out that the population was living under the pressure of propaganda from the Bosnian Serbs to surrender the enclave. Delic acknowledged that this had led to 'individuals' leaving the enclave for Tuzla.²¹⁴⁷

The Commander of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH in Tuzla, Sead Delic, also said that he had not known exactly how the ABiH was organized in Srebrenica and how the chain of command functioned. That was only known on paper: indeed local groups within the enclave were linked to brigades. All these brigades were under the command of the division, which again fell under the command of the 2nd Corps. The Zepa brigade belonged to the division as well. 'However, they could act independently, depending on the circumstances', according to Sead Delic. According to him, the local Commanders never spoke with one another, and communication from person to person was impossible because the only communication was via encrypted radio. He had to receive a lot of information about Srebrenica via UN channels; the Civil Affairs Officer of Sector North East in Tuzla, American Ken Biser, had been the most important source of information, according to Sead Delic.²¹⁴⁸

In the opinion of Bosnian journalist and author Sefko Hodzic, Sead Delic's view was too defensive. Stories of high-handed warlords formed an easy excuse according to him, but that only applied to the beginning of the war. A Command and Control relationship and good communications actually did exist in 1995, according to Hodzic.²¹⁴⁹ Rasim Delic also contradicted Sead Delic's view in his report before Parliament by saying that there was continuous contact with Srebrenica and that Naser Oric was in daily contact with Ramiz Becirovic from Tuzla. Rasim Delic added the criticism that if Oric had really wanted to influence the course of fighting in July, he would have had to build a good command system first. Command of the ABiH units indeed proved to be one of the weak points in the ABiH action during the VRS attack, according to the ABiH Commander.²¹⁵⁰

²¹⁴⁴ Conversation with Isnam Taljic, 18/05/99.

²¹⁴⁵ Interview Hasan Muratovic, 30/01/98.

²¹⁴⁶ Interview Sefer Halilovic, 17/04/98.

²¹⁴⁷ Interview Rasim Delic, Sarajevo 21/04/98.

²¹⁴⁸ Interview Rasim Delic and Sead Delic, Sarajevo, 16/04/98 and Rasim Delic, 21/04/98.

²¹⁴⁹ Interview Sefko Hodzic, 24/05/99.

²¹⁵⁰ MID, DIS97005661. HMID note to the Minister of Defence, 10/11/97.

It is clear that the psychological state of the population meant that there was little desire within the ABiH and the population to go and fight. In the month of July 1995, neither the population nor the ABiH had the will to continue fighting.²¹⁵¹ Thus, the population had basically lost hope in the rescue of the enclave, partly because there was little interest in the enclave from the outside. To criticize the ABiH, in the sense that there should have or could have been a better defence, was also rather easy in the opinion of Ramiz Becirovic.²¹⁵²

If the observations were focussed on the organization of the different parts of the ABiH enclave, it is striking that large differences in morale existed between the territorially organized brigades. However, it is difficult to obtain a view on the military performance of the locally organized, separate ABiH brigades and battalions. Ibro Dudic's brigade (in the southeast part of the enclave) was situated on the primary line of advance of the VRS, but had the least number of weapons at its disposal. No attempts were made to strengthen this brigade with the brigade of Smail Mandzic, which operated in the northern part of the enclave where hardly any fighting took place.

Most of the weapons would have been with the Suceska brigade in the South, but they were hardly involved in the fighting either.²¹⁵³ This formidable 281st Brigade led by Zulfo Tursonovic (operating in the southwest part of the enclave) would not have opened fire on the VRS in the last phase of the fight, although there would have been opportunity for that. However, this brigade would not have wanted to harm the population by giving cause for revenge. The suggestion was also made within that brigade to kill UN personnel, in order to force NATO into action. However, the majority did not agree with this.²¹⁵⁴

Zulfo Tursonovic enjoyed more respect in the enclave than his Commander, Ramiz Becirovic, and was sometimes even seen as a better Commander than Oric. He was a somewhat older man, and it was a public secret that he was Oric's advisor and that he consulted with him on everything.²¹⁵⁵ Tursonovic led a good unit from Suceska. He had the use of good headquarters, was open to initiatives and the discipline within his unit was strong. That applied to the humanitarian situation within his territory as well.

The situation was worse in Zeleni Jadar, at the VRS line of attack, where Ibro Dudic was Commander. In this area, where some 4,000 refugees were housed in the Swedish Shelter Project, SDA politician Ibran Mustafic had a lot of influence over the population and there were quite a few of his followers there.²¹⁵⁶ The population here consisted of refugees that were seen as 'villagers': they were not from Srebrenica itself, but from the surrounding villages. Therefore, they were less involved and motivated to defend Srebrenica. They fled in mass at the beginning of the attack, which instigated the negative spiral in the population's morale.

Zulfo Tursonovic did not allow Mustafic to become politically active in his area. Right away, the thought was that if Zulfo Tursonovic had been in the southeastern sector, the defence there would have been better conducted. The Brigade Commander in that area, Ibro Dudic, was seen as a good Commander, but his soldiers would have supported Mustafic, which would certainly not have helped the fight.²¹⁵⁷ In this chapter, it has however been proven that as the fighting there progressed, Ibro Dudic had more difficulty keeping his men under control. Military-psychological factors appear to offer

²¹⁵¹ Interview Igor Rajner, 06/08/97.

²¹⁵² Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 02/02/98 and 05/02/98.

²¹⁵³ Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98 with additions from 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

²¹⁵⁴ Confidential information (51).

²¹⁵⁵ Interview Damir Skaler, 17/05/99.

²¹⁵⁶ Ibran Mustafic was viewed with the necessary scepticism because he had left Srebrenica earlier. The fact that he returned later through the mountains was suspicious as well, because it was extremely difficult. When he returned, another SDA group (recruited mainly from the villages) had seized power. Conflicts between Oric and Mustafic then began too. Mustafic was the only one who survived Srebrenica, and there were rumours that he had asked Karadzic or Krajisnik via the radio to spare him. (Interview Mehmed Pargan, 15/06/98 and 16/06/98).

²¹⁵⁷ Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98, 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

a better explanation than political, because the core of the fighting was just in that corner of the enclave.

Still, Ramiz Becirovic also foisted a rather destructive influence on Ibran Mustafic. He had been the primary authority in Srebrenica in 1992, found himself at the beginning of the war in Sarajevo and tried to regain as much of his old authority as possible following a miraculous comeback to the enclave.²¹⁵⁸ He claimed a position on formal grounds as a chosen representative. According to Becirovic, he had ‘perhaps the right ideas, but it was not the right time for that’. The population did not care that he was the only chosen representative: fighting the Bosnian Serbs took priority. Some thought that he had taken to his heels at the beginning of the war and only returned when the situation had stabilized. He arrived in the enclave via Zepa, and immediately started to organize the SDA. It would thereby not have been difficult to win people over that were in destitute circumstances. The fact that there was insufficient food made it easy for Mustafic. He pointed out to the public that Opstina was depriving them and stealing aid goods. That caused discord amongst the population.

Though it was hard to say exactly what role Mustafic now played in the enclave, the reigning opinion was that he caused chaos and weakened the enclave, so judged two UN interpreters.²¹⁵⁹ Two attacks were launched on him, and once with the aid of an anti-tank rocket. It never became clear who was behind that. Both attacks had taken place at night, there were no witnesses, and police investigations produced no results. Naser Oric was sometimes suspected, but he was no longer in the enclave during the second attack.²¹⁶⁰ (See further for the role of Mustafic: Part II, Chapter 7: The situation in the enclave under Dutchbat.)

Naser Oric was the one that mattered in Srebrenica in the eyes of many. The population saw him as a living legend. Many people thus felt betrayed when Oric left the enclave in April. The reigning thought was that if Oric had been in the enclave in July, he surely would have known to organize some form of resistance.²¹⁶¹ Ramiz Becirovic was more of a staff officer than a troop commander and had little control over what was happening. In that way, a lot was left to the local commanders.²¹⁶² The journalist Sefko Hodzic said he had seen a message from Becirovic as Deputy Commander of the 28th Division of the 2nd Corps of the ABiH, which read that he was not able to execute the instructions given to him since the men were not prepared to listen to him in the absence of Oric.²¹⁶³ Becirovic had a different personality; he was not the respected figure that Oric was, and not so impressive physically. He had been an officer in the JNA and was part of the territorial defence since 15 April 1992. He was more intellectual and more politically inclined than Oric, spoke on behalf of the ABiH at Opstina meetings (Oric usually failed to appear), acted as spokesperson and negotiated with Dutchbat.²¹⁶⁴

In Opstina circles, Becirovic was seen as ‘nothing special’ and as a less capable leader.²¹⁶⁵ Afterwards, it was said in circles of the population as well that Becirovic had been a bad commander and was not up to the mark.²¹⁶⁶ UN interpreters regularly heard soldiers speak critically of him: he had been eager in accepting the post of deputy commander; others would possibly have been more suitable, but the problem with that was that most of the brigade commanders were tribal leaders of sorts, who did not use their heads enough and sometimes did mindless things. At least Ramiz Becirovic was a

²¹⁵⁸ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

²¹⁵⁹ Interview Muhamed Durakovic and Vahid Hodzic, 20/04/98.

²¹⁶⁰ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 18/04/98.

²¹⁶¹ Interview Igor Rajner, 06/08/97.

²¹⁶² Interview Sadik Vilib, 06/02/98 and 15/04/98.

²¹⁶³ Interview Sefko Hodzic, 24/05/99.

²¹⁶⁴ Interview Igor Rajner, 06/08/97; ABiH Tuzla. 2nd Corps, without no. Additional statement from Ramiz Becirovic, 16/04/98, based on an earlier statement from 11/08/95.

²¹⁶⁵ Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98, 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

²¹⁶⁶ Interview Damir Skaler, 17/05/99.

threat to no one.²¹⁶⁷ Zulfo Tursunovic would have said about Becirovic that he did spur the ABiH on to defend themselves, but not to take the initiative to counterattack.²¹⁶⁸

Becirovic pointed out that when the attack began, most of the non-indigenous population was preparing to flee to Tuzla. The indigenous residents still present followed that example. It had only been a minority that really wanted to fight for the retention of the enclave, judged Becirovic.²¹⁶⁹ In addition, there were not enough means and not enough weapons for the ABiH to win the fight. Morale was no longer very high and survival was more important. Even if Oric had been in the enclave, that would have made little difference.²¹⁷⁰

Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that at the time of the fall, Becirovic was physically hardly able to lead at times. On 7 May 1995, he was badly injured in a helicopter crash, due to which he was bedridden until 7 June. He suffered the consequences for quite some time and had to be supported by two men for a long time.²¹⁷¹ He would have been sick and unable to lead around 6 July.²¹⁷²

UNMOs attributed the minimal resistance of the ABiH to a lack of leadership and confusion about the question of who the leader actually was. Becirovic indeed tried to lead, but his orders would have been different than the troops expected, which again contributed to the confusion. Moreover, the ABiH soldiers were tired because they were sent from one side of the enclave to the other. Transportation was not available and the heat did not contribute to the performance either.²¹⁷³ The relatively large groups of armed men reported by Dutchbat that were in the centre near the PTT building, seemed to be an affirmation of the lack of leadership and the execution of a determined defence. An escape towards Tuzla began prior to 11 July as well, and although the numbers appeared to be limited, this pointed to a collapse in morale.²¹⁷⁴

The Bosnian Government in Sarajevo believed that a defensive could be waged for 30 days, but the leaders in Srebrenica had different thoughts. The War President of Opstina, Osman Suljic, did not deem this realistic. There was only enough food for a few days, according to him. Becirovic felt that the leaders in Sarajevo knew little about the local situation. Politicians that were invited to come to Srebrenica never came.²¹⁷⁵

Sead Delic, 2nd Corps Commander, thought that the statement about the defence lasting for 30 days was false as well. He saw a political explanation for this, but the 2nd Corps knew better: according to their commander, there were only 20 cartridges per soldier (that was indeed not true, because roughly 100 cartridges per soldier had already been smuggled into the enclave with the secret weapon transport in May 1995). The defence could have perhaps been lengthened to 10 or 15 days, but given the force of the VRS, this would not have been probable. Srebrenica could not be defended from a military point of view, according to Sead Delic.²¹⁷⁶

On the other hand, Chief of Police Hakija Meholic believed that the defence could have held out longer. He saw the period of 30 days not so much as incorrect, but according to him, the problem was that the ABiH had destroyed itself internally. The men no longer wanted to fight and there had been a lot of irregularities within the enclave that had contributed to the decrease in morale. Nobody could order anyone to do anything when it came down to it. The panic amongst the population destroyed the last bit of morale.²¹⁷⁷

²¹⁶⁷ Interview Muhamed Durakovic and Vahid Hodzic, 20/04/98.

²¹⁶⁸ Interview Muhamed Durakovic and Vahid Hodzic, 20/04/98.

²¹⁶⁹ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 02/02/98 and 05/02/98.

²¹⁷⁰ Interview Ibrahim Becirovic, 05/08/97.

²¹⁷¹ Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 02/02/98 and 05/02/98.

²¹⁷² Confidential information (51).

²¹⁷³ NIOD, Confidential Coll. (4). Debriefing of UNMOs from the Srebrenica enclave, 23/07/95.

²¹⁷⁴ Interview Emir Suljagic, 23/11/97.

²¹⁷⁵ Interviews Osman Suljic and Ramiz Becirovic, 04/03/98 and 02/02/98 and 05/02/98.

²¹⁷⁶ Interview Sead Delic, 10/03/99. Delic said that the number of 30 days was uttered by Minister Hasan Muratovic, but he added that it was a Bosnian Cabinet member's opinion and not that of a soldier.

²¹⁷⁷ Interview Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98 with additions from 19/04/98 and 21/05/99.

In the view of the Commander of the 283rd Brigade in the North, Smail Mandzic, it might have been possible to keep up the fight for a few more days but that would have only had a psychological effect. However, it might not have been possible to move to Tuzla at that point because the supply of ammunition would have been depleted. The ABiH had counted on NATO to keep the enclave standing. The population was completely exhausted from a lack of food. They had been separated from Tuzla for years without good information sources, and hardly any instructions had come from Tuzla.²¹⁷⁸

There had been many arguments within the ABiH and little coordination. The 28th Division in Srebrenica would have had the best weapons of the entire ABiH during the fall of the enclave, but it lacked the morale to fight with them. The 28th Division was completely exhausted from fighting, according to the War President of Opstina, Osman Suljic. The siege had taken too long, according to him, due to which the population was exhausted.²¹⁷⁹ A reward system had been set up within Opstina: 10,000 DM for each tank shot, and 15,000 DM for each captured VRS soldier would be paid. However, putting up rewards could no longer turn the tide of the decreasing morale.²¹⁸⁰

Thus, the opinions varied on why the defence of the enclave had been so unsuccessful. Accusing fingers were pointed at both the ABiH as well as Dutchbat. ABiH Commander Rasim Delic was of the opinion – contrary to his subordinate, Sead Delic – that Dutchbat could have defended the enclave.²¹⁸¹ There was also discord within the ABiH concerning the tactics to be followed in the event of a VRS attack. The responsible officers of the ABiH could have done more, according to Rasim Delic: ‘When I compare it with what happened in Brcko, I think that the attack would have stopped if two tanks had been destroyed. In Brcko, two suicide attacks were executed on VRS tanks. On the basis of their trip to Tuzla and their successful breaks through Serbian lines, they demonstrated that they were capable of something’, according to the ABiH Commander.²¹⁸²

Attempts of the ABiH to get Dutchbat on its side

How extensive the thinking was in Srebrenica to consciously try to have UNPROFOR conduct the fight against the VRS cannot be said for sure. Incidentally, that thought did play a role.

War President Osman Suljic and the ABiH Commander within the enclave, Ramiz Becirovic, did however make announcements that urged restraint, for fear that UNPROFOR would not intervene otherwise. That was also proven by the refusal to empty the Weapon Collection Point, out of fear that it would be said that the ABiH could take the defence into their own hands and UNPROFOR could stand on the sidelines. It was more logical to take the weapons from Dutchbat than to take back the weapons from the Weapon Collection Point, according to 2nd Corps Commander, Sead Delic. However, the ABiH did not do that either because Close Air Support was expected. Supposedly, Naser Oric had once stated that the ABiH would be able to defend Srebrenica if they could get a hold of Dutchbat’s weapons, but Sead Delic had no knowledge of this.²¹⁸³ Instructions to take weapons from Dutchbat had indeed been given (see paragraph 8 on this).²¹⁸⁴

Delic held little trust in cooperation with the UN anyway. He did not trust UNPROFOR to defend Srebrenica either. In his opinion, it had been proven too often that the UN was not prepared to fight. He had to admit that their role was peacekeeping, but ‘the international community had done so and been able to intervene. But the UN was more concerned about one of their own soldiers than about 5,000 citizens,’ as Sead Delic said to the NIOD interviewers.²¹⁸⁵

²¹⁷⁸ Interview Smail Mandzic, 18/05/99.

²¹⁷⁹ Interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98.

²¹⁸⁰ Confidential information (51).

²¹⁸¹ Interview Rasim Delic, 21/04/98.

²¹⁸² Interview Rasim Delic and Sead Delic, 16/04/98 and Rasim Delic, 21/04/98.

²¹⁸³ Interview Sead Delic, 10/03/99.

²¹⁸⁴ Sefko Hodzic, *Otpjecaceni koverat*, p. 250-3.

²¹⁸⁵ Interview Rasim Delic and Sead Delic, 16/04/98 and Rasim Delic, 21/04/98.

Also, Ramiz Becirovic could only conclude from the efforts of the UN, Dutchbat and especially Karremans, that they mainly acted to save their own lives and had not acted in the spirit of the mission that was ordered: ‘they did not go into action against the VRS and did not confront them, not even verbally.’²¹⁸⁶ According to War President Osman Suljic, Dutchbat had too easily given up OPs and APCs as well. In his opinion, that was why all trust in Dutchbat had been lost.²¹⁸⁷ Sead Delic also found that Karremans had requested air support too late. The VRS then took the *zona smrti* that was intended for air strikes, and were sure that the international community would not react. There was even proof of cooperation between Dutchbat and the VRS, according to Sead Delic: ‘we have more painstaking information about Dutchbat’s actions’. However, he could not substantiate this statement.²¹⁸⁸

Dutchbat was an easy scapegoat in venting frustrations over the loss of the enclave. Residents in particular tended to blame Dutchbat for the loss of the enclave, rather than their own military. To them, Dutchbat was indeed the representative of the international community that had promised to protect the Safe Area. That there was a difference between defending and scaring off an attack within a restricted mandate with limited means was a subtlety to those that found themselves in the circumstances in Srebrenica before and especially after 11 July. There were indeed other opinions within the higher social strata, although they often contained an undertone of criticism.

On the other hand, General Sead Delic said that the 2nd Corps knew that the fighting capability of Dutchbat was limited.²¹⁸⁹ For others, that was reason enough not to blame Dutchbat for the loss of the enclave. *War President* Osman Suljic was convinced that a battalion was absolutely insufficient to defend the enclave.²¹⁹⁰ Minister Hasan Muratovic did not blame Dutchbat for the fall of the enclave either. In his view, the battalion did not have the strength to stop the attack. He did not deem himself capable of giving a complete analysis of their actions, but he did point out that Dutchbat was on the verge of going home, and therefore ‘not so willing to do their jobs’. According to him, Dutchbat also had problems of a psychological nature.²¹⁹¹

The announcement from Karremans that there would be air strikes took the last bit of spirit out of ABiH’s defence, rather than giving a boost to morale. There came an end to plans for threatening the VRS. The ABiH, just like Dutchbat, waited for air strikes. When Close Air Support finally arrived, it no longer had any meaning from a military point of view, and it only sealed the fate of the enclave. The Opstina felt betrayed and left to their own devices by Karremans because of that. Promises were not fulfilled. Within Opstina’s circles, some could have killed him. ‘Why did he say such things when he could not honour them’, many asked themselves, although the realization existed that Karremans could have been misled by his UN superiors. The Opstina knew that Dutchbat was not strong enough to defend the enclave, but had believed that Dutchbat would ask for help in the event of an attack. The relationship with Dutchbat had been good up to the beginning of 1995, but after the VRS had rounded up OP-E, more understanding for the Bosnian Serbs would have arisen within Dutchbat, according to the ABiH. In the eyes of the Bosnian Muslims, it seemed that Dutchbat was more concerned about their own personnel than about the population.²¹⁹²

Step by step, the VRS took OPs, and they continued when no reaction came from UNPROFOR. The fate of the enclave was sealed after the VRS had taken Dutchbat soldiers hostage.²¹⁹³ The fact that Dutchbat soldiers fell into the hands of the Bosnian Serbs (or consciously

²¹⁸⁶ ABiH Tuzla. 2nd Corps, without no.. Additional statement from Ramiz Becirovic (1956), 16/04/98, based on an earlier statement from 11/08/95.

²¹⁸⁷ Interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98.

²¹⁸⁸ Interview Rasim Delic and Sead Delic, 16/04/98 and Rasim Delic, 21/04/98.

²¹⁸⁹ Interview Sead Delic, 10/04/99.

²¹⁹⁰ Interview Osman Suljic, 04/03/98.

²¹⁹¹ Interview Hasan Muratovic, 30/01/98.

²¹⁹² Interview Dzermaludin Becirovic and Sefket Hafizovic, 21/10/97.

²¹⁹³ Interview Sefko Tihic, 08/03/99.

walked) sealed the fate of the enclave and population, according to Dutchbat interpreter Emir Suljagic.²¹⁹⁴

²¹⁹⁴ Interview Emir Suljagic, 23/11/97.

Chapter 7

6 - 11 July 1995 – retrospective accounts

1. DCBC: Defence Crisis Management Centre and the Royal Netherlands Army Crisis Staff (RNLA Crisis Staff)

Within the Ministry of Defence Dutchbat activities were monitored closely at two locations in The Hague, namely at the Defence Crisis Management Centre, which comes under the Defence Staff at the Ministry of Defence Central Organisation, and the Netherlands Army Crisis Staff (RNLA Crisis Staff). The Defence Crisis Management Centre was located in a bunker below the Hague Ministry of Defence in *Het Plein* and the RNLA Crisis Staff was housed in the *Julianakazerne*.

Both moved into different premises in later years, which were considerably better equipped. The organization and infrastructure of the Hague bunker below *Het Plein* were poor at that time. All incoming and outgoing communications were supposed to go through the so-called head of duty team. In practice, this proved problematic, as there were large numbers of telephones with direct lines not connected to a switchboard. Those present in the Defence Crisis Management Centre made full use of these telephones, from the minister to the Directorate of Information (*Directie Voorlichting*) employees and from the junior minister to the Chief of Defence Staff. It was impossible for a head of duty team to record all these calls, and even if it happened, records were often limited to who spoke with whom. Recording the contents of these calls was virtually out of the question. Only a few telephones were equipped with a sound recorder, and these were merely intended for replay purposes, and to jot down notes if required. The tapes were neither processed nor stored. The latter also applied to the RNLA Army Crisis Staff.

In practice, the Defence Management Crisis Centre and the Netherlands Crisis Staff were charged with different tasks, though not formally. The Army Crisis Staff was mainly engaged in personnel and materiel issues relating to Dutchbat, and in exchanging information with the home front. The Defence Crisis Management Centre in its turn informed the political leadership and maintained contact with the military commands in Sarajevo and Zagreb, with NATO, and with representations of foreign countries in the Netherlands. So RNLA Crisis Staff conducted almost no business with Zagreb, and very little with Sarajevo, while the Defence Crisis Management Centre on the other hand had virtually no contact with Dutchbat; this was the situation up to the days in July.

Contact with Dutchbat was primarily a matter for RNLA Crisistaff. The RNLA Crisistaff also maintained contact with the Dutch Contingent Commander in Bosnia (Colonel Verschraegen in Busovaca). But at the time of the fall of Srebrenica a temporary adjustment was made to these functional lines, as it was no longer feasible to have the Dutch Contingent Commander, who resided in remote Busovaca, act as a Point of Contact for The Hague. He was too far removed from the centre of power. Instead, General Nicolai in Sarajevo, who was in a better position to follow developments, acted as the Dutch Contingent Commander, at the suggestion of Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen. His formal appointment only followed during the July days, after consultation with Gobilliard as deputy UNPROFOR Commander. Nicolai did seem to have occupied that post in practice for some time, as his name featured on a list of National Contingent Commanders dated June.²¹⁹⁵

For example, General Nicolai was the Point of Contact for the Defence Crisis Management Centre in Sarajevo. General Kolsteren occupied this function in Zagreb. Colonel Brantz kept the RNLA Crisis Staff as well as the Defence Crisis management Centre informed from the Sector North East in Tuzla, though any Defence Crisis Management Centre initiated contact with Brantz was scarce.

²¹⁹⁵ Confidential collection (3). G1 Military Zagreb, List B, G2 Branch Heads & Coordinating Agencies, 09/06/95

Relationship between the Defence Crisis Management Centre and RNLA Crisis Staff

Arrangements relating to the control of peace operations were taken care of by the service branch most involved, in this case the Army. But the Defence Crisis Management Centre, under the political pressure of that time, began increasingly to intervene in the execution of the operation, as things started to heat up in Srebrenica, and the dividing lines between the tasks of the Defence Crisis Management Centre and those of RNLA Crisis Staff became blurred.²¹⁹⁶

The relationship between the Defence Crisis Management Centre and RNLA Crisis Staff was not ideal during the days in July. This could be traced back to two causes: the situation in those days but additionally at the time the relationship had not formally been laid down. In practice, these factors intermingled, and as the role of the Defence Crisis Management Centre grew over time, due to the circumstances, the Royal Netherlands Army soon interpreted this as increased interference. The pragmatic arrangements, which provided for the Defence Crisis Management Centre to maintain contact with Zagreb and Sarajevo, and RNLA Crisis Staff with Brantz and Karremans, hardly worked in practice. A complicating factor was that Brantz frequently called the Defence Crisis Management Centre, and as a result the Defence Crisis Management Centre rang Brantz more than once.²¹⁹⁷ Brantz was a significant linchpin in the provision of information to the Netherlands in relation to the ups and downs of Dutchbat during the days in July. In one case, calls between Brantz and the Defence Crisis Management Centre led to irritating misunderstandings about the number of Dutchbat troops held by the VRS.²¹⁹⁸

The Defence Crisis Management Centre's position was a more central and influential one due to the proximity of the minister, resulting in a considerable increase in the influence of the Defence Crisis Management Centre during the days in July. The fact that the Defence Crisis Management Centre not only maintained contact with Dutch nationals in the UN organisations in Zagreb and Sarajevo but also with the Dutch Staff officers in New York, with the military advisor of UN Secretary-General Van Kappen, as well as with the higher echelons in Zagreb, namely Akashi and Janvier, also contributed to this. The Defence Crisis Management Centre also maintained contact with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the Dutch Permanent Representatives at the UN in Washington and NATO in Brussels, as well as with the foreign military attaches who were accredited in The Hague.²¹⁹⁹

This division of labour meant that the RNLA Crisis Staff did not of their own accord contact the Dutch officers stationed in Zagreb and Sarajevo, even though Colonel De Jonge from Zagreb and Lieutenant-Colonel De Ruiter from Sarajevo more than once called the RNLA Crisis Staff to pass on information. Regular contact did take place between RNLA Crisis Staff and the Dutch UNMO coordinator in Sarajevo but this was mainly intended to inform the rank and file. Contact between the RNLA Crisis Staff and Karremans, and occasionally Franken, mainly concerned non-operational, i.e. personnel and materiel matters.²²⁰⁰

In theory, RNLA Crisis Staff and the Defence Crisis Management Centre were deemed to exchange information on peace operations but this was not always the case in practice and much took place on an ad hoc basis. An extensive blueprint for the Crisis Staff originating from the Army and dated June 1995 explained the tasks and organisation relating to the control of peace operations. It does not contain indications as to how contact with the Defence Crisis Management Centre or with other branches of the services were supposed to be maintained.²²⁰¹ Although this point had featured on the agenda for some time, arrangements for the Chief of Defence Staff to be charged with control of the

²¹⁹⁶ SMG/1004. Conversation Col. Dedden (Chief-of-Staff Crisis Staff), 10/08/95.

²¹⁹⁷ SMG/1004. Conversation Col. Dedden (Chief-of-Staff Crisis Staff), 10/08/95.

²¹⁹⁸ SMG/1004. Report of conversations between C. Klep and Capt. Voets and Lt-Col Felix, 20/07/95.

²¹⁹⁹ SMG/1004. Conversation Col. Dedden (Chief-of-Staff Crisis Staff), 10/08/95.

²²⁰⁰ SMG/1004. Conversation Col. Dedden (Chief-of-Staff Crisis Staff), 10/08/95.

²²⁰¹ DPKL, Pers/95, ss/95/37.763/21.787. Blueprint Crisis Staff BLS, sent with fax 01/06/95.

peace operations during the fall of Srebrenica had not yet been completed. These were not put into effect until later that year.²²⁰²

As matters in Srebrenica tensed up, the volume of information from Sarajevo to the Defence Crisis Management Centre increased. This caused the Crisis Staff to feel that they were confronted with an information backlog in times of crisis in particular. Keeping the RNLA Crisis Staff to some extent also informed meant twice as much work for the Dutch Staff officers in Sarajevo, because it meant that often the same story had to be told twice from Sarajevo, to RNLA Crisis Staff and to the Defence Crisis Management Centre. Zagreb mainly continued to telephone the Defence Crisis Management Centre and not the Crisis Staff.

Added to that, the realisation that Karremans should not be telephoned all the time, whether by RNLA Crisis Staff or from the former Yugoslavia, surfaced during the days in July. A request was then sent from Sarajevo to not unnecessarily burden the Dutchbat Commander, and Brantz also let it be known from Tuzla on 7 July that questions about Dutchbat should be addressed to him, as the lines of communication with Dutchbat started to become clogged up.²²⁰³ The Army Director of Operations and Deputy Commander in Chief Van Baal issued instructions at the start of the VRS attack to preferably conduct communications between Dutchbat and the RNLA Crisis Staff via Brantz. They did add that this was not a prohibition on communication, rather that it was intended to relieve Karremans.²²⁰⁴

Contact between Sarajevo and the Defence Crisis Management Centre was good. Nicolai, as well as Lieutenant Colonel De Ruiter as his messenger at busy times, were main suppliers of information to the Defence Crisis Management Centre. The information passed on by Nicolai was considered to be factual, accurate and up to date. The Defence Crisis Management Centre therefore received the impression that it knew reasonably well what was happening. Contact consisted of answering questions or comparing different assessments of the situation. And Sarajevo did not feel it received orders from the Netherlands – communications were therefore conducted in an open fashion.²²⁰⁵ Kolsteren in Zagreb also called the line which existed from there to the Defence Crisis Management Centre on 10 and 11 July open and unproblematic. He did not consider the contact problematic, patronizing or controlling.²²⁰⁶

The Defence Crisis Management Centre as well as the Crisis Staff were plagued during the days in July by recent transfers and leaves. The relationship between the RNLA Crisis Staff and the Defence Crisis Management Centre had been good under the Crisis Staff Commander Brigadier-General Polle but in July he was preparing for his new tour of duty in the former Yugoslavia. The Defence Crisis Management Centre considered it got on less well with his replacement, Colonel P.H. Smeets, partly because of his more formal attitude. Smeets himself was of the opinion that a certain rivalry existed between the Defence Crisis Management Centre and the RNLA Crisis Staff. In his view the fact that there was no Army personnel present on behalf of the Defence Crisis Management Centre during the days around the fall of Srebrenica also played a role. This complaint was not aimed at the top level, as this was well represented, especially in the person of the Deputy Army Commander, but rather at the level of the permanent Defence Crisis Management Centre staff. Army personnel who had been there earlier included at top level the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff, Lieutenant-General M. Schouten, but he was on holiday; and as permanent staff member the former Deputy Chief of Defence Staff for Operations Kolsteren but the latter had been appointed UNPF Chief of Staff in Zagreb on 21 June. According to Smeets, this caused the feeling at the RNLA Crisis Staff that Navy and Airforce personnel interfered in matters concerning the Army. The posting of Lieutenant Colonel M.C.J. Felix as RNLA Crisis Staff liaison officer at the Defence Crisis Management Centre brought about some improvement in the situation.

²²⁰² SMG/1004. Report of conversations between C. Klep and Capt. Voets and Lt-Col Felix, 20/07/95.

²²⁰³ NIOD Coll. Brantz. Diary Brantz, (version August 1999), 07/07/95; interview J.A.C. de Ruiter, 29/06/00.

²²⁰⁴ SMG/1004. Report of conversations between C. Klep and Capt. Voets and Lt-Col Felix dated 20/07/95.

²²⁰⁵ Interviews J.A.C. de Ruiter, 29/06/00 and C.G.J. Hilderink, 11/08/00.

²²⁰⁶ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

The relationship between the Defence Crisis Management Centre and the Royal Netherlands Army top on the other hand was excellent, due to the presence of Deputy Commander Van Baal at the Defence Crisis Management Centre. General opinion at the Defence Crisis Management Centre, however, was that Commander in Chief Couzy left a lot to his deputy, Van Baal.

In addition to Defence Staff, a permanent representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, J.C.S. Wijnands, who kept his minister and department informed of developments, was also stationed at the Defence Crisis Management Centre. Senior civil servants at Foreign Affairs, such as the Director of Atlantic Security, F. Majoor, and the Deputy Director-General of the Directorate of General Policy Matters, Van Eenennaam, were only occasionally present at the Defence Crisis Management Centre. According to the former Director-General of the Directorate of General Policy Matters, Wijnaendts, Foreign Affairs hardly played any part in the Hague bunker. In his opinion, Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen was pursuing military policy on the Dutch side. He said that the latter had been pulling the strings in the bunker, and that Voorhoeve was just 'a puppet on a string in this situation'.²²⁰⁷

Others on the permanent staff of the Defence Crisis Management Centre also recognized that Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen decided policy. The then Director-General of the Directorate of General Policy Matters at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vos, had little influence on policy. The atmosphere in the Defence Crisis Management Centre at the time of the fall was rather tense, which was caused by the concern about the Dutch military in particular. Concern about the fate of the population only arose with the fall of the enclave.²²⁰⁸

2. Discussions at the Defence Crisis Management Centre up to 11 July 1995

Hence, communications were brisk between the former Yugoslavia and The Hague. Upon looking for an answer to the question about the extent of intervention on the part of The Hague in Dutchbat, there is little evidence of formal instructions. The fact is that command relations at the UN, a political organisation, were less clear-cut than at NATO, a military organisation; there was a large grey area. The UN had to consider the requirements of the troop-contributing providing troops, and depending on the political pressure which national governments put the UN under, countries were able to put a certain stamp on the deployment of their troops.

In practice, the UN offered some opportunity for this. It was, for instance, not unusual for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Akashi, and the Force Commander, Janvier, to poll the views of national governments from Zagreb. This emerged for example from a request to Kolsteren by Janvier on 10 July 1995 to find out from the Dutch Government whether they objected to the provision of air support. At the time it was a logical question, as it is a fallacy that the Netherlands no longer had anything to do, or should have had anything to do, with its units under UN command. Full Command remained in Dutch hands and the administrative and logistical responsibilities also remained a national concern. Operational issues, on the other hand, were a matter for the UN but this Transfer of Authority did not go beyond Operational Control, as it was a more limited form of command than Operational Command. As a result, the Netherlands remained involved when the tasks initially assigned were subject to change.

Incidentally, this begs the question whether such issues relating to Command and Control in the Netherlands, within and without the Ministry of Defence, were as clear as all that. Outside a small circle of military personnel, familiarity with this subject was limited amongst civil servants, as well as amongst Members of Parliament. In any case, the Ministry of Defence once more busied itself with such formal aspects, in order to get these sorted out again after the fall of Srebrenica.

²²⁰⁷ Wijnaendts obtained his information on the DCBC from the Director of Atlantic Security, F. Majoor (interview H. Wijnaendts, 08/06/00).

²²⁰⁸ Interviews C.G.J. Hilderink, 11/08/00 and J.C.S. Wijnands, 24/05/00. Telephone call H. Wijnaendts, 25/04/00; SMG/1004. Report conversation Col Smeets, 02/08/95.

The Minister of Defence, Voorhoeve, took the position in respect to NIOD that these instructions relating to Command and Control, and the allocation of people's responsibilities, was more or less clear-cut but that at the same it had proved not possible in practice to separate these kind of issues, resulting in them intermingling with each other. According to him it was possible to argue strictly from the point of international law that the Netherlands had made units available to the UN, and that subsequently the Netherlands were only entitled to recall these units, and that otherwise things were up to the UN. In other words, The Hague could say that these military troops were now UN blue helmets, and that therefore this was not their problem. But in practice matters were different, according to Voorhoeve. These were Dutch troops with a home front, which continuously asked questions and was concerned, and The Hague was also confronted by the Dutch media and Parliament, both interested in the lives of the Dutch troops in Bosnia.

Consequently, Voorhoeve saw the UNPROFOR line of command as a confused one, which was not always functioning properly and which featured representatives of numerous countries. The various levels in the UN chain of command merely revolved around a limited number of officers who kept things together, according to him. The Chief of Defence Staff, the Defence Crisis Management Centre and the RNLA Crisis Staff learned in practice whom they could consult, in order to find out what was actually happening. The vague and badly functioning formal network contained in fact a better-functioning informal network. So The Hague telephoned officials such as Kolsteren and Nicolai if questions arose. And in turn they were the people asked by their own Commanders to ring The Hague, in order to find out what its views were.²²⁰⁹

The views of The Hague could be deduced from a number of discussions held around the fall of Srebrenica within the Defence Crisis Management Centre. Voorhoeve could be found frequently at the Defence Crisis Management Centre during the days immediately prior to the fall, but this did not mean that his role or opinion was dominant. He was, however, very involved and extremely concerned about the developing situation. The role of Junior Minister Gmelich Meijlings was limited, which was linked to his portfolio. He was less frequently present at the Defence Crisis Management Centre and mainly got in touch at times that Voorhoeve was absent. Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen played a significant role in the Defence Crisis Management Centre, which was not surprising in view of his function as the military advisor of the Minister. Voorhoeve chaired meetings at the Defence Crisis Management Centre but it was usually Van den Breemen who analysed matters and arrived at a conclusion, which was then either adopted or not. We have already mentioned that General Van Baal on the Army side played a larger role at the Defence Crisis Management Centre than Commander Couzy. Van Baal generally arrived well-prepared and well-informed, and his input was greater, not surprisingly in view of his previous experience in Bosnia as Chief of Staff of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo. Those present made grateful use of the knowledge he had acquired in Bosnia. The Director of the Directorate of Policy Matters, J. de Winter, kept in the background when military affairs were discussed. His role became only prominent after the fall of Srebrenica. The Deputy Chief Defence Staff for Operations, Commodore Hilderink, was charged with day-to-day control at the Defence Crisis Management Centre and was the person who had to contribute information for the discussions at higher level. The Military Intelligence Service (of the Central Organisation as well as the Royal Netherlands Army) did not contribute to the discussions at the Defence Crisis Management Centre.²²¹⁰

On several occasions a discussion arose in the Hague Defence bunker about the situation in which Dutchbat found itself at the time of the fall. The Hague discussion, however, always lagged behind the actual situation in Srebrenica. Little was known about the actions of the warring factions. Discussions were therefore of a highly theoretical nature, and they did not affect the actual circumstances in Bosnia. The only exception was the requirement to call a halt to any further Close Air

²²⁰⁹ Interview J.J.C Voorhoeve, 15/04/97.

²²¹⁰ Interview C.G.J. Hilderink, 11/08/00.

Support on 11 July as conveyed by Voorhoeve to Akashi. This is discussed below in the section: 'Calling a halt to further air support on 11 July'.

Air support was the main topic under discussion at the Defence Crisis Management Centre. It should be noted that the possible deployment of anti-tank weapons was not under discussion within the Defence Crisis Management Centre. It had briefly been the subject of a discussion in the Prime Minister's Office between Prime Minister Kok and Ministers Van Mierlo and Voorhoeve, amongst others. There Van Mierlo took the view that Dutchbat setting out to use its anti-tank weapons was dangerous, as this could lead to a bloodbath amongst the Dutchbat troops.

Voorhoeve proposed during this discussion that Dutchbat withdraw to the Potocari compound. Van Mierlo on the other hand, according to the Chief of Military Cooperation of the Atlantic Security Directorate, Klompenhouwer, who was present, took the view that the entire world would blame the Netherlands if Dutchbat was to abandon the enclave. According to Klompenhouwer, Van Mierlo made it clear to him during the discussion that 'he should decide'. When Klompenhouwer did so, Voorhoeve became extremely irritated and asked what the alternative was; the question went unanswered.²²¹¹ Van Mierlo admitted that his attitude in respect of Dutchbat during and after the fall had mainly been one of: 'You can't just pull out.'²²¹²

Air support was the subject of different and rather strong views amongst those present at the Defence Crisis Management Centre. Voorhoeve did not object to providing air support but Gmelich Meijling, for instance, was against. A few others were also strongly opposed, but the military in particular thought that a commander could not be withheld any means he considered necessary; air support was therefore a matter for operational commanders locally. Those who thought that people in The Hague could not judge operational issues in Srebrenica gained the upper hand. No operational instructions were therefore issued from the Defence Crisis Management Centre to Dutchbat in relation to air support.²²¹³

Those present at the Defence Crisis Management Centre on 8 July, including Minister Voorhoeve, tried to form an opinion about the intentions of the Bosnian Serbs. Opinions were divided, as some thought that the VRS would not go beyond taking the southern part of the enclave and that it would not be rational to kill the Dutchbat hostages, as they would then lose their leverage. Others thought that the Bosnian Serbs would have done so earlier, if this was what they wanted. In reality, nobody knew what was about to happen, although the idea that the entire enclave could be lost could not be dismissed.²²¹⁴

Close Air Support as well as air strikes were under discussion on 9 July. The outcome of the discussion was merely that decision-making on these issues would have to be done with great care. Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen informed General Kolsteren of this view, as the highest Dutch representative in the UNPF Staff in Zagreb.²²¹⁵ Exerting pressure on Akashi and Janvier to be careful on this issue, however, was not exactly necessary: they were well aware of the risks for the hostages. The Defence Crisis Management Centre recognized that this was primarily a responsibility of the UN and NATO commanders. Couzy had 'the fullest confidence' in General Janvier in this respect. According to Couzy, Janvier had pondered so long for a good reason as to whether he should honour the request for air support or not on 10 July.²²¹⁶ Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen was also full of praise for Janvier. He admired Janvier and thought him a good soldier.²²¹⁷

There was also concern on the American side for the welfare of Dutchbat. Voorhoeve spoke to the American ambassador, Terry Dornbush, at the home of Voorhoeve in the evening of 9 July.

²²¹¹ Interview K.J.R. Klompenhouwer, 15/09/01.

²²¹² Interview H.A.F.M.O. van Mierlo, 10/02/00.

²²¹³ Interview C.G.J. Hilderink, 11/08/00.

²²¹⁴ Interview J.J.C. Voorhoeve, 13/03/97.

²²¹⁵ NIOD, Coll. Hilderink. Memo 'Besluitvorming Defence Crisis Management Centre', no date, no No., no author given.

²²¹⁶ Interview H.A. Couzy, 07/09/98, 14/09/98 and 17/09/98.

²²¹⁷ Interview H.G.B. van den Breemen, 29/09/99.

Dornbush had taken the initiative for the discussion, as he wished to be informed of the events around Srebrenica. Dornbush said that his relationship with Voorhoeve had been open. The Dutch Minister had always been straight, according to him, and was never less than frank. According to Dornbush, Voorhoeve still assumed during this discussion that the Bosnian Serbs might possibly not take the entire enclave: there was 'at least a fifty percent chance that the Serbs would not overrun Srebrenica'. Voorhoeve said that it would not be the first time that they merely tightened the noose around a town. Dornbush thought that Voorhoeve was just as concerned about the ABiH conduct as about the conduct of the VRS, after the Dutch had incurred a fatality on the part of the ABiH. Voorhoeve did not ask the Americans for assistance during this discussion.²²¹⁸

On the eve of 10 July Van Mierlo also telephoned Dornbush. Dornbush called this 'the most general of any conversation'. Van Mierlo indicated that the Dutch Government was 'very concerned' about developments around Srebrenica but the telephone call had no further content. It was only intended to open lines of communication with Dornbush, and to remain in close contact during the following days, according to the American ambassador. On subsequent days Dornbush heard no more from Foreign Affairs.²²¹⁹

There was also interest from American military quarters. Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen not only maintained a close relationship with his American colleagues (as well as with his British and French colleagues), Deputy Chief of Operations Hilderink, for instance, was telephoned at home by General Wesley Clark, the deputy of the American Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Shalikashvili, in order to catch up on matters.²²²⁰ According to his diary, Shalikashvili proved to be well informed about the situation in which Dutchbat found itself at the time of the fall.²²²¹ There was also contact between the French Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral Lanxade, and the Defence Crisis Management Centre in those days.²²²²

Discussions relating to air support

When the VRS further advanced on 10 July and Dutchbat was ordered to take up a blocking position, the Hague discussion on air support intensified. Kolsteren rang Voorhoeve, as Janvier wanted to know whether the Netherlands objected to air support, because this might have resulted in the Dutch hostages being killed. It was clear to Voorhoeve that the Netherlands was in no position to refuse air support, just because the hostages were vulnerable. He made this consideration clear to Kolsteren, even though nobody in The Hague knew what exactly were the risks that had to be balanced. These were difficult moments for Voorhoeve, as according to him it was clear on the one hand that the enclave would not be able to survive without air support, and on the other hand that the enclave would fall as soon as the Bosnian Serbs decided to take it. The decision-making process could take half a day, or two weeks, and even then Voorhoeve could be little sure about the risks: there might be no fatalities, or there might be sixty, the VRS might first fire mortar bombs at the civilian population, resulting in hundreds of casualties, or the Bosnian Serbs might demonstrate that they were in power by executing a number of hostages. The VRS might also fire on the Dutchbat compounds. There had been earlier strikes in the town and in the compound, even though it was not clear for whom these grenades had been intended. Dutchbat would be left with little they could do. Voorhoeve put into words what he

²²¹⁸ Interview Terry Dornbush, 29/01/01. Dornbush spoke several times with Voorhoeve and Van den Breemen following this conversation but not with other Dutch authorities. Contact with both was via the telephone. Dornbush could not recall the details of these conversations.

²²¹⁹ Interview Terry Dornbush, 29/01/01.

²²²⁰ Interview C.G.J. Hilderink, 11/08/00.

²²²¹ Interview John Shalikashvili, 07/11/00.

²²²² DCBC, 528. Daily reports DCBC, 10/07/95. The content of this contact was not recorded.

called 'the emotional context of those days': 'You did not know exactly how it would end, only that it would end badly'.²²²³

Hilderink wrote in a memo dated October 1995 about the meeting at the Defence Crisis Management Centre during the fall of the enclave. The following, he wrote, had been present at the meeting on 10 July: Junior Minister Gmelich Meijling, secretary-general Barth, Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen, Director of the Directorate of General Policy Affairs De Winter, Deputy Commander in Chief of the Royal Netherlands Army Van Baal and Deputy Chief of Defence Staff for Operations Hilderink himself, who informed Voorhoeve of the outcome.

The main objective of the meeting was again to arrive at a judgement about the intentions of the Bosnian Serbs and to formulate guidelines and priorities for action by Dutchbat. These could then be compared to the UN instructions, and where necessary be made known to the UN authorities as the Dutch position. Those present identified three possibilities in respect of the intentions of the VRS: to provoke the UN by taking over OPs; to take the strategically important southern part; or take the entire enclave. The latter was still not seen as the most likely goal, based on information provided by the UN and appraisals by the Military Intelligence Service. The safety of the Dutch personnel had to be paramount with respect to Dutchbat, and the next priority was the execution of the task for as long as possible, in so far as this did not threaten the first priority.²²²⁴

The safety of the national troops was constantly emphasized during discussions held in these days. This was in agreement with the instruction issued by General Smith, namely that the execution of the mandate was subservient to the safety of the UN personnel.²²²⁵ Van den Breemen, but also Voorhoeve, was strongly convinced of the importance of the safety of the Dutch troops. Voorhoeve, on the other hand, seemed to have shifted ground on this in his later account of the discussions at the time.²²²⁶ he wrote a commentary on 28 October 1997 on the passage mentioned above in the memo by Hilderink in which the latter wrote that the safety of the national troops was paramount. Voorhoeve noted that this account of the situation was too brief and incomplete. The memo did not do justice to the concern and fear which was prevalent at the time for the inhabitants of the enclave, in case they were overrun. Voorhoeve pointed out that this was considered repeatedly during those days at the Defence Crisis Management Centre and that the question as to what fate would befall the population had arisen, and what Dutchbat could still do from its powerless position in order to as much as possible to limit a 'disaster taking place'. Voorhoeve wrote that at the time he had not wanted the UN to take unwarranted risks in pointless battles with the VRS: Dutchbat would only lose these. Voorhoeve estimated the odds that the VRS wanted to round up the entire enclave at 50% in this commentary after the event.²²²⁷

Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen left for Mons in Belgium in the afternoon of 10 July, in order to visit the SACEUR, General Jouwan, following the meetings at the Defence Crisis Management Centre. Van den Breemen discussed the possibilities and impossibilities of air support with him and the measures which Admiral Smith had taken in Naples to be able to provide air support. Van den Breemen returned early in the morning of 11 July.²²²⁸ Joulwan remembered that Van den Breemen had tried to call Janvier from his home but that the Chief of Defence Staff had not been able to speak with the Force Commander.²²²⁹

²²²³ Interviews J.J.C. Voorhoeve, 13/03/97 and 15/04/97.

²²²⁴ NIOD, Coll. Hilderink. Memo 'Besluitvorming Defence Crisis Management Centre', no date, no author given. A note on the memo reads: approved by: Stas, SG, vml PBLs, vml SCO, CDS. The memo dates from October 1997. The commentary by Voorhoeve dates from 28/10/97.

²²²⁵ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. UNPROFOR Directive 2/95, 29/05/95, UN Conf.

²²²⁶ Interview H.G.B. van den Breemen, 22/09/99.

²²²⁷ NIOD, Coll. Hilderink. Memo MINDEF to CDS, i.a.a. STAS, SG, Lt-Gen M. Schouten (PCDS), Cdre C.G.J. Hilderink (SCO), 28/10/97, No. 1381.

²²²⁸ NIOD, Coll. Hilderink. Memo 'Besluitvorming Defence Crisis Management Centre', no date. [1997]; see also 'Hollands Dagboek', *NRC Handelsblad*, 22/07/95.

²²²⁹ Interview George Joulwan, 08/06/00.

3. Discussions at Defence Crisis Management Centre: 11 July 1995

Shortly after the morning briefing at Defence Crisis Management Centre on 11 July another discussion was held at 08.40 hours, on offering air support to Dutchbat. Minister Voorhoeve was not present but was in Doorn at that time, where he took leave of a Royal Netherlands Marine Corps mortar company which was about to participate in the Rapid Reaction Force.

The discussion developed along the following lines. The Deputy Army Commander, Van Baal, was under the impression that there were two 'hard' targets for Close Air Support that morning. Those present realized that Close Air Support would probably provoke a response on the part of VRS but Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen did not want to accept any ultimatums from VRS. On the other hand, the Netherlands would have to take into account the safety of its own troops; Dutchbat itself should take care of this, if necessary with the aid of a third party. Junior Minister Gmelich Meijling had two options: abandoning the remaining OPs and withdraw to the town of Srebrenica, or enter into battle with the VRS. The latter scenario, however, begged the question as to what the consequences would be. There would be casualties as a result of the Close Air Support, and a possible later, more massive deployment of air power. Dutchbat was in a 'no win' situation, according to Van den Breemen, and found itself in a spot in respect of the Bosnian Muslims as well as the Bosnian Serbs. Gmelich Meijling considered the best option to be for Dutchbat to withdraw to both compounds, or to the Potocari compound only, in which case the town of Srebrenica would have to be abandoned. Van Baal retorted that Dutchbat would have to continue carrying out its assignment, and that not the Defence Crisis Management Centre, but rather the UN at the highest level decided on the abandonment or otherwise of the enclave.²²³⁰

Barth, secretary-general of the Ministry of Defence, was pessimistic about the fate of the thirty Dutchbat hostages. A decision on Close Air Support was the responsibility of the Dutchbat Commander but Barth considered the deployment of air power at that time to be overkill. Gmelich Meijling also wondered whether Close Air Support could be given at that time, as the activities of VRS were not aimed at UNPROFOR. Deputy Chief of Defence Staff for Operations Hilderink pointed out that reactive, rather than active action was required against the two VRS tanks close to the blocking positions.

Barth remained pessimistic, Van den Breemen did not want to give in to VRS demands, and Close Air Support in self-defence remained feasible for Van Baal. According to him, the VRS would understand the situation fully well after the warning issued on 10 July. Hilderink, however, warned that little time remained for Close Air Support, as the aircraft would soon be out of the airspace over Bosnia again, and that thereafter the aircraft could only be redeployed from their base.

Talking or fighting?

Gmelich Meijling subsequently wondered what to do next. Barth proved to be in favour of pulling out of the OPs. Van den Breemen merely wanted to be prepared for this, he was thinking of reinforcement and assistance from the French. In this connection, the Dutch ambassador in France, Wijnaendts, had pointed out on 10 July that Paris had notified Janvier that the French units of the Rapid Reaction Force were in Bosnia and available to relieve Dutchbat. This was overly optimistic: in reality the realisation of the Rapid Reaction Force was not making much progress, and it was nowhere near ready to be deployed operationally in Srebrenica. Paris thought that the British were stalling,²²³¹ and expected an improvement only after the tough French General Soubirou had taken on the command, which was planned for 16 July.²²³² French helicopters for a possible transfer of troops to Srebrenica were not yet

²²³⁰ DCBC, 636. This discussion has been reconstructed on the basis of notes during the morning briefing on 11/07/95 July 1995 at the DCBC. No author given.

²²³¹ Original: '*les Britanniques trainent les pieds*'

²²³² ABZ, DPV/ARA/00797. Code Wijnaendts 217, 10/07/95.

available in Bosnia either; these helicopters comprised Tigre attack helicopters including crew,²²³³ which were still underway to Bosnia on the aircraft carrier Foch.²²³⁴ It is not quite clear as to when these helicopters would be available for deployment at Srebrenica. Janvier had insisted as recently as 10 July that they would arrive in Bosnia before 14 July.²²³⁵

This French support had, however, not been able to offer assistance, as Voorhoeve said immediately after the fall, even if the helicopters had arrived in good time: it was not an option from a military point of view to fly to Srebrenica with vulnerable transport helicopters.²²³⁶ It is true that on 10 July France was said to have offered to supply the Tigre helicopters, including crew, should the Dutch run into further problems.²²³⁷

Actually, the apparent French offer to provide troops and attack helicopters for the reinforcement of Srebrenica was more a political gesture rather than a feasible military option. Attack helicopters had not yet arrived in Bosnia and the French did not have transport helicopters which could transfer larger numbers of troops. The Americans would have to supply these. These helicopters were available onboard the American amphibian ships in the Mediterranean but immediate deployment for an operation which was not without risk could not be taken for granted. It would require coordination with NATO, as all helicopter landing pads in the enclave were within range of VRS artillery. The planning and preparation of the operation would require at least 72 hours.

The greatest problem with such an operation would be to obtain political consent: this required overcoming an important obstacle in respect of command and control relations. The Americans wanted to operate only under NATO command in the case of such an operation, not under UN command. At that time, the command relations had not yet been put in place either for a possible withdrawal operation on the part of UNPROFOR (Oplan 40104; see Chapter 1). It would take days just for national governments to establish a position, for the North Atlantic Council of NATO to pronounce on it, and for the secretaries-general of the UN and NATO to agree.

Another possibility was to have French attack helicopters operate under UNPROFOR command. These helicopters would require air cover, due to their vulnerability. Moreover, they could not be stationed in the enclave itself, as fuel and ground staff could not reach the enclave. The helicopters would therefore have to find a base in remote Tuzla.

The conclusion relating to an apparent French offer of attack helicopters to assist Dutchbat is that it involved such considerable difficulties from a military point of view, that the offer must be considered as no more than a political gesture towards The Hague. It arrived too late to be considered seriously.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Defence declared that other countries had also made gestures similar to France, though he declined to say which countries.²²³⁸ Support from other countries was not really under discussion at the Defence Crisis Management Centre. The availability of the Quick Response Option – NATO reserve troops – was, however, reviewed. The best option seemed to Voorhoeve to assume a 'worst-case scenario', and meanwhile to ask NATO to prepare for this. NATO had declared to need three days to activate the reserve troops, according to Voorhoeve, but the problem was that it was difficult to keep this secret. An even greater problem was the fact that the NATO evacuation plan (Oplan 40104) provided for a Quick Response Option, but only for a single enclave. The British might oppose an evacuation of only Dutch troops from Srebrenica, thought Voorhoeve, as they themselves wanted to leave Gorazde with their troops on 5 September. If NATO actually proceeded to activate the Quick Response Option, then it seemed more likely to Voorhoeve

²²³³ ANP 101938 July 95.

²²³⁴ *Srebrenica: rapport sur un massacre. Assemblée Nationale, 2001 No 3413, Annexe IV, Note interne du ministère de la Défense du 11 juillet 1995 sur la situation en ex-Yugoslavie*, p. 328.

²²³⁵ NIOD, Coll Banbury. Banbury dairy. SRSG's Briefing 10/07/95.

²²³⁶ *Algemeen Dagblad*, 12/07/95.

²²³⁷ ANP 101938 jul 95.

²²³⁸ ANP 101938 jul 95.

that the UN troops would be evacuated simultaneously from all three eastern enclaves.²²³⁹ The Dutchbat withdrawal will be discussed in greater detail in the Chapter 'Departure of Dutchbat from Srebrenica'.

It seemed to Gmelich Meijling that the discussion at the Defence Crisis Management Centre was about the choice between talking and fighting. He retained a preference for withdrawal to the compounds, in order to continue carrying out the assignment from there. Van Baal considered this not feasible from the compounds; according to him the blocking positions remained necessary to protect the population. The party agreed that it was not for the Dutchbat Commander to determine how long Dutchbat was to continue fighting; it was not up to a battalion commander to make such fundamental choices but rather a matter for the Security Council Cabinet.

Van Baal was the only one who considered that the decision whether, and how long, to continue fighting lay with Dutchbat. Barth then wondered who would have to make a decision on this: it was clear that it would be a political decision but who exactly was to decide, and on what grounds? He wondered whether the safety of Dutchbat and the hostages played a role in this. Withdrawal (evacuation) of Dutchbat no longer served a useful purpose, according to the secretary-general. Van den Breemen repeated that the safety of the troops was paramount, and that carrying out the assignment came second. The local commander continuously weighed this up and reviewed his available fighting power, according to the Chief of Defence Staff. As well as his earlier choice in favour of withdrawal to the compounds, evacuation of Dutchbat was now also an option for Gmelich Meijling. This begged the question for Hilderink as to what response it would draw from the Bosnian Muslims.

The discussion on talking or fighting did not arrive at a conclusion. Two decisions were made: Minister Voorhoeve would be recalled to the department and an Orion (maritime patrol aircraft) was made ready. Van den Breemen had namely proposed that he travel to Zagreb to contact the Security Council jointly with Janvier. A decision whether the Chief of Defence Staff should actually undertake this journey was not made during this meeting.²²⁴⁰

Another meeting took place at the Defence Crisis Management Centre at 11.00 hours. Voorhoeve had by then returned from Doorn.

Van Baal presented an assessment of the situation. The renewed VRS attack which was in full swing by now made it clear, according to Van Baal, that it was the intention of the VRS to clear the enclave. The blocking position was not able to do anything against the superior strength of the VRS, or to maintain it. The VRS knew about the possibility to deploy Close Air Support. The fundamental points of this discussion continued to be the safety of the Dutch troops and the feasibility of continuing with the assignment. Van den Breemen had to ask Janvier and Akashi whether the task assigned was still feasible.

Voorhoeve then asked whether Dutchbat would still be able to carry out its task if Close Air Support was provided. Hilderink answered that this in itself was still possible but the question was what would happen after air support had been given. Voorhoeve was of the opinion that the terrain restricted the chance to eliminate the VRS in one go. The message as far as he was concerned was therefore regrouping, and withdrawing to the compounds in Potocari and Srebrenica. Van den Breemen added that the enclave would have to be given up and that Dutchbat would have to leave it if the VRS would fight on. Janvier would have to take the political consequences up with the Security Council. Political action and the local situation had to be synchronized. Karremans, the local Commander, was in the best position to weigh up the conduct of the warring factions and balance it against the battalion's own possibilities to halt the VRS advance. Close Air Support involved large risks but it had to remain available to the battalion commander.

²²³⁹ Voorhoeve diary, p. 105.

²²⁴⁰ DCBC, 636. This discussion was reconstructed on the basis of notes during the morning briefing on 11/07/95 at the DCBC. No author given.

Voorhoeve feared that the VRS might surround and starve the Dutch units into surrender if Dutchbat withdrew to the compounds in Srebrenica and Potocari. Voorhoeve also feared that the ABiH might insist on the Weapon Collection Point in the enclave being opened up for its own purposes following a regrouping by Dutchbat. In his opinion, Nicolai had to be notified.

According to Deputy Army Commander Van Baal, an additional problem was that the VRS might use uniforms and armoured vehicles stolen from Dutchbat. A withdrawal from the enclave by Dutchbat also entailed the risk of misunderstandings.

At that point a message arrived that OP-N was under attack but that Janvier had not honoured a request for Close Air Support. This also proved that the information received by the Defence Crisis Management Centre was not always accurate: as shown in the previous chapter, there was no causal connection between the attack on OP-N and the rejection of the request for Close Air Support, as the former took place only after the latter. Moreover, as already shown in the previous chapter the request never got as far as being considered in Zagreb but was rejected in Sarajevo, as (according to Nicolai) Dutchbat had not been attacked and the town had not been shelled.

Barth proposed to halt the deployment of Close Air Support but Voorhoeve disagreed. Barth argued that Close Air Support would lead to escalation and would only have a limited effect. Moreover, it would result in increased risk for the thirty Dutchbat hostages. Barth guessed that the VRS would break through and that the positions of Dutchbat would become untenable. According to Barth, the Netherlands should impress upon the UN that a 'give-way' scenario could not be excluded. Gmelich Meijling thought that Karremans ought to know what ideas were bandied about in the bunker, and he wanted Karremans to be telephoned: the battalion Commander should take steps in line with Defence Crisis Management Centre, according to the Junior Minister. He did not clarify how Karremans should translate the thinking into measures to be taken. Minister Voorhoeve did not consider this necessary, he considered Karremans to be familiar with the priorities, which were to ensure a minimum number of casualties, certainly amongst Dutchbat, and after that also amongst the population.

Nevertheless Voorhoeve, like Gmelich Meijling, wanted to call Karremans to ask him personally for his assessment of the situation. Van Baal thought it would be better to call Janvier, rather than Karremans, in order to give voice to the Dutch concern in relation to the continued execution of the assignment. His idea was that it would allow for people in the bunker to control the orders to be issued to Dutchbat, and their feasibility. Focusing on the safety of the Dutch troops would result in the assignment no longer being carried out but it was up to the UN to decide that Dutchbat should consider its task to be either the safety of the Dutch troops, or the safety of the population also. Voorhoeve agreed that the UN as well as the Netherlands was faced with a problem, and that Janvier would be asked for his judgement in this matter.

Even so, Voorhoeve was in favour of contacting Karremans as he thought that the latter had to deploy antitank weapons even if Close Air Support would not be forthcoming. Van Baal, however, pointed out that the VRS tanks were shelling Srebrenica over the heads of Dutchbat. Admittedly, the task of Dutchbat was to protect the population but if the VRS went through with the attack, the safety of the Dutch troops would be threatened and their only choice would be 'a white flag and retreat'. If the VRS deployed artillery or mortar bombs, the Dutchbat Commander would feel compelled to call on Close Air Support, according to him. Van den Breemen repeated that Dutchbat was in a 'no-win' situation. A commander should decide the deployment of available weapons but should also assume that casualties amongst his own troops should be avoided, and that should therefore not happen upon giving up the blocking position. The possibility to give Close Air Support would therefore have to be worked out in greater detail.

In the opinion of Voorhoeve, the enclave would certainly be lost should Dutchbat withdraw to the compounds, with Close Air Support. Hilderink feared that Dutchbat soldiers would be taken hostage by the ABiH upon surrender to the VRS, and that the OPs would be attacked. Van den Breemen then proposed that he also discuss the evacuation of Dutchbat with Janvier in the knowledge

that this could lead to problems because an evacuation by road, taking along weapons, could lead to blockades by the ABiH.²²⁴¹ Voorhoeve decided that Van den Breemen would indeed have to personally convey the results of the discussion to Janvier that same day, as the Dutch view of action required. Van Baal would accompany Van den Breemen.²²⁴²

Voorhoeve then called Members of Parliament Korthals (*VVD-Liberals*) and Hoekema (*D66-Democrats*), respectively chairman and deputy chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Defence. He informed them that the situation was hopeless and that nobody knew what would happen to the inhabitants of the enclave and the Dutch troops.²²⁴³

That afternoon, the Interservice Committee Deputy Chiefs of Staff for Operation of the Armed Forces, were also convened at the Defence Crisis Management Centre. Hilderink, as Deputy Chief Operations of the Defence Staff for Operations chaired the committee. Also present were Air Commodore F.J.M. Vogelpoel (Air Force), Commandore R. Zeijlemaker (Navy) and Colonel C.N.J. Neisingh (Military Police). The Army was represented by the newly stationed liaison officer Lieutenant Colonel M.C.J. Felix. This rather surprised Neisingh of the Military Police, as the focus that day was on the Army, yet it was represented merely by a Lieutenant-Colonel commander, not by a higher rank (Brigade-General or Colonel). He was also surprised that there was no one else present from the Army in the bunker: he got the impression that this service branch had withdrawn to its own stronghold, namely the RNLA Crisis Staff. Evidently events at the Central Organisation (in this case the Defence Crisis Management Centre) were of less interest to the Army. What Neisingh at that time did not know was that Deputy Commander Van Baal, who was normally present when things hotted up, had left for Zagreb with Van den Breemen. Colonel Smeets, the Deputy Chief of Operations of the Army, did not join the company until later that afternoon. As explained earlier, the latter was not usually found at the Defence Crisis Management Centre but rather at the RNLA Crisis Staff.²²⁴⁴

Conclusion

We can surmise from the discussion that the Dutch Defence top did apply itself to the policy to be followed but that this for the time being remained without consequences. It is also evident from the discussion that there was a great deal of uncertainty about the developing situation. It became clear to The Hague too on 11 July that the end of the Srebrenica Safe Area was on its way, and that an evacuation of Dutchbat was not out of the question. It was a question of balancing on the one hand the question whether Dutchbat should pull out of the enclave, or on the other hand should withdraw to the compounds; and between on the one hand the possibility for Dutchbat to continue carrying out its assignment, and on the other hand whether they should consider the safety of the Dutch troops as a priority. The safety remained a priority at the Defence Crisis Management Centre but this was no different in Zagreb. It was UNROFOR policy to place the safety of the UN troops above execution of the assignment.

At that time, The Hague did not object to allowing Close Air Support, despite the concern about the possible consequences. Nevertheless, the fact that there might be casualties amongst the Dutch troops was part of the equation.

Military considerations were left to Janvier. Despite the wish of Voorhoeve as well as Gmelich Meijling to personally confer with Karremans, this did not happen. Karremans did not receive instructions from The Hague and intervention on the part of The Hague did not go beyond the

²²⁴¹ NIOD, Coll. Hilderink. Memo Maj Govaarts to Lt Col P. van Geldere, 20/01/97. Govaarts was head of the duty team at the DCBC and took notes of what was discussed at the time, which he later worked up.

²²⁴² NIOD, Coll. Hilderink. Memo 'Besluitvorming Defence Crisis Management Centre', no date [1997]. The Govaarts report states that Minister Voorhoeve decided that Van den Breemen as well as himself would inform Janvier, Van Baal and Hilderink Karremans. (NIOD, Coll. Hilderink. Memo Maj Govaarts to Lt Col P. van Geldere, 20/01/97).

²²⁴³ Manuscript Bert Kreemers, *Aan de achterkant van de maan*, p.66.

²²⁴⁴ Interview C.N.J. Neisingh, 03/01/02.

decision to inform Janvier of the Dutch views. There was no question of any attempt to interfere in the UN chain of command. All this would change a few hours later.

4. Meeting of the Ministerial Council at the Defence Crisis Management Centre on 11 July

A party of senior politicians arrived at the bunker following the meeting of the Deputy Chiefs of Staff for Operations. There was a second meeting that same afternoon at the Defence Crisis Management Centre, where Prime Minister Kok and Van Mierlo, the minister for Foreign Affairs, were apprised of the situation in the presence of Minister Voorhoeve and secretary general Barth. Hilderink provided a briefing. In case Dutchbat would have to leave the enclave somehow, four options open to Dutchbat were discussed: activation of the NATO withdrawal plan (Oplan 40104); a UN and NATO helicopter operation; an escape attempt via the northern edge of the enclave; and leaving by road, taking the vehicles. The latter would, however, have to be referred to the Bosnian Serbs, and the population would have to be taken along. It was generally feared that the Bosnian Muslims would want to block Dutchbat leaving by lying down in front of the vehicles. The question was also raised as to who would be in charge if one of the options were chosen. The answer was that this would be the UN in the case of the last option (driving off) and in the case of the first three options this would be the United States or NATO.²²⁴⁵

A surrealistic atmosphere prevailed in the bunker during this meeting. A map was projected onto the wall, and the blocking position was discussed. At some time a picture of the VRS breaching the blocking position was created and it became clear that the latter had indeed been overrun. This led to the realisation that the VRS really wanted to capture the enclave in its entirety and that operations were no longer limited to the southern part of the enclave. Voorhoeve concluded that the 'serbs had blood in their eyes'; he seemed to be a few steps ahead in his mind, while the military were still mainly thinking technocratically.

Prime Minister Kok found it difficult to choose between doing something and doing nothing. The discussions, which Voorhoeve had held with Akashi, were raised, and they heard through the American military attaché in The Hague that the United States were under the impression that Akashi had even already requested the evacuation of Dutchbat. (See also Chapter 9, 'Departure of Dutchbat from the enclave'). It was also known that Janvier in Zagreb and Nicolai in Sarajevo were evaluating the situation.²²⁴⁶ The party finally decided to call a halt to air support, after receiving the latest news; see also the section below, 'Calling a halt to further air support on 11 July'.

Following this meeting, Voorhoeve prepared for his press conference in order to announce the fall of the enclave. A decision was made at the Defence Crisis Management Centre to brief the accredited military attachés present in The Hague.²²⁴⁷

Meanwhile, Nicolai had telephoned Mladic and passed on the latest details to the Defence Crisis Management Centre: refugees were being admitted to the compound in Potocari; there were no casualties or wounded amongst the Dutch; all OPs would be abandoned; Dutchbat had been forced to leave the compound in Srebrenica; and all UN personnel were now centred on the Potocari compound. Nicolai also reported that Karremans intended to negotiate with Mladic on that evacuation.²²⁴⁸ Brantz

²²⁴⁵ NIOD, Coll. Hilderink. Note 'Besluitvorming Defence Crisis Management Centre', no date [1997]; interview C.N.J. Neisingh, 03/01/02. The impressions of this meeting are taken from the observation of Colonel Neisingh (Deputy Director of Operations Royal Netherlands Marechaussee).

²²⁴⁶ Interview C.N.J. Neisingh, 03/01/02.

²²⁴⁷ Interview C.N.J. Neisingh, 03/01/02.

²²⁴⁸ DCBC, 528. Daily Reports DCBC 11/07/95, 17.52, statements by Nicolai.

reported from Tuzla that the VRS had offered an evacuation of the Dutch, representatives of the non-governmental organisations and also of the population, with the exception of able-bodied men.²²⁴⁹

A last meeting within the Defence Crisis Management Centre on this day involved almost the entire Ministerial Council, which assembled there at about 19.30 hours.²²⁵⁰ The meeting was convened because Prime Minister Kok and the members of the Ministerial Council most involved found it necessary to bring the entire Ministerial Council up-to-date. The Prime Minister had opted for the bunker as the venue because this offered the best chance to have the coordination staff at Defence, who had maintained contact with the former Yugoslavia, present an assessment of the situation there and then. He did not want to drag them away from their job by having them come to the *Trêveszaal* (the usual meeting place of the Ministerial Council).²²⁵¹ Ministers present were told that the Bosnian Serbs had overpowered the enclave. According to the reports, no Dutch soldiers had been killed, even though this was stated with reservation. The briefing continued: thirty hostages were in the hands of the VRS; Dutchbat and the garrisons at most OPs had retreated to the Potocari compound. Various Dutchbat soldiers were on their way to Potocari, accompanied by 7000 refugees. Karremans conferred with Mladic on the admission of aid convoys, unopposed departure of the refugees and of the battalion, along with the weapons. Nor was it a coincidence that the attack took place a week before the realisation of the Rapid Reaction Force, and a week before Dutchbat was relieved.

The fear was voiced within the Ministerial Council that the VRS attack would not be restricted to Srebrenica; Zepa and Gorazde were also indefensible and might fall shortly. It was hoped that Dutchbat would receive permission for departure to Serbia or to Central Bosnia. Karremans was free to act according to his own judgement. This had proved essential in order to prevent loss of lives, and it also became clear that this had always been given the highest priority in discussions with Karremans. He seemed to have succeeded in this respect. The Ministerial Council also judged that Dutchbat had no chance of defending the enclave, in view of the geographical situation and the artillery preponderance of the VRS.

The question was then raised at the meeting of the Ministerial Council on what grounds it was hoped that the Bosnian Serbs would give permission for Dutchbat's departure from the enclave. There was a possibility that the Dutch would be taken hostage in order to prevent the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force. Reports that permission for the departure of the refugees and Dutchbat had been given had not yet been confirmed. There were reports that only women and children would be allowed to leave and this gave rise to the worst fears for the men, and for a bloodbath. The Bosnian Serbs would want to prevent the men from joining the ABiH but the feeling in the Ministerial Council was that a bloodbath would not be in the interest of the Bosnian Serbs, in view of international repercussions. Should Dutchbat receive permission to leave, then this would give rise to an ethical dilemma. In that case pressure would have to be exerted on Milosevic. EU negotiator Bildt had already been approached for this purpose, and the Netherlands had requested that an emergency meeting of the Security Council be convened. Kinkel, the German minister for Foreign Affairs, had promised he would speak with the Russian Government.

The meeting also led to questions about responsibilities and a discussion on evacuation plans. It became clear that the UN was responsible for the negotiations. Evacuation without the consent of the warring factions was only possible with the support of NATO, and the United States would have to take the initiative. It was a risky operation because it would have to be done using helicopters. The time for preparation was three days and this seemed hardly acceptable in the circumstances, yet inevitable. Only the United States were able to carry out such an operation independently. All other variants would have to be subject to negotiation. The American and French Governments had offered to assist with a possible evacuation.

²²⁴⁹ DCBC, 528. Dagrapporten DCBC 11/07/95, 18.17, statements by Brantz. The statement relating to able-bodied men stems from the notes of Colonel Neisingh who was present at the DCBC.

²²⁵⁰ NIOD, Coll. Hilderink. Note 'Besluitvorming Defence Crisis Management Centre', no date [1997].

²²⁵¹ Interview W. Kok, 30/05/00.

The issue of emergency measures to deal with refugees was also raised in the meeting of the Ministerial Council. Only, those present did not know the location where provisions had to be made. The most urgent requirement was to find a safe haven. The situation, which had developed, would without doubt lead to ethnic cleansing. Negotiations with the Bosnian Serbs would therefore have to continue for as long as possible but on the other hand there was only sufficient food in Potocari to last for 24 hours.

Another question raised was whether the Netherlands was in a position to impose conditions. This seemed not possible in the circumstances. At best the Netherlands would only be in a position to submit requests. The Spanish presidency of the EU was busy preparing a statement on the situation in Srebrenica and Spain thought that the Dutch military should continue to offer protection to the local population. In that case the Netherlands was faced with the difficult choice of deciding between continuing a humanitarian assignment, or the safety of their own troops. The question was asked whether the battalion commander should make that decision. The Ministerial Council considered this a matter for later; saving human lives was paramount for the time being. During the battles much of the focus had been on the safety of their own troops; after the fall, attention would have to be paid to the Bosnian Muslims but the question was how long that would be possible. A scenario, which saw Dutchbat leaving, taking along all refugees was difficult to imagine.

A question of an entirely different order was how Parliament and the media should be informed. The intention of the Ministerial Council was to invite the chairmen of all parliamentary parties for a briefing at the Ministry of Defence. The hope was also in this way to prevent a parliamentary debate in the near future, and to postpone a parliamentary debate already planned for 12 July. The idea behind the postponement was to exercise reticence in the comments on the events for the time being.²²⁵²

In retrospect, Prime Minister Kok said that the discussions in the Ministerial Council on the situation as it had developed in Srebrenica had been emotional that evening. There was a growing feeling of powerlessness, due to the fact that it was extraordinary difficult to determine the consequences of the enclave being overrun. There was uncertainty about the position of the Dutch troops and of the population. The subject of solidarity was raised repeatedly in the discussion, which according to Kok resulted in the conclusion that they were responsible for the fate and future of the population, in the knowledge also that the possibilities for Dutchbat in the newly created circumstances were completely different to the role assigned earlier. Kok thought that there was no question of conflicting ideas in the bunker on the evening of 11 July. The emphasis was on different points relating to emotional involvement with the population as well as with the Dutchbat troops.

Kok could in no way agree with a description which indicated that there were opposing views.²²⁵³ Such a description could for instance be found in *Vrij Nederland*, where Leonard Ornstein posed that disagreement had arisen in the Ministerial Council and a fierce debate had raged during which Pronk, the Minister for Development Cooperation, had in an emotional manner drawn attention to the interests of the refugees, and Voorhoeve considered safeguarding the troops as the most important task, with Van Mierloo midway, and Kok shifting from safeguarding Dutchbat to safeguarding the Muslims.²²⁵⁴

According to Voorhoeve, harmony between political authorities and the military had been good in those days. There had been no disputes on the type of action. Voorhoeve added that he had not done anything different to what the military also considered had to be done. He had not been able to judge everything himself, and the military also knew that they could not assess the situation properly from The Hague. That could only be done by the UN troops locally.

²²⁵² Objectivized summary for the NIOD investigation of the Ministerial Council meeting on 11/07/95.

²²⁵³ Interview W. Kok, 30/05/00.

²²⁵⁴ Leonard Ornstein in *Vrij Nederland*, 09/09/95.

Voorhoeve is on record as saying that he minded the retrospective criticism by Couzy. He thought it artificial and contrived criticism on the part of someone who had visited the bunker only a few times. On one of these occasions, Voorhoeve had a discussion with Couzy on the order to take up the blocking positions, which Dutchbat had received from Zagreb. Couzy had said then that the order had to be carried out. There was no alternative, even if it might cost human lives, as the white vehicles were sitting ducks. The only alternative according to Couzy was to pull back Dutchbat. Couzy suggested this but then rejected it again as not feasible. A worried Couzy then left the bunker, saying that he expected things to turn out badly, according to Voorhoeve.²²⁵⁵

Couzy was indeed not often found at the Defence Crisis Management Centre during those days. He generally sent his deputy, Van Baal. Neither did he visit RNLA Crisis Staff much, though he was kept informed by telephone of important developments. In his memoirs, Couzy indicated that he did not like to be in the way of the staff on duty, and that it was impossible for him to influence the situation.²²⁵⁶ Voorhoeve participated in the debate on the shopfloor through his presence at the Defence Crisis Management Centre, in contrast to Couzy; the latter hardly ever did this, and was merely kept informed. Even though Couzy could not make decisions, his conduct could create distance to those who had to make decisions. On the other hand, the Minister knew himself to be surrounded by his direct advisers, the lines were short and decisions could be arrived at quickly when the situation hotted up.

The question remains whether the political authorities should have gotten involved in discussions at the Defence Crisis Management Centre as happened here. The question was prompted by ex-Minister of Defence Ter Beek, amongst others. The latter said that he would not have done so in his place.²²⁵⁷ But this is an individual consideration: elements such as commitment, solidarity and a feeling of responsibility may also play a role, including for members of the government other than those directly involved.

5. Calling a halt to further air support on 11 July

One of the few examples where The Hague concerned itself with the operational execution of the assignment in Bosnia related to the attempt to halt Close Air Support, when the Bosnian Serbs threatened to kill the Dutch military hostages if air support continued. This topic is dealt with in detail in this section. We will look at the extent to which the Dutch attempt to intervene actually had any effect, and also how the UN tried to cash in on this.

Remarks made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the UN, Akashi, do not indicate clearly why air support was cancelled. Akashi said in a meeting in Zagreb on 12 July, which Janvier also attended, that the Dutch Minister of Defence had called him the previous day. He said that Voorhoeve had requested the air actions be cancelled, due to the threats against his troops. Akashi said that he therefore had no choice in this respect but he did accept responsibility for the decision. Akashi also reported the request by Voorhoeve during a TV interview that day. He did add then that it had also been impossible to continue air support for another reason: Dutchbat and the VRS were too close together, according to him.²²⁵⁸ Akashi mentioned to SACEUR Joulwan later in July that he would have been prepared to continue deploying air power, if the Dutch Minister of Defence had not stepped in.²²⁵⁹ On the following day,²²⁶⁰ Akashi also remarked that air support had been discontinued at the

²²⁵⁵ Interview J.J.C Voorhoeve, 15/04/97.

²²⁵⁶ Interview M.C.J. Felix, 06/04/00; Couzy, *Mijn jaren als bevelhebber*, p. 161-2.

²²⁵⁷ Interview A.L. ter Beek, 01/12/99.

²²⁵⁸ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Banbury diary, SRSG's briefing 12/07/95.

²²⁵⁹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 22/07/95, No. Z-1229.

²²⁶⁰ The first discussion dated from 18 July, the second from 19 July. The report of the interview with Joulwan was therefore compiled at a later stage.

request of Voorhoeve at a meeting with the North Atlantic Council.²²⁶¹ Akashi stuck to this reading in his interview with the NIOD in 1999; at the time he had cancelled a new wave of Close Air Support following a telephone call by Voorhoeve. The telephone call had been the deciding factor for him.²²⁶² Boutros-Ghali shared the criticism of Akashi. As soon as Voorhoeve heard that an air campaign had started, he immediately rang to say that the Dutch troops were too close to the Bosnian Serb infantry and that their lives would be in danger during an air campaign. Akashi then had no other choice than to postpone the air campaign, according to Boutros-Ghali in his memoirs.²²⁶³

So Akashi gave a different representation of the state of affairs shortly after 11 July than he did after a longer period had passed. Shortly after 11 July he accepted responsibility for the decision to suspend and at that time he was not yet hiding behind Voorhoeve. He reported to New York that ‘Admiral Smith has agreed to our request, proposed by the Netherlands Minister of Defence to the SRSG, to suspend air presence and Close Air Support missions over Srebrenica. It is our view that they would endanger the civilian population and our own personnel who are now intermixed with Serb forces.’²²⁶⁴ Janvier also confirmed the postponement of Close Air Support in a letter to Admiral Leighton Smith, giving the following reason: ‘the extreme confusion on the ground in the Srebrenica area and especially the current BSA [VRS] threat to the thousands of Bosnian refugees in the northern part of the area, as well as the UNPROFOR forces’. Janvier himself did not refer to any political reasons for the decision and did not mention the intervention on the part of Voorhoeve.²²⁶⁵

Janvier also offered different readings for the reasons for cancelling air support. During the meeting with Akashi on 12 July Janvier only said that there had been sound military arguments in favour of cancelling Close Air Support. The troops had indeed been too close together to continue air support, according to Janvier.²²⁶⁶ But on the night before Janvier had said to Van den Breemen, the visiting Chief of Defence Staff, that he himself had decided to cancel the second wave of air support following the threat by the VRS to kill the population and the hostages.²²⁶⁷ According to Colonel De Jonge, this Bosnian Serbian threat only played a limited role in the decision-making process on calling a halt to Close Air Support within UNPF headquarters, as the respective information did not arrive at Zagreb until later.²²⁶⁸ In this sense, the call by Voorhoeve to Akashi met the objective Voorhoeve had intended: to pass on the information more quickly than was possible via Dutchbat and the UN chain of command.²²⁶⁹

Kok, Van Mierlo and Voorhoeve were present at the Defence Crisis Management Centre on the afternoon of 11 July, together with a number of civil servants, when the news arrived that the Dutch military hostages would be killed if the third wave of air support were to take place. This message from Brantz in Tuzla was received at 16.03 hours by the head of the Defence Crisis Management Centre, Commander P.P. Metzelaar.²²⁷⁰ The message had arrived at Dutchbat at 15.50 hours, i.e. more than one hour after the first wave of Close Air Support had taken place and during which bombs had been dropped (no bombs had been dropped during the second wave).²²⁷¹

²²⁶¹ DCBC, 925. Code Feith NAVO 1097, 19/07/95, Conf.

²²⁶² Interview Yasushi Akashi, 25/11/99.

²²⁶³ Boutros-Ghali, *Unvanquished*, p. 238.

²²⁶⁴ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1136.

²²⁶⁵ DCBC, 664. Letter Lt Gen B. Janvier to Admiral L. Smith, 11/07/95.

²²⁶⁶ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Banbury diary, SRSG's briefing 12/07/95.

²²⁶⁷ SMG 1004/85. Brief report on the meeting between CDS and PBLs at FC UNPF (also present COS UNPF), 11/07/95.

²²⁶⁸ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

²²⁶⁹ Deputy Force Commander Ashton received a telephone call from Deputy SACEUR from NATO headquarters at Mons, after Janvier had left the Situation Center. This time it was Paris [sic] which asked to suspend the Close Air Support as the risk faced by the troops was too great. The report could not be verified. There are no indications that this has been the subject of an approach by The Hague to Mons. (Diary notes by Major David Last; interview 05/07/00).

²²⁷⁰ DCBC, 1975. See note on Code Biegan 382, 1/06/96.

²²⁷¹ NIOD, Coll. Karremans No. TK195118. ‘Kort overzicht van de gebeurtenissen van de afgelopen periode’ compiled by Lieutenant Colonel Karremans, 17/07/95.

Brantz also reported from Tuzla that Mladic threatened to bomb the town of Srebrenica and the Potocari compound in response to the air support, as well as kill the Dutch military hostages. It was not known at that time whether the UN or NATO was aware of this threat.²²⁷² Alarming as this report was, it was surpassed by another report. The B Company compound was said to have fallen in the hands of the VRS and the B Company commander had allegedly been taken prisoner. The first was correct and the latter was not but it did give rise to confusion. A briefing at the Pentagon on 11 July even mentioned that a Dutch commander had surrendered to the Bosnian Serbs in order to ensure the release of his troops, 'and that did, in fact, happen'.²²⁷³

Minister and chief of defence staff start ringing round to halt air support

Once Metzelaar, the head of the Defence Crisis Management Centre, had passed on the message, the conclusion of the ministers after a few minutes of discussion was that air support had to be cancelled immediately. The meeting was interrupted to allow Voorhoeve to call the UNPF authorities. In the words of spokesman Bert Kreemers: 'following some discussion, Voorhoeve calm, Kok quiet, the members of the government agreed the allocation of tasks. Voorhoeve would ring Akashi; Kok would ring Leighton Smith if necessary. Wim Kok's face was ashen.'²²⁷⁴

Before he began to telephone, Hilderink, who was responsible for the day-to-day running of the Defence Crisis Management Centre, had appealed to Prime Minister Kok. He asked Kok to telephone personally, should Hilderink not be able to reach the NATO authorities. The Prime Minister consented but it proved unnecessary. Hilderink called the Dutch representatives in Naples and Vicenza (respectively Colonel J. Beks and Colonel P.H. Koopmans) with the message to report matters to the NATO commanders. Hilderink did not ring NATO in Brussels, as it would probably be too late to pass on the message via this route.²²⁷⁵

In order to have air support cancelled, the commodore present at the meeting also used the argument that the enclave had already fallen, so that there was no longer a military reason for action.²²⁷⁶ Voorhoeve said later he would also have decided to cancel air support if he had been on his own in the bunker, and that for that reason Kok and Van Mierlo need not be held co-responsible. It was the only sensible course of action according to him. To continue would mean incurring a large and pointless risk.

Not knowing whether Zagreb also wanted to cancel air support, Voorhoeve went to the room at the Defence Crisis Management Centre where the telephones were and also began to telephone. He first rang Akashi, to say that it made no sense to continue with the air campaign. When Voorhoeve rang Akashi, Akashi told him to stay on the line, as he was talking to Milosevic on another line. After Akashi had spoken to Janvier he returned to Voorhoeve and said that Janvier was not fully in agreement that a third wave of aircraft for Close Air Support should not take place. Nevertheless, Voorhoeve was told that the third wave of attack would be stopped if there were time.

Voorhoeve then wondered whether the UN would be quick enough to immediately ring NATO. To be on the safe side he decided to do this himself, and explain what he had discussed with Akashi. Voorhoeve first tried to reach the permanent representative at NATO in Brussels, Ambassador Veenendaal, who was not at his post. Voorhoeve got his deputy, Feith, on the line. The minister told of the Bosnian Serb threat and asked Feith to pass on to Secretary-General Claes that he advised to suspend air support as the enclave had already fallen and air support made therefore no longer any

²²⁷² NIOD, Coll. Hilderink. Memo 'Besluitvorming Defence Crisis Management Centre', undated [1997].

²²⁷³ Background Briefing U.S. Department of Defense, 11/07/95, http://www.defenselink.mil:80/news/Jul1995/x071195_xback711.html, consulted 06/05/00.

²²⁷⁴ Manuscript Bert Kreemers, *Aan de achterkant van de maan*, p. 68.

²²⁷⁵ NIOD, Coll. Hilderink. Memo 'Besluitvorming Defence Crisis Management Centre', undated [1997]; Interview C.G.J. Hilderink, 11/08/00.

²²⁷⁶ Objectivized summary for the NIOD investigation of the Ministerial Council meeting held on 11/07/95.

sense from a military point of view.²²⁷⁷ Feith did indeed ring Claes but he was told that NATO wanted to leave any suspension of an air campaign up to the UN, for political reasons.²²⁷⁸

Voorhoeve then also spoke to Colonel Koopmans, who was the Dutch representative in Vicenza at the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC), of the Fifth Allied Tactical Airforce stationed there. It was more or less coincidence that Voorhoeve spoke to Koopmans there. Hilderink had first spoken with Koopmans. Hilderink said he was well aware as to how the NATO command system functioned, and that a telephone call was insufficient authorisation to suspend an operation such as this but that he rang to say that this should happen anyway. Beks (in Naples) as well as Koopmans had indeed already indicated that a telephone call was inadequate. But according to Hilderink the idea was to inform NATO as soon as possible, and neither of the Dutch colonels were indeed aware of the threat on the part of the Bosnian Serbs.

Koopmans had called the Defence Crisis Management Centre at 16.25 hours with the message that a fax with the latest news from Vicenza was on the way. When Koopmans finished speaking, Hilderink asked Voorhoeve: 'Minister, do you want to have a word?' Voorhoeve then passed on the same message to Koopmans, which Hilderink had passed on earlier: air support had to be suspended.²²⁷⁹ Koopmans later commented that Voorhoeve had told him that he had to suspend air support immediately because his people were at risk. Koopmans was not authorized to do so; he said he could only pass on the request, and subsequently did so to Major General Hal Hornburg, the CAOC director. Hornburg had responded with 'He may be right but he has to go other channels. Sorry, I have no authority to do so. He has to go to his political friends.' This message was then relayed to Voorhoeve. Koopmans did understand the action of the Minister but nevertheless considered it incorrect. Senior national representatives were stationed at NATO headquarters to ensure that Dutch policy was carried out correctly, not to carry out orders from ministers, according to Koopmans. Voorhoeve later countered this with 'if required I will transgress my authority as much as necessary. If I can avoid a disaster but have no authority, then blow the authority.'²²⁸⁰

These were not the only actions undertaken from the Defence Crisis Management Centre to have air support suspended. Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen called the military advisor of the Secretary-General of the UN, General Van Kappen in New York, stating that the wave of Close Air Support had to be stopped. Van Kappen responded by saying that this was the wrong route to take: this concerned operational decisions, which were not made in New York, something which Van den Breemen knew fully well according to Van Kappen. But Van Kappen was able to report that Janvier in his capacity as operational commander had also already reached the conclusion that continuation of the Close Air Support no longer made sense: the conditions for Close Air Support were no longer met and it was now pointless as there was no longer a boundary between the UN troops and the enemy. Moreover, the refugees were caught in the middle.²²⁸¹

Van den Breemen had also wanted to speak with Admiral Leighton Smith. The latter was at sea onboard the USS LaSalle. At the time Voorhoeve rang Akashi, Commander Metzelaar was busy passing the information on to Smith. The request seemed to have been passed on to Admiral Smith at 17.15 hours.

²²⁷⁷ Interview J.J.C Voorhoeve, 15/04/97; DCBC, 528. Daily reports DCBC, 11/07/95, 16.03 hrs.

²²⁷⁸ SMG 1004/48, Code Feith NATO 1036, 11/07/95.

²²⁷⁹ DCBC, 652. Hand-written 'logboek DCBC'; DCBC, 528. Daily reports DCBC, 11/07/95, 16.25 hrs; interviews C.G.J. Hilderink and J.J.C Voorhoeve, 15/04/97. Voorhoeve noted in his diary that Akashi told him immediately to ask Janvier to do so. This agrees with the notes in the 'logboek DCBC'.

²²⁸⁰ Lutgert and de Winter, *Check the Horizon*, pp. 411-412. The interview with Koopmans dated from 26/03/96. According to Koopmans, Voorhoeve should have approached SACEUR. This would not have been correct as General Joulwan was not a keyholder for air support to the UN. Koopmans said in an earlier interview with Frank Westerman (*NRC Handelsblad* 11/11/95) that he had referred Voorhoeve to AFSOUTH. This would seem a more correct representation. As Westerman wrote, Voorhoeve had shouted: 'stop, stop, stop'.

²²⁸¹ Interview F.H. van Kappen, 21/06/00.

A minute later, De Jonge reported from Zagreb that the third wave of Close Air Support had indeed been cancelled. According to Voorhoeve, the military within the Defence Crisis Management Centre had fully agreed with his action. Everyone knew that the enclave had already fallen and that air support could no longer make any difference. The pointless continuation would only have incurred risk, and human lives could have been lost.²²⁸²

Air support cancelled at the request of the Netherlands?

When the message from Voorhoeve that the hostages would be killed if Close Air Support was to continue arrived in Zagreb, the decision to suspend had already been made, according to UNPF Chief of Staff Kolsteren. In that sense he considered intervention on the part of Voorhoeve in fact not necessary.²²⁸³ An assistant of Akashi also said that Akashi immediately agreed with the request by Voorhoeve not to have any further Close Air Support missions carried out, after Voorhoeve called Akashi. It was a 'convenient excuse' for Akashi, because no more new missions were being prepared. Voorhoeve had not needed to persuade Akashi.²²⁸⁴

Deputy Force Commander Ashton also said that Akashi had decided to deploy no more Close Air Support even before Voorhoeve rang.²²⁸⁵ According to De Jonge in Zagreb, it was Sarajevo, which had applied the brakes. At the same time that Kolsteren had been called away for a telephone call from The Hague, De Jonge heard that the NATO liaison officer in Zagreb consulted with his counterpart in Sarajevo. De Jonge understood this to mean that the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo, following consultation with the staff there, had already called off air support on military grounds. This was rendered unnecessary because the Bosnian Serbs were outflanking the blocking position and as a result VRS troops, refugees and Dutchbat troops got mixed up. Sarajevo reported it wished to suspend Close Air Support for this reason. At approximately the same time Kolsteren, rather agitated, re-entered and said: 'The Dutch Government wants the action to be suspended.' This was no longer necessary, as the action had already been suspended for military reasons, according to De Jonge.²²⁸⁶

De Ruiter, who was in Sarajevo, underwrote De Jong's view. The suspension of the third wave of Close Air Support was not the result of the combined action of Voorhoeve and Akashi. Bosnia-Herzegovina Command received the news that Srebrenica had fallen and that Dutchbat and the refugees were withdrawing to the UN compound in Potocari from Dutchbat, the British JCOs in the enclave as well as from the VRS.²²⁸⁷ Lieutenant Colonel Milenko Indic, the VRS liaison officer, had also informed UNPROFOR headquarters at 16.35 hours of the threat to shell Dutchbat and the refugees if the UN did not suspend the air campaign. The VRS threat seemed serious, not least because it was reinforced by two mortar grenades, which had landed some fifteen minutes before on the UNPROFOR headquarters in Sarajevo. Sarajevo had already doubted whether the second wave of aircraft should have started the attack. The consideration to take action and to direct the NATO planes to an area over Tuzla was already based on the fact that even air support could no longer restore the former situation in the enclave; refugees and Dutchbat also ran a large and disproportionate risk of retaliation.

Nicolai had informed Karremans that air support remained available. Karremans had told Nicolai he had wanted to surrender to the VRS but received the reply from him that surrender was out of the question which was another reason why air support remained available.

Voorhoeve made his request to Akashi at such a time (16.50 hours) that it indeed had no longer any effect. The decision to suspend the attack had already been taken in Sarajevo. The Ruiter also

²²⁸² DCBC, 652. Hand-written 'logboek DCBC'; interview J.J.C Voorhoeve, 15/04/97.

²²⁸³ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

²²⁸⁴ Confidential interview (84).

²²⁸⁵ Interview Barry Ashton, 30/05/00.

²²⁸⁶ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

²²⁸⁷ SMG, 1004. Report of a telephone conversation [SMG] with Lt Col A. de Ruiter (BH-Command), 03/08/95.

deduced this from a conversation held later that afternoon between Janvier and Deputy UNPROFOR Commander Gobilliard. When Janvier referred to the contact between Voorhoeve and Akashi, Gobilliard also spoke of a decision already made. In the opinion of De Ruiter, Sarajevo had not understood that the Dutch Minister had also made a similar attempt until hours after the event.²²⁸⁸

General Nicolai called Voorhoeve to tell him that it was decided in Sarajevo to halt further use of air power. Voorhoeve was pleased with this. Nicolai said that internal deliberations amongst the staff had led to the conclusion to suspend air support. This had been done in consultation with Karremans, after the Bosnian Serbs had threatened to shell the Potocari compound. The reason was that nearly the entire enclave had been captured by then. Nicolai set the time of that decision at approximately 16.30 hours.²²⁸⁹

Nicolai's telephone call to Voorhoeve took place not long after Voorhoeve had called Akashi. It initially caused Voorhoeve to think that he had called a halt to the air campaign. He also said during the press conference following the fall of the enclave that the third wave of air support had been halted at the request of the Netherlands. It was only during subsequent days that he discovered that others had beaten him to it.²²⁹⁰ In a letter to Parliament, Voorhoeve neatly circumvented the issue: he wrote that the Dutch Government had simultaneously drawn the same conclusion as UNPROFOR.²²⁹¹ There was no mention of the fact that the Dutch Government had also been active in ending air support in an earlier letter by Voorhoeve to Parliament.²²⁹²

There seems to have been more involved than just 'calling a halt'. Perusal of the NATO logbooks and the UNPF reports to the UN headquarters Situation Room tells us that there was never any question of calling a halt to the third wave of attack; the only reason that the third wave of attack did not come about was not that it had been called off by Voorhoeve or Zagreb or Sarajevo but that it had been cancelled: the Forward Air Controller (this was raised in the previous chapter; it concerns Windmill 03) was under fire and it was impossible for him to identify the target.²²⁹³ At the time the message from Brantz reached the Defence Crisis Management Centre (16.03 hours), the third wave, comprising American A-10s, had already been flying over the enclave for a period of 15 minutes. The fourth wave, consisting of F-18s, got ready at 16.35 hours to enter the target area. The message that the aircraft would only be allowed to drop their bombs when the Forward Air Controllers requested it did not arrive from Vicenza until 16.58 hours, when the Forward Air Controllers themselves were under fire. In this sense no absolute brake had therefore been applied to Close Air Support. Nor did Akashi mention the suspension of the third wave of Close Air Support in his reports later on during the evening of 11 July. The third wave was aimed at a tank and infantry which besieged one of the Tactical Air Control Parties, 'but no ordnance was dropped'.²²⁹⁴

General Gobilliard had, however, ordered a pause in the attacks to give him the opportunity to consult Pale. Once Commander Kevin Donegan, the NATO liaison officer in Sarajevo, and Squadron Leader Rick Phillips, the Director of the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo, had pointed out to Gobilliard that the Windmill 03 (the commandos' Tactical Air Control Party) was still under fire, Gobilliard countermanded his order for a pause in the attacks. The aircraft left the air space around Srebrenica only when Windmill 03 proved safe and it was established that there would be no more

²²⁸⁸ NIOD, Coll De Ruiter. Letters Lt Col J.A.C. de Ruiter to Commodore Hilderink, personal, 23/01/97 and 27/01/97; Debriefing statement Lieutenant Colonel J.A.C. Ruiter, 27/09/95 with addition 22/01/02; DCBC, 528. Daily reports DCBC, 11/07/95, 16.50 hrs.

²²⁸⁹ DCBC, scattered archivalia. Letter Commander 1 Division '7 December', 23/01/97, appendix to memo S97/061/1487, 23/01/98.

²²⁹⁰ Interview J.J.C Voorhoeve, 15/04/97.

²²⁹¹ TK, 1995-1996, 22 181, No. 129 (30/10/95).

²²⁹² TK, 1995-1996, 22 181, No. 115 (28/08/95).

²²⁹³ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol. I, Resupply Eastern Encl 17/04/95 -11/07/95. Fax UNPF HQ Zagreb G3 Land Ops to UNNY Sitroom, Sincerp, 111930Bjul95.

²²⁹⁴ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1138; DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 11/07/95.

requests for Close Air Support from the enclave.²²⁹⁵ This was at the request of Dutchbat. By then it was 17.05 hours.

The aircraft in the end only returned to their base at 18.30 hours, after Janvier had asked to extend their availability for as long as possible. It looked therefore very much as if the call by Voorhoeve was indeed 'a convenient excuse' after the realisation that the enclave was lost.

The affair relating to the calling off of air support gave rise to a sequel in January 1997 due to the publication of the book by Westerman and Rijs, *Het zwartste scenario*. The authors referred to 'secret documents' in their possession in which Akashi said that air support had been ended at the request of the Netherlands. The opening paragraphs to this section refer to the Code Cables from Akashi to New York.

As indicated above, the Dutch intervention ultimately had a negligible effect on the air support operations. The intervention also arrived too late. The NATO aircraft remained in the air space near Srebrenica and it was the conditions locally which led to the fact that no new bombing missions were carried out. In that sense there was no question of calling a halt to Close Air Support. The NATO logbooks and the statements from Forward Air Controllers do not show that those carrying out air support were ordered to suspend further Close Air Support. Aircraft no longer flew in the vicinity of the enclave following a request by Dutchbat, due to the situation around the hostages. The aircraft only left after Dutchbat had confirmed it would no longer request Close Air Support. General Gobilliard even notified the VRS afterwards that although the aircraft no longer occupied air space over Srebrenica, they were still available. The aircraft only ceased to be available after 18.30 hours.²²⁹⁶ There were no longer any consultations with NATO to arrive at a continued presence of aircraft in Bosnian air space after the afternoon flights, in order to continue Close Air Support if necessary.

Janvier also returned to the subject of air support at the end of September 1995, after New York asked Janvier questions on it, in connection with the preparation for the Dutch parliamentary debate on Srebrenica. On that occasion Janvier said of the air support that it had been 'particularly complex'. However, when suitable targets had been identified and the criteria met, Akashi had adopted his recommendation to permit Close Air Support. Janvier did say this time that the NATO missions had flown until the Dutch Minister of Defence had requested suspending them. Janvier once more pointed out that Close Air Support was not a panacea, and that it would not have been able to prevent the fall of the enclave.²²⁹⁷

Janvier repeated that view in November 1995 in the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, when he said that Close Air Support was not a magic wand. Janvier also thought that he did not need to answer for his decisions in his capacity of operational commander. He added that he had not decided on a large-scale deployment of air power because this would inevitably have resulted in the death of dozens of Dutch soldiers. Janvier wondered in this respect what the Dutch Government would have had to say about this. He was of the opinion that the tendency to criticize personnel deployed for peace operations should cease: 'the assassination of UNPROFOR-peacekeepers by words or by bullets must stop', according to Janvier.²²⁹⁸

The conclusion is that Akashi during the short period all this took place could agree with Voorhoeve's request and at the same time see it as a convenient excuse to hide behind, only to subsequently honestly believe in their explanation.

²²⁹⁵ NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. 'sequence of Events CAS Missions Srebrenica. Origin not indicated, probably 5ATAF Cell in Zagreb.

²²⁹⁶ SMG 1007/25. Debriefing Sergeant Major Van Meer, Camp Pleso, 22/07/95; DCBC, 623. AFSOUTH Air Desk Log, 11/07/95, 1630Z; NIOD Coll. De Ruiter. Telephone Conversation General Gobilliard - General Gvero, 11/07/95, 18.10 hrs.

²²⁹⁷ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 27/09/95, 1768.

²²⁹⁸ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05279. Code Feith NAVO 1467, 03/11/95. Janvier made his statements in the presence of Feith.

6. The discussions in Zagreb on 11 July

In addition to the question of how to get Dutchbat out of Srebrenica, the problem posed by the refugees was also one of the main topics under discussion in Zagreb on the evening of the fall. This section offers an impression of the discussions in Zagreb during the evening of 11 July. Please refer to Chapter 9 of this Volume 'The departure of Dutchbat from the enclave' for thoughts on and arrangements for the departure of Dutchbat. The departure and the treatment of the refugees will be discussed in detail in Volume IV chapter 4.

During a meeting with Akashi on 11 July, which started at 18.30 hours, Janvier said that he feared that the end of the 'safe area' concept had begun now that Srebrenica had fallen. He thought that the other two eastern enclaves, Zepa and Gorazde, would follow. This meant that the Bosnian Serbs would have achieved their objectives in relation to the 'map' for the division of Bosnia. The Bosnian Serbs had used the attack by the ABiH on Visnjica as an excuse to overrun the enclave, according to Janvier. Nevertheless, an attempt had been made with 'firm intentions' to stop the Bosnian Serbs. UNPROFOR 'did battle on the ground' and air support had been deployed to protect the Dutch units. The power ratios had prevented the continuation of the battle after the VRS had threatened to kill the hostages if air support had been continued. Janvier decided to retrieve the authority allotted to Gobilliard, because he had had to hear from Gobilliard that Sarajevo had advised to suspend air support. Janvier also pointed out that he had issued an order to leave the OPs at the time he initiated Close Air Support. He did not want to risk the ABiH blocking the withdrawal, as had happened at OP-F, which had cost Dutchbat a fatality.²²⁹⁹

Akashi wondered what had happened to the ABiH. Janvier said to have asked the same question and to have understood that the ABiH troops had 'disappeared'. Janvier thought therefore that public statements should indicate that the ABiH had been not very active in defending the Safe Area. Akashi offered a short comment on this: if that would be stated, then Janvier's statement in May 1995 before the Security Council would be recalled (see Chapter 1): Janvier had said there that UNPROFOR could be withdrawn from the eastern enclaves. According to Akashi this would be accompanied by the comment that Janvier had been wrong, because the ABiH would clearly not have been strong enough to defend the enclave by itself. Deputy Force Commander Ashton in turn countered this by saying that the converse was also possible, namely that the ABiH had chosen not to defend itself.²³⁰⁰

The fundamental question for Janvier remains as to why the ABiH had not deployed the weapons available against VRS. Janvier estimated that 1500-1800 VRS troops had been involved in the attack, as well as a squadron (four or five) tanks. He wondered why the ABiH had not been able to deal with a concentration of VRS troops, and what the ABiH had in fact done to assist in the defence of Srebrenica. It was clear to Janvier that the ABiH had shown little zest for battle. Janvier also considered that Mladic would begin to demand that the ABiH lay down its weapons. Zagreb, however, did not have any information as to where the ABiH was in the area around Srebrenica.²³⁰¹

Akashi then raised the possibility of allowing the refugees from Srebrenica to go to Serbia, in view of the closeness of the border. But he also realized that this would mean crossing the territory of the Republika Srpska, and that the population would want to go to Tuzla. The local UNHCR staff in Srebrenica had already made it clear that everybody preferred to leave the enclave. An evacuation was mainly a mass logistical operation, in Akashi's opinion, for which the Bosnian Government would have to give its consent.

Akashi thought that a departure of the population would have to be prepared along the UNPROFOR as well as the UNHCR line. UNHCR was preferred, as they had no part in the violence

²²⁹⁹ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Banbury diary, SRSG's meeting 11/07/95.

²³⁰⁰ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Banbury diary, SRSG's meeting 11/07/95.

²³⁰¹ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Note Janvier to Only Cable Annan to Akasi, 11/07/95, No. 2280; NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Banbury diary. SRSG's briefing 12/07/95.

exercised by UNPROFOR in Srebrenica. UNHCR representative A.W. Bijleveld immediately pointed out during the meeting that the VRS would probably not allow the men to leave the enclave, and that this could give rise to problems. The staff in Zagreb also predicted that the two parties would use tactics to humiliate each other. An international presence remained desirable for that reason. Bijleveld therefore wanted to keep Dutchbat in the enclave until the logistical operation to move the refugees out of Srebrenica had started to take shape. In any case, UNPROFOR troops were required at locations where refugees assembled before departure. The VRS would there try to separate the men from the women and children, according to Bijleveld, unless the VRS was not able to keep control of so many men. Escorts for the aid convoys were also required but the warring factions might well object to these also.²³⁰²

Akashi also remarked to his staff during this meeting that Boutros-Ghali wanted to make political use of the fall of Srebrenica. The UN Secretary-General now wanted to achieve the 'rationalisation and regrouping' of UNPROFOR, which he desired. In practice, this meant a withdrawal by UNPROFOR from the three eastern enclaves. UNPROFOR would in that case be faced with a 'major media offensive' feared Akashi, because leaving Zepa and Gorazde could at that time not be sold as a policy in any case. Janvier's experience was no different, because his suggestion to leave the eastern enclaves and to concentrate UNPROFOR in Central Bosnia had led to a storm of protests in the Security Council as recently as May. But Janvier was in favour of maintaining a symbolic UN presence. This begged the question as to how the Security Council would have to be involved in instructions on a withdrawal from the Safe Areas. Admiral Leighton Smith suggested to Akashi to have New York consider asking the Security Council for support from NATO for the withdrawal, but Smith did not enter into details.

The discussion foundered on the urgency of the problem to first get the refugees out of Srebrenica, even though it was possible that similar problems would arise in Zepa and Gorazde during the next few days. But Akashi did not just want to brush aside the thoughts of Boutros-Ghali: they had to be considered. Others however did push aside his thoughts: a separation of men and women under the eyes of UNPROFOR would be a 'disgrace of highest order', and would capture the full attention of the media. It was decided to go down two routes: UNHCR would have to establish a plan for the evacuation of the population and Zagreb would have to inform New York of the problems regarding the enclaves. The estimation during this meeting was that the VRS would not be able to manage 20,000 refugees; the Bosnian Serbs would want to be rid of them. This would be the start of a forced deportation and UNPROFOR would be accused of helping it along. Akashi was not overly pessimistic: 80 percent of the population of Srebrenica were already refugees.

Another question Janvier asked himself was who would force the Bosnian Serbs to leave Srebrenica again and what means would be deployed.²³⁰³ This question did not yet lead to a discussion on 11 July but it did so the next day in the Security Council. Please refer to Chapter 8: 'Plans for the recapture of Srebrenica' for this discussion.

The UN headquarters in Zagreb and Sarajevo had little time for reflection and an analysis of the reasons for the attack on Srebrenica, due to the plans to recapture Srebrenica and especially due to the acute problems which would arise in respect of the relief of the refugees from Srebrenica on arrival in Tuzla. Moreover, it was not known in Sarajevo and Zagreb where the men were who had left Srebrenica, and there was a risk of an attack on Zepa.

Akashi did look for an explanation for the attack on 12 July but he had to admit that this was speculation. Akashi also complained that there had been no overview of the VRS military activities, and that he had not had any intelligence at his disposal, which might have indicated an attack. The most probable reason for the VRS campaign seemed to Akashi to be that the Bosnian Serbs wanted to show off their military force after the Croat attacks on the Republika Srpska Krajina, and the series of attacks

²³⁰² NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Banbury diary, SRSG's meeting 11/07/95.

²³⁰³ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Banbury diary, SRSG's meeting 11/07/95.

which the Bosnian Muslims had undertaken since March. In addition, the Bosnian Serbs could have intended to protect their own terrain against raids by the ABiH, and in order to gain access to the bauxite mines and roads in Srebrenica, according to Akashi; this would make securing their own terrain easier, and free up scarce troops. Akashi also saw certain proof in the attack that the Bosnian Serbs were prepared to continue their military operations against the will of the international community. A last possibility suggested by Akashi was that the Bosnian Serbs had wanted to deliberately change the map and demography of the area in order to force negotiations on the peace process in a direction favoured by them.²³⁰⁴

7. Prior knowledge of the attack in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

There was no official response on the capture of Srebrenica from Belgrade. The under Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cicanovic, said only that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (formed by Serbia and Montenegro) opposed the use of violence: it was counterproductive and did not lead to a political solution. Belgrade opposed the ABiH attacks from the Srebrenica Safe Area as well as the attack on it by the Bosnian Serbs. But even though Belgrade did not support the Bosnian Serb regime in Pale along official channels, the media and the population in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were certainly on the side of the Bosnian Serbs, according to Akashi's representative in Belgrade, Miakotnykh. Belgrade was also of the opinion that the logic of the developments pointed with a high degree of probability in the direction of a continuation of the attack on Zepa and Gorazde.²³⁰⁵

The fact that there was no response from Belgrade begs the question as to whether Belgrade was aware of the intended attack on Srebrenica. This question must be answered in the affirmative. There were VJ officers at the VRS headquarters in Han Pijesak.²³⁰⁶ The Dutch Military Intelligence Service also concluded from confidential conversations some months after the fall that the decision to attack Srebrenica was coordinated with Perisic and Milosevic but made without consultation with Karadzic.²³⁰⁷ Another western intelligence service was also of the opinion that the VRS operations in July 1995 had been coordinated with Belgrade. This service was of the opinion that not only military but also political coordination had been involved. The latter fitted in with the thought of the idea 'to clean up the map' relating to the peace plans, in which progress of the negotiation process had been caught up.²³⁰⁸ Negotiator Carl Bildt had never been able to establish whether Milosevic had been aware of the attack on Srebrenica. According to Bildt, the VJ military were of the opinion that Milosevic did not know much about military matters and that is why they preferred to keep him out of it.²³⁰⁹ The extensive indictment against the former Yugoslav President Milosevic before the Yugoslav Tribunal offers no clues on this point.²³¹⁰

NIOD interviews showed that it was largely known in the circles around the former Yugoslav President Cosic on 4 July that something was about to happen but there also it was not known exactly what. Sympathising 'political friends' of Cosic had indicated this. In these circles there was a certain fear that it would come to extreme solutions for the Bosnian conflict. If the VRS advanced to Srebrenica then they would have to attack Dutchbat and this could result in intervention on the part of NATO. The government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia received, however, no warning from these circles lest they would be accused of being foreign agents. Enquiries at the *Republika Srpska* office in Belgrade indeed showed that they were not aware of anything in this respect. The circle around Cosic

²³⁰⁴ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 12/07/95, No. Z-1147.

²³⁰⁵ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87717, File 7-8-1, 11/07/95 – 31/07/95. Fax I. Miakotnykh, D-SRSG/CAC to FRY to Y. Akashi, M. Moussali, 12/07/95.

²³⁰⁶ Confidential interview (2).

²³⁰⁷ MID/CO. Ontwikkelingen in de voormalige Joegoslavische Federatie, 47/95, closed 141200B Sep 1995.

²³⁰⁸ Confidential interview (52).

²³⁰⁹ Interview Carl Bildt, 13/12/00.

²³¹⁰ ICTY, Indictment No. IT-01-51-I, 22/11/01.

did not renew their activities until after the fall of Srebrenica;²³¹¹ we will return to this in Part IV, Chapter 1 the Journey from Srebrenica to Tuzla in Volume IV. The question regarding prior knowledge of the attack will be dealt with in detail in the appendix on intelligence to this report.

8. Retrospective accounts relating to air support: Zagreb, The Hague, Mons, Naples, Washington etc.

The provision of air support to Dutchbat was one of the main issues under discussion after the fall of the enclave and also before it, together with the deportation of the population and the fate of the men fleeing from Srebrenica. In Chapter 3 called ‘No air actions upon release of the hostages: a deal between Janvier and Mladic?’ we already attended to the question whether bargains had been struck at the time in relation to the release of UN personnel taken hostage, in exchange for a decision no longer to proceed with air campaigns against the Bosnian Serbs, or whether Dutchbat was denied air support because the UN top wanted rid of the enclaves was already attended to. Our conclusion was that a direct link between these issues and the fall of Srebrenica could not be established.

A further discussion broke out on the question whether air support had been too little and too late. The UN and NATO each had their own ideas on this.

An entirely different question relates to the issue whence the belief on the part of Dutchbat regarding the arrival of air strikes in the early morning of 11 July originated. This section starts by discussing the various interpretations of the air support at Srebrenica. We will then try and disentangle the views held by the various headquarters and players in respect of the deployment of air power on 11 July 1995.

General Janvier told visiting General Van den Breemen on the eve of the fall that he thought that UNPF had done what had to be done. Janvier was of the opinion that Mladic had miscalculated, as public opinion in the West would now turn acutely against the Bosnian Serbs. Janvier was right as far as the latter was concerned but that was a matter for later. By no means everyone agreed with Janvier’s verdict that UNPF had done enough.²³¹²

His stand also led to the question as to how effective the deployment of air power had been at Srebrenica. Many different views and opinions prevailed, some of which had been voiced even before the fall of Srebrenica. General Smith in Sarajevo, for instance, did not believe that air power could protect the population in the Safe Areas.²³¹³ And Admiral Smith in Naples had explained earlier to the British Foreign Secretary Hurd that it was a myth that the enclaves could be defended and protected from the air. He had pointed out that the VRS conducted most attacks with mortars which could be moved, placed in position or hidden by a handful of persons within the space of a few minutes. Air support could achieve nothing in this kind of situation.²³¹⁴

Air support came also up in a discussion on 10 July in the Prime Minister’s Office at which Prime Minister Kok, Ministers Van Mierlo and Voorhoeve, Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen and the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff Operations Hilderink were present. During the discussion it was also mentioned that ‘massive CAS’ could not deliver the desired solution, namely retention of the enclave, from a military point of view, not least because the VRS might deploy its artillery in a reprisal.²³¹⁵

Only the most senior military NATO authority in Europe, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) General Joulwan, struck a completely different note. He thought that air power might have been able to save Srebrenica but only if Srebrenica had been declared a Heavy Weapon

²³¹¹ Interview Vladimir Matovic, 16/12/99.

²³¹² SMG 1004/85. Brief report of the meeting between CDS and PBLs at FC UNPF (also present: COS UNPF) 11/07/95.

²³¹³ NIOD, Coll. Smith. BHC Situation Report signed Lt Gen R.A. Smith, 05/04/95.

²³¹⁴ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

²³¹⁵ ABZ, DAV 999.241. Memo DAV to Archive, 12/07/95, No. DAV/MS-51/95.

Exclusion Zone as early as 1994.²³¹⁶ This would have given NATO the opportunity to undertake air strikes against heavy weapons within a radius of 20 kilometres around the boundary of the Safe Area. Yet as indicated in Chapter 1 of this volume, this did not happen due to the lack of aircraft and airfields in Italy. Joulwan's view in hindsight is, however, completely at odds with an earlier statement made during an informal meeting of the North Atlantic Council on 18 April 1994. He stated there that air power could not restore the original situation in Gorazde, where the Bosnian Serbs had started to advance, neither could it protect the other Safe Areas.²³¹⁷ There were also reservations in the Netherlands as to what air power would be able to achieve. According to Minister Voorhoeve, the idea, which arose later amongst commentators, that air support could have saved the enclave, had never existed within the Ministry of Defence.²³¹⁸

The same view was prevalent during an informal 'brainstorm' at the North Atlantic Council on 14 July, in which the chairman of the Military Committee, British Field Marshal Sir Richard Vincent and SACEUR Joulwan also took part. Close Air Support merely resulted in a rather limited outcome and was in most cases not able to turn events around, according to Vincent. Joulwan emphasized that the UN authorisation for the deployment of air support in Srebrenica had come extremely late, and that Janvier and Akashi had attached the strict condition that action could only be taken against 'a smoking gun'. This even led to a discussion started by Hunter, the American Permanent Representative at NATO, whether NATO could also impose demands and decline UN requests for air support. Otherwise NATO ran the risk of cutting a poor figure, or, in the words of Vincent who agreed with Hunter on this point: 'is it worth it?'

Concern for the credibility of NATO could also be heard in the questions asked by Dutch Deputy Permanent Representative Feith. The latter wondered whether more 'high tech' ammunition had not been available instead of the 500 pounds bombs. The perception of air power amongst the general public happened to be based on CNN images from the Gulf war. He received the answer that the terrain and the weather conditions in Bosnia were quite different.²³¹⁹

Air support: too little, too late?

The tardy decision to deploy air support led in retrospect to a point in the debate. Akashi feared on the day after the fall of Srebrenica that criticism would be forthcoming on the deployment of Close Air Support, in the sense that it had been 'too late and too little'.²³²⁰ The staff in Zagreb shared this concern of Akashi's, not least because Karremans had asked repeatedly for Close Air Support, and this had been declined.²³²¹ Haris Siladjic, the Bosnian Premier, had already made some critical comments along these lines on 11 July. Akashi's advisor John Almstrom thought that there had been no suitable targets to attack, apart from the two VRS tanks. The deployment of air power could not have been effective against the VRS infantry. The artillery positions, which Karremans would have liked to tackle, were not mentioned in Zagreb. NATO liaison officer Air Commodore Rudd stated that Admiral Smith wished to avoid a debate on the subject of air support.²³²²

The question what could have been achieved in deploying air support against the VRS did result in a heated argument between Admiral Smith and Janvier. Janvier had said to Smith that there were no targets on the ground. Smith, on the other hand, was of the opinion that there had certainly been such targets but that Zagreb had merely been too late in summoning air support. If they had done this earlier, there would have been better targets for NATO, according to Smith. Janvier had shown

²³¹⁶ Interview George Joulwan, 08/06/00.

²³¹⁷ Confidential information (22).

²³¹⁸ Interview J.J.C. Voorhoeve, 13/03/97.

²³¹⁹ DCBC, 835. Code Feith NATO 1060, 14/07/95, Confidential.

²³²⁰ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 88040, File 4-2, SRSG Meeting, May-Oct 95. Senior Staff Meeting, 12/07/95.

²³²¹ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury SRSGs briefing 12/07/95.

²³²² NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury, SRSGs briefing 12/07/95.

surprise at this analysis of Smith's and had rejected it.²³²³ General Joulwan explained the controversy between these two officers by saying that their assessment of the military situation differed, and also pointed out the wish on the part of Admiral Smith to show his teeth at an early stage.²³²⁴ Leighton Smith did not care to speculate on the question whether the fall of Srebrenica could have been prevented in this way.²³²⁵

Admiral Smith had expressed himself more cautiously on this point during an interview than he had to Janvier: 'we may have been involved in this a bit late in that the Bosnian Serb forces were so close and the balance was pretty much tipped in favour of them at the point we were called in'.²³²⁶ Smith proclaimed that he would take the stand that air support had indeed been too late if it was to come to a debate on air support. He would then say that there had been targets and that earlier deployment might have yielded results. Janvier did not understand what Smith based his statement on and completely disagreed with him. Janvier added in his defence that there had been sound military reasons, on the basis of which Close Air Support had been suspended; according to Janvier, the troops had been so close to each other that it was impossible to proceed with air support.²³²⁷

The difference in views between Janvier and Admiral Smith was also evident from the fact that Janvier called the air support provided, the first example of 'real' Close Air Support on the day after the fall. Like Smith, he declared not to want any discussions on the question whether earlier and tougher action should have been taken. The focus now should be primarily on aid to refugees, and on assisting the battalion commander in his impossible task in Srebrenica.²³²⁸

The discussion was given a surprising turn by a French Air Force colonel in Zagreb, who took a stand diametrically opposed to Janvier on 14 July during the daily briefing to Akashi. During the briefing, and in the presence of Janvier, he stated that he did consider that Close Air Support had arrived too late. UNPF should have planned better to avoid situations such as those in Srebrenica. Action was taken merely in response, rather than planned in advance. The Dutchbat Tactical Air Control Party was already under fire when air support was being planned, so it would have come much too late. Deterrence had failed, and too little force had been used.²³²⁹

The discussion on 'too late and too little' did not include the time passed between approval of the request by Janvier and Akashi and the arrival of the aircraft over the enclave. Admiral Smith called the two-hour interval on 10 July 'reasonable'. It should be said that Smith only looked at his own organisation, ignoring the time which had passed between the request from the battalion commander and the approval of the request in Zagreb. As explained in the previous chapter, NATO also made mistakes which resulted in delay,²³³⁰ for instance the flying command post (ABCCC) which had not been put on alert by Vicenza (see the previous chapter).

The view of Admiral Smith that air support had been too little too late continued to exercise the minds in Zagreb. Akashi again wanted to know on 17 July what Admiral Smith thought of Close Air Support at Srebrenica. Deputy Force Commander Ashton (Janvier was on leave) replied that Smith was still disappointed and considered that Close Air Support had come too late. Smith would have wished to be warned in advance, if possible.

Janvier was said to have been told that the aircraft could only take off on the basis of a written request and this point was also raised during the briefing on this subject to Akashi. NATO liaison officer Rudd then pointed out that this was not policy, and practice also had shown differently. Janvier

²³²³ Interview David Last, 05/07/00.

²³²⁴ Interview George Joulwan, 0/06/00.

²³²⁵ *De Volkskrant*, 13/07/95.

²³²⁶ ABC World News Tonight 6:30 pm ET 11/07/95.

²³²⁷ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury, SRSGs briefing 12/07/95.

²³²⁸ NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. Diary Kolsteren, 12/07/95.

²³²⁹ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury, SRSGs briefing 14/07/95.

²³³⁰ DCBC, 747, Fax NLO AFSOUTH Naples to OCHKKlu and DCBC, 12/07/95 20.10 LT.

had been informed incorrectly by someone, or he had misunderstood. The aircraft had even taken to the air before the Blue Sword Request had been signed.²³³¹

Admiral Smith *did* think that the political will had been lacking to deploy the military power available against the Bosnian Serbs. He was of the opinion that the UN had lacked resolve and consensus on the question as to what to do, resulting in Dutchbat ending up in a situation without clear political leadership. Moreover, the Safe Area concept was not clear-cut for the situation of such an attack and neither had the UN provided clarity.²³³²

The rate of response on the part of the UN had also been too slow. As early as June 1995, Smith had urged Akashi to establish a list of targets in order to cut out a long series of decision-making procedures every time. Akashi had persistently rejected this.²³³³ SACEUR Joulwan also urged the establishment of triggers during the London Conference after the fall of Srebrenica (see Part IV, chapter 9 'The fate of the other eastern enclaves'), and before the North Atlantic Council on 14 July, after which NATO could go into action. Joulwan was afraid that too much time would again be lost otherwise, so that NATO would have no time left to plan measures for, in this case, Gorazde.

Meanwhile, some good intelligence had been obtained on the way VRS had proceeded against the enclaves. This showed that the VRS had very quickly concentrated its troops around Srebrenica 'to support forward elements already in place', and only the front echelon of these was used. This happened again later at Zepa. The detection of such a concentration of troops, and artillery being placed in position, should have been such a trigger. This proved indeed successful in the case of Gorazde. The shelling of the market in Sarajevo later also became such a trigger. NATO had also been able to plan air support at that time. The VRS could have been tackled much earlier in this fashion, according to Joulwan, if only the UN had created the right conditions. Joulwan sighed that he had been trying to establish such a trigger procedure from February 1994 until September 1995 but that the UN had not agreed. So the smoking gun became unfortunately the guiding principle, instead of the trigger principle. In his opinion, UNPROFOR had been occupied too much with the protection of its own troops.²³³⁴

Janvier's view remained unchanged. He repeated during a meeting with the North Atlantic Council on 19 July 1995 that he had gone as far as he could in giving air support at Srebrenica. The Deputy Chairman of the Military Committee, American Vice Admiral Ray, however, rejected Janvier's explanation that the UN had deployed air power to the full. And Akashi's interpretation of the political guidelines had been too limited: because the authorisation was based on 'smoking guns' only, air support had come too late.²³³⁵ Janvier also maintained during a meeting with General Joulwan on 18 July that the air support provided was 'at precisely the correct time and place'.²³³⁶ Joulwan later commented before the NIOD that Janvier himself thought that he had a thorough understanding of the meaning of air support but that this had not proved the case in practice. In the same way that Admiral Smith doubted the timeliness of the air support, Joulwan also thought that three days had been wasted during the run-up to the fall of Srebrenica.²³³⁷

NATO Secretary-General Willy Claes also returned to the air support in a meeting with Akashi on 19 July. Claes thought that Janvier had responded too late even during the first request of Dutchbat. Neither could he understand why it took the UN until 11 July to respond, after a warning had been issued to the Bosnian Serbs on 9 July (which had resulted in the blocking positions). Nor could Claes understand why Janvier had insisted on only tackling weapons actually used by the VRS for firing on

²³³¹ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury, SRSGs briefing 17/07/95.

²³³² Interview Leighton Smith, 06/06/00.

²³³³ Confidential information (23).

²³³⁴ Interview George Joulwan, 08/06/00. Joulwan had argued this before on 14/07/95 at the North Atlantic Council (DCBC, 835. Code Feith NAVO 1060, 14/07/95, Conf).

²³³⁵ DCBC, 925 and 1561. Codes Feith NAVO 1097 and 1098, 19/07/95, Conf.

²³³⁶ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 22/07/95, No. Z-1229.

²³³⁷ Interview George Joulwan, 08/06/00.

UNPROFOR. NATO had only done what the UN asked of it, yet NATO had subsequently come under serious attack in relation to the restrictions on the air support.

Akashi defended himself by saying that he had faith in the military judgement of his commanders and found it difficult to say that Close Air Support could have been effective, and whether it could have been deployed against infantry. Claes objected by saying that the Bosnian Serbs would no longer respect the rules of the game if Close Air Support was deployed on too small a scale. As soon as the details of the genocide in the enclave became known, UN and NATO would be for it. Claes predicted that Washington would then call for an end to the weapons embargo, and the European countries would want to pull out of Bosnia.²³³⁸ This was a real risk, as on the day of the fall Premier Haris Silajdzic had pleaded with American Senators Bob Dole (Rep., Kansas) and Joseph Lieberman (Dem., Connecticut) for the suspension of the weapons embargo.²³³⁹ Izetbegovic did not seem to be entirely convinced of this course. He feared that the Americans would no longer be under an obligation to the Bosnian Muslims if this happened.²³⁴⁰

Akashi passed the report of the meeting with Claes on to New York. It reflected little of the harsh criticism by Claes. According to the report, Claes had merely suggested that the deployment of air power 'may have been too late' and that the UN 'was perhaps too limiting in its use of CAS'. Akashi indicated that he had responded by saying that air power was not the best form of defence against an infantry attack. He ignored the tanks and the artillery. Janvier had added to the comments by Akashi that: 'he went as far as he could with air power, and that its use was not too little or too late, but rather just right'.²³⁴¹

During a press conference in Athens on 14 July, Boutros-Ghali was also asked whether more use should have been made of air power at the start of the Bosnian-Serb offensive. Boutros-Ghali replied then that the truth should be known, and that according to him it had been the Dutch Government who had asked the UN to call a halt to further deployment of air power. Boutros-Ghali thus blamed the Dutch Government on account of 'too late and too little', without answering the question asked.²³⁴²

General Couzy from the Dutch side also reproached NATO for having failed but he only referred to the execution of Close Air Support on 11 July. This arrived too late, and only the Dutch F-16s had been effective. 'The other planes had lost their targets, had to leave at the crucial moment to refuel, or disappeared because they were being detected by the Serb anti-aircraft defence', according to Couzy after the press conference in Zagreb on 23 July.²³⁴³ These statements were not without a trace of demagoguery.

The UNPF Chief of Staff, General Kolsteren, thought that NATO was also to blame for 'too late and too little'. It had taken another two hours after the UN had turned the key on 11 July before the first bombs were dropped. And these had even been dumb bombs, and the choice of weapons was a matter for NATO and not for the UN.²³⁴⁴ But this was neither what the NATO critics had in mind with 'too little and too late'. They had wanted to deploy air power even during the preceding days.

Air action should have taken place much earlier, much more massively and should have included air strikes for it to have been meaningful, agreed Voorhoeve. This should have taken place one or two days before the fall, even if a number of guns would undoubtedly have survived. It would have been a clear-cut signal to Mladic that UNPROFOR and NATO took things seriously. Nevertheless, the

²³³⁸ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury. Meeting Claes-Akashi 19/07/95.

²³³⁹ *AP Worldstream*, 11/07/95; Tuesday 19:24 Eastern Time.

²³⁴⁰ *Dani*, Special edition dossier Srebrenica, Sarajevo, September 1998. Izetbegovic made the statement in the afternoon of 11/07/95 during an internal SDA meeting in Zenica.

²³⁴¹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 21/07/95, No. Z-1223.

²³⁴² ABZ, DPV/ARA/00797. Code Wagenmakers 133, 14/07/95.

²³⁴³ *De Volkskrant*, 24/07/95.

²³⁴⁴ DAB. Notes of the meeting held on 01/11/95 on the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995, undated

hesitation on the part of the UN to provide air support was not the cause of the fall of Srebrenica, according to Voorhoeve.²³⁴⁵

But American negotiator Richard Holbrooke squarely lay the blame for the absence of mass air attacks on Voorhoeve. Following criticism in the American press on the tardy UN response at the attack on Srebrenica, Holbrooke pointed out that the United States had desperately urged the deployment of air power but that the Western European countries had rejected it. 'The first line of resistance to any action was the Dutch Government, which refused to allow air strikes until all its soldiers were out of Bosnia. (...) For a week I called our Ambassador in the Netherlands, Terry Dornbush, instructing him to press the Dutch to allow air strikes, but to no avail,' Holbrooke wrote in his memoirs. Neither had other European countries planned to undertake action which might endanger the Dutch, according to Holbrooke.

The remarks by Holbrooke were wide of the mark. Holbrooke must refer to air strikes *after* the fall of Srebrenica. Not only did the Netherlands not object against the deployment of air power *before* the fall of the enclave, despite the hostages, no trace was discovered of any demarche by the American ambassador in The Hague in the Defence and Foreign Affairs archives. Ambassador Dornbush consequently had to admit that Holbrooke's comments 'did not reflect the embassy's reporting'. A spokesperson at the State Department tried to put things right by stating that 'the problem was not so much with the Dutch as with the United Nations'. This should have put an end to the discussion. But Holbrooke repeated his accusations against Voorhoeve in his memoirs.²³⁴⁶ It prompted Voorhoeve to point out to Holbrooke that he misled his readers, as the Netherlands had actually agreed to the air support when Voorhoeve had been asked by the UN headquarters in Zagreb on 10 July whether there were any objections to it.²³⁴⁷ Air support no longer made sense after the fall of the enclave in the opinion of the Dutch Government, as it would have endangered the Dutchbat hostages unnecessarily.

Holbrooke confused the air support affair with something which was at issue shortly thereafter. Holbrooke was indeed after the bombing of the Bosnian-Serb positions *after* the fall of Srebrenica. Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen had approached ambassador Dornbush in this matter to ask whether the bombardments could be delayed until 22 July as Dutchbat would have left Srebrenica by then. Holbrooke advanced this by ten days in his book. It gave the erroneous impression that the Dutch Government did not want any bombardments when the VRS attacked Srebrenica.²³⁴⁸

Air strikes instead of Close Air Support?

The question remains whether air strikes in addition to Close Air Support might have made a difference. To start with, it must be said that there was not really any question of the possibility of air strikes in July. The authority for these was in the hands of Boutros-Ghali. It should be noted that Akashi had spoken with Boutros-Ghali on the morning of 11 July. At the time, Boutros-Ghali had offered to delegate the authority to deploy air strikes to Akashi. But Akashi had declined.²³⁴⁹

There were also practical reasons for not proceeding with air strikes. The conditions for air strikes as formulated by General Smith in Sarajevo were not in place, namely (1) protect the peacekeepers to avoid hostages being taken; (2) deploy offensive manpower to support air strikes and (3) let the air strikes be an integral part of a campaign rather than deploy air strikes on an ad hoc basis. All these conditions were only met at the end of July.²³⁵⁰

²³⁴⁵ Interview J.J.C Voorhoeve, 15/04/97; *Algemeen Dagblad*, 12/07/95.

²³⁴⁶ NIOD, Coll. Van den Breemen. Letter Terry Dornbush to Joris Voorhoeve, 31/10/95; Holbrooke, *To End a War*, p. 70. These reports were published on 30/10/95 in the American press.

²³⁴⁷ BSG, D 010/98. Letter J.J.C. Voorhoeve to R. Holbrooke, 03/06/98, No. D 98001199.

²³⁴⁸ Interview Terry Dornbush, 29/01/01.

²³⁴⁹ Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35 (1998), 'srebrenica Report', 15/11/99, § 301.

²³⁵⁰ Interview David Last, 05/07/00.

Philip Corwin, Head of Civil Affairs in Sarajevo, associated the air strikes with a serious risk of ‘collateral damage’. Air strikes within the enclave or on the edges would have been pointless, as there were few immovable targets. Even the deployment of Close Air Support was not a realistic option for Corwin. NATO should have bombed the VRS command centres in Pale, Banja Luka and Han Pijesak in response to the attack on Srebrenica. This would have escalated the conflict to a different political level, for which UNPROFOR did not have a mandate. The world was ready for this only after the events in Srebrenica and Zepa,²³⁵¹ when the situation within UNPROFOR had changed to the extent that UN staff could no longer be taken hostage on a large scale. Not until then could the earlier ill-concealed differences of opinion between the United States, France and the United Kingdom in particular be bridged. The British had earlier referred to French bragging; the French to the unwillingness of the American Congress, and the Americans had distrusted the British because the latter did not want to use force.²³⁵²

The only way to stop the VRS would have consisted of the deployment of large-scale, sustained air strikes but this crucially required a political decision. The period of time covering the Bosnian-Serb attack on Srebrenica was, however, too short to arrive at such a decision. The advance had simply been too fast: ‘the Serbs were taking the elevator’. Even if Close Air Support had been deployed on a larger scale, it would not have been able to achieve anything right from the start. But neither would air strikes have had much effect because Dutchbat soldiers had been taken hostage. And the large hostage campaigns in May/June, started after the air strikes on Pale, had only just been completed; as explained in chapters 1 and 2 of this part the political climate was thereafter particularly unfavourable in relation to new air strikes. There was also the risk of reprisals elsewhere and suspension of humanitarian aid.

In any case it was clear that Close Air Support, or ‘pinprick air strikes’ were not effective. The VRS had shown not to be easily intimidated by air attacks and even less by Close Air Support. The VRS was not even touched after the massive air strikes during the Deliberate Force operation at the end of August, and continued to move its troops.²³⁵³

VRS General Milovanovic, VRS Chief of Staff but Corps Commander in the Bihac region at the time of the fall of Srebrenica, confirmed that it would have been impossible for NATO to intervene on behalf of Dutchbat. The bombs intended for the VRS would also have landed on the population and on Dutchbat. Punishment of the VRS elsewhere would have been possible but no longer in Srebrenica.²³⁵⁴ But this was also judged in hindsight.

All in all, air support was not a panacea for the UNPROFOR weaknesses, as many seemed to think. As explained in Chapter 1, the deployment of air power in a peace operation was full of pitfalls. This applied to air strikes even more than to air support. The power of air strikes was considerably undermined by the fear that UNPROFOR troops and unarmed UNMOs (United Nations Military Observers) might be taken hostage. The Bosnian-Serb air defence increasingly prevented NATO aircraft from operating freely in Bosnian airspace. In addition, a decision relating to the deployment of Close Air Support could only be made after a laborious and time-consuming consent procedure. The Bosnian terrain and the weather conditions also contributed to the difficulties.

The Bosnian Serbs were not deterred from taking Srebrenica by the presence of the NATO airforce. The deterrent effect of air power had worn off, and the VRS was prepared for a possible deployment of air power. We can only speculate on the question whether the Bosnian Serbs were guided in their decision by the fact that the NATO air force had not been deployed up to that moment on the eve of 9 July to capture the entire enclave after all. It is clear from a military point of view that it would have been virtually impossible to eliminate from the air the VRS infantry who were attacking from dispersed positions, and to prevent them from overrunning the enclave.

²³⁵¹ Corwin, *Dubious Mandate*, pp. 160, 190 and 204.

²³⁵² DCBC, 835. Code Feith NAVO 1060, 14/07/95. Confi.

²³⁵³ Confidential interviews (7) and (52).

²³⁵⁴ Interview Manojlo Milovanovic, 18/11/98.

9. The non-arrival of air strikes

All misunderstandings about the arrival of air strikes on 11 July seemed to stem from telephone conversations conducted mainly in Dutch circles between the various UN headquarters. UNPROFOR contained a network open to Dutch officers and relatively closed to outsiders, to which other nationalities did not have access. This meant that anyone other than the Dutch did not always know what was said in the telephone conversations amongst Dutch officers. It contributed to the fact that others in the UN staffs were less well informed than Dutch officers about issues around Dutchbat, which in itself created new problems because it was not generally the Dutch who were in charge.

The UN report on Srebrenica dated November 1999 says of the supposed air strikes: 'It remains unclear why UNPROFOR personnel in Srebrenica were expecting air strikes to be deployed automatically. Instructions on this subject appear to have been passed over the telephone, of which no official written record exists.'²³⁵⁵

Lacking written resources, below parade the views of those most involved in relation to the supposed arrival of air strikes, to achieve at the most accurate reconstruction possible. The communication between the Dutch officials will be depicted and portrayed, starting at the Zagreb level and continuing down to the Srebrenica level. The section ends with observations made in relation to air support during the debriefings in Zagreb and Assen, and concludes with the verdict by the Hague ministries on this point.

Zagreb/Sarajevo versus Karremans/Brantz: different wavelengths...

General Smith's Military Assistant, Baxter, was clear in his view with respect to Karremans' expectation that air strikes would take place; according to him, Karremans requested 'the undeliverable'.²³⁵⁶

Why Karremans believed that large numbers of aircraft would arrive on 11 July for bombing purposes was in hindsight a mystery to UNPF Chief of Staff General Kolsteren. In his opinion, the idea could only have been based on a communication problem; he suspected that the number of aircraft involved in the operation must have been known in Sarajevo, and possibly also in Tuzla. Somehow there must have been a breakdown of communications either at Karremans end or, if Brantz also expected air strikes, in the upstream information pipeline. It came as a complete surprise (in retrospect) to those involved in Zagreb that Karremans had spoken of a 'zone of death' as the subject of air strikes had never been raised there. A battalion commander would not normally be involved in air strikes, as this was a matter for the top level. A battalion commander was generally only involved in Close Air Support, and the request procedure for air support was geared to this.²³⁵⁷

Janvier could not say anything on expectations about air strikes prevalent on 11 July at his interrogation by the French parliamentary investigation committee. He did say he regretted the confusion which had arisen but he maintained vigorously that he had never said that air strikes would take place at 06.00 hours that day.²³⁵⁸

There had been no direct contact with Karremans from Zagreb, according to Dutch Chief of Staff Kolsteren. According to Kolsteren as well as Colonel De Jonge, numbers of aircraft had never been discussed in Zagreb; this was a matter for the NATO planners.²³⁵⁹ The number of aircraft depended on the question how long Close Air Support would continue and whether NATO aircraft would be required to relieve each other.

²³⁵⁵ Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35 (1998), 'srebrenica Report', 15/11/99, § 298.

²³⁵⁶ Interview Jim Baxter, 16/10/00.

²³⁵⁷ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

²³⁵⁸ *Mission d'Information commune sur les événements de Srebrenica*, Audition de M. Bernard Janvier, 21/06/01.

²³⁵⁹ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

According to De Jonge, neither could Karremans have heard about the arrival of air strikes via NATO lines from Zagreb (the local NATO liaison cell). It was all the less likely because the erroneous distinction Karremans made between both forms of deployment of air power (air support or Close Air Support on the one hand and air attacks or air strikes on the other) were not likely to have been made along that line.

The NATO representatives in Zagreb had not had any contact with Tuzla and Srebrenica. De Jonge emphasized that only Close Air Support had been discussed in Zagreb, and not air strikes. According to De Jonge, somewhere along the UNPROFOR line a 'translation' must have taken place from the number of aircraft to the expectation of air strikes. The question as to where it had been translated wrongly could not be answered by anyone in Zagreb. De Jonge could only hazard a guess: possibly something had been interpreted wrongly under pressure and through wishful thinking in Tuzla, where the staff relied on a few hard-working people who were near the end of their tether. De Jonge had been in touch with Brantz on 10 July but not again after the conclusion of the disappointing development of the discussion amongst the Crisis Action Team, where Janvier had decided that evening not to give his consent to Close Air Support but to await the following morning. Colonel Brantz in Tuzla was a busy man according to De Jonge, much was put on his shoulders, and the staff in Srebrenica was also fully occupied in arranging all matter of things. This had prevented Dutch officers in Zagreb to pick up the phone and call Dutch officers in Tuzla or in the enclave.

One possibility not discounted by the Dutch officers in Zagreb was that the idea of air strikes had originated in the Dutchbat Opsroom (Command Post). Neither did they exclude the possibility that the use of the Dutch language had played a part: misunderstandings might have arisen because the NATO terminology was not used, even though it was more or less customary to do this even in conversations in Dutch amongst themselves. De Jonge understood in hindsight that in Tuzla as well as in Srebrenica the idea had existed that air strikes would take place but he had not been able to determine from Zagreb whether and how mutual influence between Tuzla and Srebrenica had played a part in relation to this point.²³⁶⁰

What *could* have contributed to the idea in Srebrenica (and Tuzla) that air strikes were imminent is the fact that target lists were regularly compiled and sent to Tuzla or Sarajevo from the enclave during those days. From Zagreb, target lists had been requested regularly downstream in the UN hierarchy. But according to Kolsteren this was a normal procedure, which also applied to Close Air Support. It did not necessarily point to air strikes but related to the establishment of possible targets, priorities and to listing the coordinates for the location of the targets. An indication that there was no question of air strikes lay according to Kolsteren in the fact that Forward Air Controllers were not required for air strikes. Kolsteren considered there could be no argument about this as far as the procedure was concerned.²³⁶¹

The view of De Jonge was the same. He agreed that target list were a common aid in the execution of Close Air Support.²³⁶² It had not been known in Zagreb that Karremans was asked to submit a request for Close Air Support from Tuzla on 11 July; Karremans was under the impression that a certain measure of automatism was involved in the arrival of air strikes, when aircraft were available at 06.00 hours on 11 July.²³⁶³

Neither had the subject of air strikes been raised in Sarajevo on 10 or 11 July, according to the officer in charge of operations (in military terms the G-3) in Sarajevo, Canadian Rick Hatton, who considered that the staff only prepared for Close Air Support. In this context the target lists requested from Dutchbat were only meant to prepare for missions, and to establish whether their own troops ran a risk, agreed Hatton.²³⁶⁴

²³⁶⁰ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

²³⁶¹ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

²³⁶² Interview H.A. de Jonge, 30/05/01.

²³⁶³ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

²³⁶⁴ Interview Rick Hatton, 16/11/99.

Lieutenant Colonel De Ruiter in Sarajevo was of the opinion that there had been considerable ambiguity amongst unit commanders (in other words not just at Dutchbat) on the possibilities and limitations of Close Air Support existing in June and July after the hostage-taking and the shooting down of an American F-16. There was confusion about these possibilities, and the expectations of the unit commanders had been too high.²³⁶⁵

The implementation of air support was a technical matter, according to De Ruiter. It was of no interest to a commander on the ground how the mission was flown, what the weapons were and what type of aircraft was being used. The Air Operation Coordination Center in Sarajevo only briefed the Forward Air Controllers on a mission when it was certain that the mission would take place. The Forward Air Controllers knew that only missions consisting of just two aircraft at a time were flown over the enclave; there was not much room for more. De Ruiter also emphasized that it was improbable for a Forward Air Controller to believe that air strikes would be involved, as Forward Air Controllers did not play a role in these.

The most probable explanation for the belief in air strikes was that it was not known in Tuzla and Srebrenica that the NATO tactics had been changed and that aircraft would only arrive if they could be supported by aircraft to suppress the Bosnian-Serb Air Defence, according to De Ruiter, which made the mission more hazardous. The procedures remained the same, and the concept for support to troops on the ground, including the Rules of Engagement, remained unchanged.²³⁶⁶

This begs the question whether Brantz as well as Karremans had been adequately informed of the effects of the changed tactics. It meant that aircraft destined for Close Air Support had to be accompanied by aircraft deployed in suppressing Bosnian-Serb air defence. This was the explanation for the large number of aircraft airborne.

According to De Ruiter, Karremans and Brantz were sufficiently aware of the changed tactics. Discussions had been held repeatedly between Nicolai and Karremans, between De Ruiter and Karremans, but also with Brantz, on the intrinsic meaning and ideas on which UNPROFOR guidelines for air support were based. De Ruiter had spoken more about this with Karremans than with Brantz.

Karremans should have known, according to De Ruiter, that there could never have been any question of air strikes in the sense the battalion Commander had in mind. Nicolai and De Ruiter had explained the air support procedure to Karremans as recently as 6 July, and even before then the difference between, and the possibilities of, Close Air Support and air strikes had been discussed several times. De Ruiter had stated explicitly that air strikes were not an option within the existing Rules of Engagement and the proportionality principle.²³⁶⁷

In addition, General Smith had issued a guideline from Sarajevo as recently as 29 May, and shortly after the consequences of the air strikes on Pale became visible in the form of hostages, which explained that air strikes would be deployed less frequently in future. Karremans confirmed in his book that he was aware of the so-called Post Air Strike Guidance; he also knew that air support had been reduced to a minimum. However, he wrote: 'Knowing this, I am nevertheless requesting air support'. Karremans justified this on the fact that UNPROFOR was aware of the exact location of the VRS weapons systems. In his opinion, this offered a 'unique opportunity' to eliminate a large number of them. He wrote that he discussed the possibilities of this with Nicolai but that the directives of the Force Commander and Commander of UNPROFOR had not been met, reasons for Nicolai to reject the request.²³⁶⁸

The investigators compiling the UN report on Srebrenica stated in this connection to have gained little insight in the roles played by Nicolai and De Ruiter in the process relating to the air

²³⁶⁵ Debriefing statement J.A.C. Ruiter, 27/09/95.

²³⁶⁶ Interview J.A.C. de Ruiter, 29/06/00.

²³⁶⁷ Interview J.A.C. de Ruiter, 29/06/00.

²³⁶⁸ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 160. Commander HQ UNPROFOR Directive 2/95, 'Post Air Strike Guidance', dated 29/05/95 mentioned not much more about air support than that Close Air Support and air strikes could only be deployed 'as a last resort'.

support requests, in the sense that they were not clear what they said to Karremans on the one hand, and to The Hague on the other. They intimated that information had run aground with Nicolai, so that it did not reach the staff in Sarajevo, according to one of the investigators.²³⁶⁹ General Smith's Military Assistant, Baxter, was of a different opinion. He was convinced that the staff in Sarajevo knew everything Nicolai was told at the time of the fall.²³⁷⁰

As far as Tuzla was concerned, Brantz was of the opinion he had acted meticulously by inquiring in Sarajevo about the arrival of air strikes. He also deduced the arrival of air strikes from the indicated time the aircraft would arrive over the enclave (in military terms: Time over Target). Brantz also considered that Karremans had learnt of the arrival of air strikes from Sarajevo, and that both Potocari and Tuzla notified separately by Sarajevo had arrived at the same conclusion.²³⁷¹ The assumption took greater hold through the continuous telephone communications between Sarajevo and Karremans, to the annoyance of Brantz. It interrupted the chain of command, as communications should formally take place via Tuzla.

Karremans in turn indicated that he had heard about the arrival of air strikes from Brantz. Both, and with them all of Dutchbat, therefore solemnly believed in the arrival of air strikes. The Commander had a duty to inform his subalterns correctly, accurately and clearly, in the opinion of Brantz. If a subaltern and the local commander had both misunderstood, then the blame was not theirs in the eyes of Brantz.

Brantz defended himself before the NIOD researchers as follows: "The person who told me I could not tell the difference between an air strike and Close Air Support, insults my intelligence, my professional competence and the training I have received within the Army. Of course I know the difference. But when I ask three times whether forty aircraft are setting off for the enclave, and De Ruiter answers yes twice, Nicolai says yes and a G-3 Brit says yes, then it does not stem from my imagination?. De Ruiter had even said on 11 July that two groups of forty aircraft (packages) would arrive; they required targets in the north and in the south of the enclave. Dutchbat therefore had to submit additional 'hard' targets in the north of the enclave."²³⁷²

It seems that here the seed was sown for the assumption that air strikes would arrive, despite the fact that Brantz will undoubtedly have known the difference between air strikes and Close Air Support. Three officers confirmed to Brantz from Sarajevo that forty aircraft were set to arrive. The number of aircraft gave no indication as to whether they were deployed for air strikes or for Close Air Support; Brantz' interpretation that air strikes were imminent was therefore incorrect. It was likely that there were many aircraft airborne: as well as the attack aircraft, for instance SEAD, and refuelling aircraft, flying command posts, aircraft for air presence or Combat Air Patrol, or aircraft which were not destined for Srebrenica directly.

The views of Karremans and Brantz

Brantz said that he had once more checked at 04.50 hours in the morning of 11 July in Sarajevo whether the information on the deployment of air support was still correct. He received confirmation of the data, as well as the updated target list, the composition of the aircraft package and the method of attack. The times were repeated constantly, perhaps unnecessarily: Time over Target 06.50 hours. Brantz thought that any misunderstanding was excluded. Sector North East passed to readiness level Alert State 'Orange' at 06.00 hours, and this changed to 'Red' at 06.45 hours. Everyone looked at the sky in anticipation – only to find that nothing happened, after which total confusion took hold. Sector

²³⁶⁹ Interview David Harland, 18/05/99, 21/05/99 and 25/05/99.

²³⁷⁰ Interview Jim Baxter, 16/10/00.

²³⁷¹ Interview C.L. Brantz, 11/06/99.

²³⁷² Interview C.L. Brantz, 11/06/99. Brantz and Karremans had both been trained at the Army Staff College (*Hogere Krijgsschool*) and should therefore have been aware of the distinction between an air strike on the one hand and Close Air Support on the other.

North East returned to Alert State 'Green' at 08.00 hours and everything seemed to return to normal. Brantz called Sarajevo to ask what had happened. De Ruiter told him that the aircraft had circled the enclave but that bad visibility had prevented deployment. All aircraft had gone back to refuel, and also, De Ruiter added, to await a request from Dutchbat.²³⁷³

Brantz confirmed that he received no information on air support from Zagreb from Kolsteren or De Jonge on 10 and 11 July. The only contact had taken place when Brantz rang De Jonge later that morning. Brantz had asked then whether the request for Close Air Support (which Dutchbat had submitted at 10.00 hours) had been received. De Jonge had replied to Brantz that the aircraft had been put on standby (in military terms: they were in a holding area). Brantz had then asked whether it was right that forty aircraft were involved. Brantz had understood this from Sarajevo and he would like to have it confirmed in Zagreb. De Jonge received his information on this point from NATO, from Naples and Vicenza, and he confirmed that 40 aircraft were indeed involved. Brantz retorted that he thought a second group of forty would arrive. De Jonge replied that he did not know, and would have to sort this out first.²³⁷⁴

De Ruiter had been the person in Sarajevo who passed on to Tuzla and also directly to Dutchbat that air support with at least forty aircraft was imminent, with a Time over Target of 06.50 hours. The receipt of this news by Brantz was confirmed by Major Wijsbroek, Brantz' Military Assistant. Brantz in turn passed it on to the rest of the staff at Sector North East, and then to Karremans, who had already heard it directly from Sarajevo.

The fact that Tuzla received the news from Sarajevo and passed it on to Dutchbat is also evident from the Sector North East log, which has an entry by the operations officer from Sarajevo (the Chief G-3) dated 11 July at 01.00 hours that aircraft would be airborne at 06.00 hours and arrive above the enclave at 06.50 hours. Tuzla passed the message on to Dutchbat.

When ultimately nothing happened at that time, the initial trust that Brantz and Karremans had in Nicolai and De Ruiter disappeared, as it proved to them that their information was inaccurate. This seemed a significant breeding ground for recriminations to and fro during the period of the aftermath of the fall of Srebrenica. These feelings were strengthened in retrospect by the lack of feedback from Sarajevo and the feeling that the Dutch in Sarajevo had not been in close contact with their compatriots in Tuzla in order to find out how Karremans got on.²³⁷⁵

The question remains how Brantz arrived at the idea that air strikes were imminent. The explanation is broader than merely the number of aircraft. Brantz admitted that he was not really aware of the changes which the shooting down of the American F-15 on 2 June had effected. He only learnt that the flight levels were different after the fall of the enclave.²³⁷⁶ But like Karremans he considered that all VRS targets would have to be eliminated if the objective was to halt Mladic, and this could not be done with just a few aircraft. Brantz saw the event that forty aircraft were on their way to the enclave as 'Close Air Support with an air strike impact'. It was also significant that Brantz was not aware of the smoking gun principle (the principle that air support could only be given if UN units were under VRS fire). Brantz considered these to be desk ideas, in view of the prevailing conditions on 11 July. He only became aware of this principle after statements by Nicolai and after his return to the Netherlands.²³⁷⁷ Nicolai said in May 1996 in an interview that guidelines had been established for a more reticent deployment of air power. Assistance by NATO should not be called on for the retention of a single OP, unless the crew was at risk.²³⁷⁸

Deputy Battalion Commander Franken was of the opinion that Karremans had been genuinely convinced that air strikes were imminent, otherwise he would not have enthusiastically expressed this

²³⁷³ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Diary Brantz, (version August 1999), p. 131-132.

²³⁷⁴ Interview C.L. Brantz, 11/06/99.

²³⁷⁵ Interview M.P. Wijsbroek, 10/12/97; Westerman & Rijs, *Srebrenica: Het zwartste scenario*, Annex 3D, p. 236.

²³⁷⁶ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Diary Brantz (version August 1999), p. 121-122.

²³⁷⁷ Interview C.L. Brantz, 11/06/99.

²³⁷⁸ NIOD, Coll. Westerman: 'Interview Cees Nicolai', The Hague, 15/05/96.

belief to the Opstina during the night of 10 – 11 July. Franken said that he had been more sceptical, and he added that he was *not* saying so in hindsight. He later stated that he had made his scepticism known to Karremans in the morning of 11 July, when they both sheltered in the ‘bobo’ bunker while awaiting the arrival of the expected air strikes. He considered himself not to be in a position to counter Karremans’ belief.

Karremans’ belief was greatly nourished by the reports from Brantz, also to Franken. Brantz had made it crystal clear that air strikes were involved. But Nicolai had omitted to make sure that De Ruiter, and also Brantz and Karremans, had understood this crucial point clearly, Franken judged with hindsight. Neither had Nicolai made it clear that air strikes could not be involved, and that while it was obvious to him that only Close Air Support could be involved. Franken considered this a significant explanation for the tension which arose later between Brantz and Karremans on the one hand, and Nicolai on the other.

The disaffection felt by Karremans and Brantz towards Nicolai increased in retrospect when it became known that he had rejected the first two requests for air support on the basis of arguments which did not mean much to the staff in the enclave at that time. Franken had understood these arguments to be that no aircraft were available if there was no attack on the UN, and that there was a risk of the Dutchbat and VRS troops being mixed up.²³⁷⁹

There were further reasons unrelated to Nicolai, which caused Karremans and Brantz to assume that air strikes were imminent. On several occasions there was some doubt whether the Dutchbat staff was sufficiently aware of the request procedures for Close Air Support, and the conditions under which it could be provided. This was at issue even before 11 July; Dutchbat had first been confronted with the need to submit a request for air support at the capture of OP-E at the beginning of June. Karremans did not mention this in his book. Chapter 5 discussed how Karremans went about requesting air support on that occasion, and how the outcome of considerable discussion between Dutchbat and Sarajevo was that the battalion was surprised about the result that no aircraft were available.

Karremans had also already summoned Voskamp as his Forward Air Controller during the attack on OP-E, in order to request air support. Voskamp pointed out to him that the sky was overcast and that it would therefore be difficult, but Karremans had replied that he did not care. He thought it more important that the ‘droning of aircraft’ could be heard over the enclave. Voskamp was ordered to request air support and to ensure that aircraft would arrive. He refused initially, as it was not his job according to the guidelines; it was the job of the battalion commander or his deputy. The Forward Air Controller’s task was merely to guide aircraft to their targets. Karremans persisted and even had Voskamp call Zagreb direct. Voskamp was told in reply that the weather was not ‘workable’ for air support. This gave Voskamp the impression that Karremans did not know how to ask for air support.²³⁸⁰ The question is whether together they could not have resolved the issue by discussing the formalities. Voskamp was formally correct in that it was not his job; the UNPROFOR Operations Order confirmed that the Forward Air Controller should initiate the request process (by submitting an Air Request Message to the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo) but it was indeed the commander who had to ratify the actual request.²³⁸¹

Knowledge at battalion level *did* seem to be inadequate. Dutchbat had to rely formally on the so-called Dutchbat Operations Orders, which dated from the time of Dutchbat I. These were brief in relation to air support, and did not mention air strikes at all, as it was not a matter for the battalion. In relation to the procedures for Close Air Support, the Operations Orders only mentioned that the Forward Air Controller should request Close Air Support from the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo when the battalion commander made this decision, while the commander explained

²³⁷⁹ Interview R.A. Franken, 18/05/01.

²³⁸⁰ Interview R. Voskamp, 08/10/98.

²³⁸¹ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 79, File 2.5.4, Air Support 17/08/93- 06/02/95. UNPROFOR Operations Order 14/94, 15/07/94.

the situation via the hierarchical line.²³⁸² The idea was that a well-considered decision could thus be made on the basis of information supplied by the commander. The form in which this should take place was not mentioned in the Operations Orders. The designation Blue Sword Request as a code name for a Close Air Support request did not appear.²³⁸³ Instructions for requesting air support were laid down in the UNPROFOR operation orders but these seemed not to have found their way to the Dutchbat orders. This may have put Karremans on the wrong track. On the other hand, Franken had experience with air support procedures as he had earlier occupied the post of Ground Liaison Officer in the First Army Corps.

According to Brantz the early June request had been submitted directly and without a target list to Sarajevo, against the procedure which applied at the time. The UNPROFOR orders did not prescribe that a Battalion commander had to submit his request via a sector headquarters (in this case Sector North East in Tuzla). On the contrary, the rules (Command relationships) for Close Air Support provided for a direct line from the battalion to the Commander Bosnia-Herzegovina Command (later called UNPROFOR Commander). The sector headquarters only needed to be notified.²³⁸⁴

Operational orders for the fifth allied airforce in Vicenza indicated that a battalion as well as a company commander could themselves submit an Immediate Request, and that the Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force including the Forward Air Controller could then send the request directly to Sarajevo.²³⁸⁵

Brantz was also haunted by the events in July. During a meeting with the 2nd Corps of the ABiH, Brantz said that he was worried about Srebrenica, that he had therefore urged air support and that he had been promised it.²³⁸⁶ When air support ultimately was not forthcoming, Brantz was no longer welcome at the 2nd Corps. Nevertheless, Sead Delic, the Commander of the 2nd Corps, did not complain to Sector Commander Haukland about the lack of Close Air Support, once Haukland returned from leave. Haukland had expected Delic to do so.²³⁸⁷ A representative of the at the Ministry of Defence later stated to the NIOD that question marks could be placed at Brantz as a source on what had happened and been decided in relation to Close Air Support. According to him, Brantz was not in a position in Tuzla, and should never have manoeuvred himself in such a position, to make statements on it afterwards.²³⁸⁸

The stand taken by Karremans in relation to enlisting air support changed over time in Sarajevo during the VRS attack, according to De Ruiter, possibly as a result of the changing circumstances. He alleged that Karremans had hesitated considerably about requesting Close Air Support during the initial days of the VRS attack. Karremans' stance did not change as far as his urging large-scale deployment of air power was concerned. Karremans stated on 6 July that Close Air Support was pointless in his opinion, unless deployed on a large scale.²³⁸⁹ When De Ruiter telephoned to pass on orders for the blocking positions on 9 July, he indicated that Close Air Support would be available the next morning. At the time Karremans rejected this, arguing that it would only escalate the situation.²³⁹⁰ That same day Karremans indicated in his Commander's assessment for Sarajevo that deployment of Close Air Support in his opinion was not yet 'feasible'; it would provoke the VRS to the extent that Srebrenica, the OPs and the compounds would become targets for the two rocket systems (MLRS) which were

²³⁸² UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 79, File 2.5.4, Air Support 17/08/93- 06/02/95. UNPROFOR Operations Order 14/94, 15/07/94.

²³⁸³ SMG/Debrief. Operations Order 1(NL) VNInfbat, Annex 12 Air Support.

²³⁸⁴ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 79, File 2.5.4, Air Support 17/08/93- 06/02/95. UNPROFOR Operations Order 14/94, Annex B, 15/07/94.

²³⁸⁵ DS, SN95/938/3402. FIVEATAF OPORD 45101.5, 1 May 1995, No. 1520.1/FAPP/95.

²³⁸⁶ Interview Nadia Skokic, 04/02/98.

²³⁸⁷ Interview Hagrup Haukland, 03/05/99.

²³⁸⁸ Interview J.S. Riepen, 03/10/99.

²³⁸⁹ Interview J.A.C. de Ruiter, 29/06/00.

²³⁹⁰ SMG 1007/30. Letter C-11 Pagnbat (Lt Col J.A.C. de Ruiter) to CDS and BLS, 07/11/95.

deployed north of OP-P and in Bratunac, as well as for the artillery and the mortars around the enclave. According to Karremans it would be impossible to eliminate all of these in one go.²³⁹¹

Nicolai was aware that Karremans was afraid of such repercussions and that the elimination of VRS tanks might indeed mean that the rocket systems would start firing. This was an important reason for Karremans to say that all targets which circled and threatened the enclave had to be eliminated immediately on deployment of Close Air Support. Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo, on the other hand, did subscribe to the view that these rocket systems were a risk factor but considered them less of a threat than Karremans did. According to Nicolai, Sarajevo wanted to keep the possibilities open and this was also the reason that Sarajevo had asked Karremans during the night from 10 to 11 July to pass on all known VRS positions in any case.²³⁹² This may have been the source for a significant misunderstanding. The last chapter also referred to this discussion: it was precisely this telephone conversation with Sarajevo through which Karremans received the impression that Sarajevo announced that massive air strikes would be deployed on all these targets the next morning. We already mentioned in the previous chapter that he passed on this expectation to the Opstina, ABiH and the entire Dutchbat, with the result that they were all looking at the sky at 06.00 hours. This also seems to agree with Nicolai's position: he informed Defence Crisis Management Centre on the evening of 10 July that Close Air Support was available from 06.00 hours in order to be deployed against the VRS artillery amongst other things. He also added that he would telephone Karremans in relation to this point.²³⁹³ Nicolai was, however, referring to Close Air Support rather than to air strikes.

Sarajevo proves more reticent than Karremans expects

As far as the risk run by the peacekeepers upon deployment of air support is concerned, there seemed to be two camps within UNPROFOR in Sarajevo. One group said that the Bosnian Serbs would never deliberately eliminate peacekeepers, and the other said that the risk should be avoided. De Ruiter in Sarajevo belonged to the first camp: if VRS policy was to eliminate UNPROFOR troops when possible, then there had been plenty of opportunities earlier in Gorazde and Sarajevo. VRS General Tolimir had also said in so many words that the peacekeepers in Srebrenica were not a target: the VRS was concerned with the ABiH. Occasionally a grenade landed on a UN headquarters but this resulted from deliberate action on the part of the Bosnian Serbs, in reprisal for an incident or because air power had been deployed. Such a reprisal was for instance carried out after the Pale bombardments but also on 11 July when grenades landed on the UN headquarters in Sarajevo after the air support at Sarajevo.²³⁹⁴

Karremans seemed to belong more to the second group on account of the position he found himself in; he did not want his troops to run any risks. According to Voorhoeve, Karremans therefore hesitated considerably on the question whether it would be sensible and feasible to try and eliminate the Serb artillery in one go. It also explained the confusion which arose later on the issue as to what had happened on the afternoon of 11 July, according to Voorhoeve - air strikes or air support. According to the Minister, the static VRS positions, about which Voorhoeve was notified that there were not less than forty around the enclave, indicated the former. Voorhoeve had seen some of these himself through a telescope when he was in the enclave in September 1994: 'You looked straight into the face of the Bosnian Serbs who were playing cards next to the guns, and looked down onto the enclave. They then picked up their telescope because they saw that they were observed through the telescope.' The

²³⁹¹NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Letters Commanding Officer 1(NL)UN Infbn (Dutchbat3) to Commander Bosnia-Herzegovina Command through Commander Sector North East, 07/07/95, No. TK95112 and 09/07/95, No. TK95113.

²³⁹² Interview C.H. Nicolai, 09/07/99.

²³⁹³ DCBC, 528. Daily reports DCBC, 10/07/95, 21.58 hrs.

²³⁹⁴ Interview J.A.C. de Ruiter, 29/06/00.

fact that attacking and firing objects had been bombed would indicate air support on the other hand.²³⁹⁵

Karremans considered the hoped-for arrival of large numbers of attacking aircraft as deliverance, according to Franken, in a situation which was hopeless from a military point of view. In these circumstances only air strikes on as many VRS targets as possible could have brought relief, according to the battalion commander. It was not so much the VRS infantry that filled Karremans with dread, but rather the artillery. The infantry tread wearily out of fear for losses. VRS artillery did not fire on Dutchbat but on the refugees. Karremans therefore considered that the VRS artillery, as well as the tank, had to be eliminated. Close Air Support was not the answer.

A massive deployment, simultaneously on the targets listed, matched the tactical picture in Franken's opinion also; a pinprick would only provoke the anger of the VRS. Franken considered the arrival of the two F-16s as of little use from a military point of view, certainly after Dutchbat had quite clearly outlined the threat posed by the artillery. Franken expected that the VRS artillery deployed in the north would be tackled after the attack on the VRS tanks; the former had a high priority for him as the Potocari compound was within reach of the artillery.²³⁹⁶

According to De Ruiter in Sarajevo, people there found it difficult to go along with Karremans's ideas. They believed that Karremans took it for granted that air support had to be provided if requested by him. They also noticed that Karremans assumed as a matter of course that, once he had submitted a request for air support, it applied for some time. Karremans made it clear that he considered it overly bureaucratic to submit a request repeatedly; Sarajevo alleged that he had little understanding for the context in which the senior military and political level processed requests, and for the pros and cons which Dutchbat was not in a position to grasp. De Ruiter said, for instance, that Karremans did not appreciate the political context that negotiator Bildt was involved, which restricted Sarajevo's scope for action at the time.²³⁹⁷ This referred to the discussion on 8 July, which has already been mentioned in the previous chapter.

This begs the question, however, whether in this situation Karremans could be expected to appreciate the context. It certainly seems to be the case that Karremans was not well-acquainted with this particular context of the senior military and political levels. The reason was that he depended mainly on a single Dutch TV channel and the *Wereldomroep* for his knowledge of events in the outside world; matters such as the political context were not raised in the daily situation reports. Srebrenica was isolated, which made it impossible for Karremans to attend commander's conferences in Sarajevo or Tuzla. Such matters were indeed discussed there between senior and other commanders. More or less the same applied to Brantz: for instance, he only knew of the presence of Bildt in the region because the latter visited Tuzla.

So Dutchbat expected on 10 July that air strikes would arrive the following morning, while Sarajevo knew nothing about this. This begs the question whether this could not have become apparent; in theory there were several opportunities but the misunderstanding was not cleared up during any of these.

According to First Lieutenant Caris, whose group of commandos acted as Forward Air Controllers, there was no direct contact between the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo and Dutchbat on 10 July. This was the reason, according to him, that there was no denial of the expected air strikes from that side.

Neither was there a report of an air strike during the daily evening discussions via the satellite link of the JCOs with their commander in Sarajevo on 10 July.²³⁹⁸ This was precisely because nobody in

²³⁹⁵ Interview J.J.C. Voorhoeve, 13/03/97.

²³⁹⁶ Interview R.A. Franken, 18/05/01.

²³⁹⁷ Interview A. de Ruiter, 29/06/00.

²³⁹⁸ Interview A.A.L. Caris, 03/03/00.

Sarajevo assumed air strikes were imminent. Bosnia-Herzegovina Command was not aware of such contact between the JCOs and their own headquarters in Sarajevo.²³⁹⁹

Discussions were held on 11 July between Dutchbat and the Air Operations Coordination Center. These did not reveal anything concrete to support Dutchbat's belief in air strikes, nor apparently anything to make Dutchbat think that air strikes were definitely not imminent. Dutchbat merely got the feeling that the Air Operations Coordination Center was a delaying factor because only noises like 'be patient please', 'arrangements have not yet been finalized' or 'planes still need to take in refuel' reached Dutchbat from there. This slowly extinguished the last remaining shreds of belief in the arrival of large-scale air strikes.

When the air strikes did not arrive, Dutchbat belatedly received a report that in fact everything had been cancelled the night before. This alarmed them. 'We heard that somewhere during the night there had not been enough signatures to realise that. The Battalion Commander had visited the ABiH on the night before. So he was made to look a right fool', according to Dutchbat Major Wieffer.²⁴⁰⁰ This appeared to be another misunderstanding, one of many: it concerned the rejection by Janvier of the request for air support on the evening of 10 July, not the requests for 11 July.

The question arises why the sector commanders involved were not sent written confirmation in relation to the deployment of something so major as an air strike. Either the procedures did not provide for this, or it was not done for secrecy reasons. Sector Commander Haukland did not receive written confirmation of the arrival of the air strikes in September 1995.²⁴⁰¹

The subject of the so-called 'strike package' was raised in NATO circles on 11 July but this related to nothing more than a list of the thirty participating aircraft for the afternoon group of aircraft (the afternoon package). Not more than eight of these were destined for Close Air Support. It does not seem likely that such lists circulated outside NATO circles, certainly not in Tuzla or Srebrenica.²⁴⁰²

Karremans on air support at the press conference in Zagreb on 23 July

The statement by Karremans at the press conference in Zagreb after the departure of Dutchbat from the enclave gave some insight in his way of thinking in relation to air support. His thinking during the days before the fall was aimed mainly at large-scale deployment of air power (air strikes) rather than Close Air Support for the threatened positions.

Karremans admitted during the press conference that he had not requested air strikes directly. 'You understand that this is authorized at top level'. He said that a decision had been made during the morning of 11 July not to proceed with the air attacks because of ground mist but in addition the higher echelons had not seen any reason to deploy air strikes according to him, because the VRS was not attacking the battalion or the town at that time.

Notes made in preparation for the press conference also mentioned that a battalion commander did not independently request air attacks. His military chiefs were able to draw the conclusion from the situation outlined that, as Karremans had jotted down, 'air support (Close Air Support)' was required. Karremans wrote that the higher echelons had made a decision in favour of 'air attack (Close Air Support)' but had cancelled the actual deployment of the aircraft because of the ground mist ('not where we were, the weather in Srebrenica was beautiful').²⁴⁰³

Even the question whether there had been ground mist gave rise to contradictions. Karremans said at the press conference at Camp Pleso in Zagreb that mist hung over the ground. Some months later, there had been no ground mist in Karremans' memory: 'Mist was said to hang over the ground.

²³⁹⁹ Interview C.H. Nicolai, 09/07/99.

²⁴⁰⁰ Interview E. Wieffer, 18/06/99.

²⁴⁰¹ Interview Hagrup Haukland, 03/05/99.

²⁴⁰² DOPKlu STAOOPER, no No. given. 'strike Package on 11/07/95. POC Maj Roberts'.

²⁴⁰³ SMG 1007/13. Statement by Lt Col T. Karremans, press conference Camp Pleso (Zagreb) 23/07/95; DV, Afd Legervoortlichting. 'Inleiding Karremans persconferentie 23 juli 1995 op Camp Pleso'.

But there was no mist'.²⁴⁰⁴ The British Joint Commission Observers and the commandos' Tactical Air Control Party, who were on the roof of the compound in Potocari at 06.00 hours, reported that there was ground mist which had not cleared away until around 08.00 hours.

According to an entry made at the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo, the air above Srebrenica was clear at 06.45 hours.²⁴⁰⁵ It was possible that local differences affected the weather picture. Brantz also blamed the fact that air support proved fruitless on the fact that all kinds of things had 'gone wrong through a combination of human failure, equipment and ground mist' in an interview conducted shortly after the fall of Srebrenica.²⁴⁰⁶ The targets had not been visible due to the ground mist, according to Brantz.²⁴⁰⁷

The Netherlands Airforce was explicit in its judgement on this: there was *no* relationship between the ground mist and the non-arrival of Close Air Support on 11 July. The weather in the area had not been a factor for the deployment of aircraft in the decision-making of the Fifth Allied Tactical Airforce in Vicenza either. Ground mist *did* limit horizontal vision but not generally vertical vision, at least not to the extent that it was impossible to attack from a medium height. The fact that no air support took place that morning could only be blamed on the lack of a request from the UN, according to the Netherlands Airforce.²⁴⁰⁸

There was more fog around the terminology used by Karremans at the press conference in relation to 'air support' and 'air attack'. On paper he used the terms indiscriminately. The fact that he not only equated the term air support (correctly) but also the term air attack (incorrectly) with Close Air Support, may be a slip of the pen. But it may also point to an inadequate distinction between these two forms of air power. Karremans was not the only one who confused the terms: a number of military men and civil servants were not always duly careful with the terminology and there was also an uncontrolled Babel-like confusion in relation to these terms amongst the international press during the period 6 – 11 July 1995. Hardly any distinction was made between air strikes and Close Air Support.

There were exceptions, such as the *United Press International* and *Associated Press*, who did try and explain the difference between both forms of air power, only to fail miserably. Liam McDowall of *Associated Press* was well off the mark in stating: 'Close Air Support is the term used to describe NATO protection for embattled peacekeepers, including airstrikes.' Chris Simon of *UPI* did no better when it came to understanding the definitions: 'The latest strikes were what the United Nations refers to as 'close air support', technically differing from airstrikes in that the aim was to defend troops rather than to launch an offensive attack.'²⁴⁰⁹ Press agencies such as *Agence France Press* and *Associated Press* mentioned air strikes in most of their reports but no single press agency or newspaper was consistent. *CNN* used both terms. The warning issued by UNPROFOR on 9 July to the Bosnian Serbs literally referred to the fact that Close Air Support would be given if the VRS attacked the blocking position to be manned by Dutchbat but this was often represented as air strikes in the news.

The death of soldier Van Rensen overshadowed reports of the UNPROFOR warning to the Bosnian Serbs in the Dutch press. The handful of newspapers which mentioned it, such as *NRC Handelsblad* and *De Volkskrant*, spoke of air attacks, the Dutch term for air strikes. The headquarters in Zagreb and Sarajevo consistently spoke of Close Air Support and there was not a trace of doubt in relation to the conceptual and procedural distinction between Close Air Support and air strikes. Both headquarters disposed of expert NATO Airforce personnel. A liaison cell of the Fifth Allied Tactical Airforce was stationed in Zagreb, and NATO officers were represented in the Crisis Action Team and at the discussions with Akashi and Janvier. Sarajevo had the Air Operations Coordination Center staffed by NATO officers. The difference seemed insufficiently known amongst the lower

²⁴⁰⁴ CRST. C-13 Infbat Lumbl, 15/11/95, No. TK95.213. No addressee given.

²⁴⁰⁵ NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. Memo Maj Frenzt, AOCC Sarajevo to Lt Col de Ruiter, undated.

²⁴⁰⁶ Cees van der Laan, 'Commandant Brantz: Ruwe bolster blanke pit' ['a Rough Diamond'] in *Haagsche Courant*, 20/07/95.

²⁴⁰⁷ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Telephone conversation SMG with Col Brantz, 04/08/95.

²⁴⁰⁸ DOPKlu STAOOPER, no No. SCO to PDOP, draft replies to parliamentary questions, undated.

²⁴⁰⁹ *AP Worldstream*, 10/07/95; Monday 08:32 Eastern Time; *United Press International*, 11/07/95.

headquarters, such as Sector North East and Dutchbat. Adequate knowledge about the procedural aspects of the deployment of air power was evidently lacking there. The Sector North East headquarters had, for instance, no longer an Air Liaison Officer.

The Netherlands Airforce also deduced from the debriefing report for the 'large' debriefing in Assen that the difference between air strikes and Close Air Support was not sufficiently clear at all UN levels.²⁴¹⁰ The term air strikes does not appear in UN documents stemming from Sarajevo and Zagreb. Those involved within these staffs also deny ever to have uttered the words. The term Close Air Support was also the term used in RNLA Crisis Staff logs. Lieutenant Colonel M.C.J. Felix of RNLA Crisis Staff, attending the Defence Crisis Management Centre during those days as liaison officer, could not remember that the term air strikes was ever used in The Hague.²⁴¹¹ Dutch UNPROFOR officers from Zagreb and Sarajevo also only ever spoke of air support to the Defence Crisis Management Centre.²⁴¹² The RNLA Crisisstaf log listed as its last entry on 10 July that Lieutenant Colonel De Ruiter had telephoned that Close Air Support would be available from 06.00 hours on 11 July onwards.

The question is therefore where the use of the term air strikes originated. A clue is the first entry in the RNLA Crisis Staff log on 11 July which was a message from Brantz in Tuzla in which he announced that the Time over Target of the aircraft was 06.50 hours, and that they 'would attack in six waves.'²⁴¹³ Voorhoeve remembered that at one time the idea took hold in the Defence Crisis Management Centre that a large number of NATO aircraft would carry out a 'massive air campaign' and would eliminate some forty targets simultaneously. It would seem that the term 'air attacks' is creeping in at this stage.

Voorhoeve could not remember precisely when the idea of a 'massive air campaign' took hold exactly. He thought that it had been late in the evening on 10 July, or early in the morning on 11 July, and thought that the source of the idea had been Brantz in Tuzla.²⁴¹⁴

Colonel Smeets, Deputy Commander of RNLA Crisis Staff, agreed that everybody within the Royal Netherlands Army top had expected 'an enormous bang' from the 'air attacks', even though this term evidently did not make the logs. The expectation was also based on the fact that RNLA Crisis Staff had received reports, from AFSOUTH amongst others, which indicated the deployment of large numbers of aircraft. Afterwards they felt let down when the results of the bombardments proved to be negligible. By then it had become clear to RNLA Crisis Staff also that from the large number of aircraft only a few were destined for Close Air Support.²⁴¹⁵

Later voices: the so-called Preplanned Requests

Karremans wrote in a letter to the minister of Defence at the end of August 1995 that he had been given to understand on 10 July, when gathering information on air support for the following day, that air support had been provided on the same conditions as during the evening of 9 July.²⁴¹⁶ But a decision had only been made for air support to be available; not that it would actually be provided, on 9 as well as on 10 July. The fact that Sarajevo had been preparing for preplanned air support on 9 July, and that a Blue Sword Request signed by Deputy Commander UNPROFOR Gobilliard had been dispatched to Zagreb at his initiative, could give rise to confusion. This method of requesting Close Air Support by Sarajevo, unsupported by a request from a battalion commander and without a smoking gun, certainly

²⁴¹⁰ DOPKlu STAOOPER, no No. given. SCO to PDOP, draft replies to parliamentary questions, undated.

²⁴¹¹ Interview M.C.J. Felix, 06/04/00.

²⁴¹² DCBC, 528. Daily reports DCBC.

²⁴¹³ NIOD, Coll. Brantz.Logbook. RNLA Crisis Staff Srebrenica. No copy found in the RNLA archives. The version in Brantz' possession is an edited version.

²⁴¹⁴ Diary Voorhoeve, p. 183.

²⁴¹⁵ SMG/1004. Report conversation Col Smeets, 02/08/95.

²⁴¹⁶ KabBLS. Letter Karremans to the minister of Defence, via BLS, 29/08/95.

confused Brantz.²⁴¹⁷ A Preplanned Request for air support was certainly not common within UNPROFOR; there was in fact little practical experience in relation to the deployment of air power. NATO may well have conducted tens of thousands of raids since the start of operation Deny Flight, but only five requests for an air strike, and five requests for Close Air Support had been approved before July 1995.

A Preplanned Request in Sarajevo related to missions which could be included in the planning cycle, because the nature of the targets and the operational requirements for the mission were known. But even then requests still needed to go through the normal chain of command, in other words via Tuzla, also via Sarajevo and finally Zagreb. A smoking gun cannot be established in advance, so in that case, Immediate Requests were a more common form: they would allow a Forward Air Controller to contact Sarajevo directly, quickly followed by the usual approval procedures. The bombardments had then to be carried out with aircraft, which were already airborne for this purpose, or with aircraft which were stationed at airfields or on the deck of an aircraft-carrier with a certain degree of readiness.²⁴¹⁸

Colonel Hatton, Operations Officer (G-3) in Sarajevo, had drawn his boxes on the map as part of the Preplanned Requests; these indicated areas supposed to be rich in targets. Bosnia-Herzegovina Command had asked Zagreb for authorisation to attack targets in these boxes. This was rejected by Zagreb, which also resulted in frustration within Bosnia-Herzegovina Command, not least because a detailed explanation for the refusal was not given.

Hatton did not know that Karremans had gone to the Opstina to explain there about the *zona smrt*, the zone of death. According to Hatton, it would indeed have been 'prudent' to leave the areas within the boxes, and to minimize the damage for the ABiH. But Hatton had already taken the ABiH positions and the population into consideration when drawing the boxes on the map. Karremans had interpreted the information wrongly, according to Hatton, by warning the ABiH to leave in order to prevent them being bombed. Karremans seemed not to have made a distinction between 'being available' and 'to arrive' in relation to the aircraft. Hatton said that there was no plan for Preplanned Close Air Support on 11 July.²⁴¹⁹

SACEUR Joulwan did try to breathe new life into the preplanned Close Air Support in later days. He considered that the directions of advance towards Zepa and Gorazde could be mapped in advance, and be taken into account in a box.²⁴²⁰ Joulwan also stated that he had pointed out the possibility to Akashi. Even though that would not have changed the Srebrenica outcome, it would have been possible to deploy preplanned air support at the time that the Dutchbat OPs had detected the Bosnian-Serb advance, according to Joulwan.²⁴²¹

Later voices: the changed air tactics

The sector headquarters, including Tuzla, and the battalions were not sufficiently aware that the shooting down of the American F-16 in June had led to a radically different operating procedure at NATO. There are no indications that the lower echelons had been notified of this in writing. On the other hand, it was less relevant for the battalions: they only requested Close Air Support. The method of execution was of no concern to a battalion commander.²⁴²² The UNPROFOR operations orders did not provide for a request of air strikes by a battalion.

²⁴¹⁷ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Diary Brantz, (version August 1999), p. 131.

²⁴¹⁸ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 424, ops/Micro Files, OPORDER 34/94 – Close Air Support, 23/01/94, No. 301.1/934, UN Conf.

²⁴¹⁹ Interview Rick Hatton, 16/11/99.

²⁴²⁰ DCBC, 1566. Code Feith NATO 1060, 14/07/95, Conf. Joulwan made the proposal in the NATO Council.

²⁴²¹ UNNY, DKPO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 22/07/95, No. Z-1229.

²⁴²² Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

Air strikes in Safe Areas were exclusively linked to Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones, and they only applied around Gorazde and Sarajevo. All other Safe Areas were concerned exclusively with Close Air Support.

The aircraft could no longer hang in the air as a kind of *perpetuum mobile*, due to the change in tactics. Having been airborne for a few hours above Bosnia or the Adriatic, they were required to pull out.²⁴²³ The ground troops were apparently insufficiently aware of this change in tactics relating to the air war, and they had unrealistically high hopes of air power, as it turned out on 11 July, based on the number of aircraft to be deployed.

Dutchbat believed in the arrival of air support because Karremans had been told this by Tuzla and (in Karremans' perception) by Sarajevo. The battalion believed it because its commander believed it. Moreover, military logic in the mind of many dictated that there had to be a large number of aircraft simultaneously tackling a large number of targets, for the enclave to be retained.²⁴²⁴

The VRS advance had progressed too far by 11 July for air support to be of little use. The battalion and the population felt therefore that they had been abandoned. Expectations had been raised which ultimately could not be realized, and those involved felt they had been made to look foolish.²⁴²⁵ In addition, the air space above Srebrenica was so limited that no more than two aircraft were able to operate simultaneously. Ultimately, there were only a limited number of targets and there were only two Forward Air Controllers. The capacity per Forward Air Controller was limited and only one aircraft per tank would be available.²⁴²⁶

The Dutch F-16s were at the time only armed with 'dumb bombs' (they could not be guided once dropped) (type Mk82 weighing 500 lbs.). This did not mean that such bombs could not be dropped accurately. The computers in the F-16 carried out the calculations,²⁴²⁷ and the bombs could be dropped with an accuracy of ten to twenty metres, depending on the skills of the pilots and the altitude at which the bombs were dropped. This was usually more than sufficient for attacks on military targets such as barracks, depots and vehicle parks but a tank represented a smaller and better-protected target. The Netherlands Airforce plans only provided for the procurement of Laser Designator Pods in 1997-1998, with which laser-guided ('smart') bombs once dropped could be guided to their target.

This removed the Dutch F-16s from the category 'most advanced aircraft' because they were not able to drop Precision Guided Munitions. That is why there had been some talk in June of these aircraft no longer being needed for a Close Air Support task.

Later voices: why Dutch aircraft?

The fact that these Dutch F-16s flew the first mission on 11 July and that the Royal Netherlands Airforce also played a leading role amongst the aircraft which were destined for Srebrenica during the preceding days, was a deliberate choice. It had been agreed with CAOC in Vicenza. As squadron Commander Lieutenant-Colonel J.L.H. Eikelboom said: 'we fought to be allowed to fly in the front line. After all, they were our mates down there'. Vicenza could sympathize with this.²⁴²⁸ The Dutch did surprise Janvier because he heard a woman's voice over the radio: it had to be explained to him that this was a Dutch female pilot at work.²⁴²⁹

²⁴²³ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

²⁴²⁴ Interview E. Wieffer, 18/06/99.

²⁴²⁵ SMG/Debrief. Feitenrelaas [Factual Account of the Debriefing], p.68.

²⁴²⁶ DMKlu, M95077091/1617. Director Operations Klu (MGen G.F.A. Macco) to MinDef via CDS, 04/10/95, No. DOP95.072.078; DCBC, 1251. Note DOPKlu to CDS, 01/12/95, no No.

²⁴²⁷ Interview J. Le Clerq, 18/05/01.

²⁴²⁸ DCBC, 625. Hand-written fax SNR CAOC 5ATAF (Col A.F. Koopmans), 10/07/95; Peter Gerritse, 'We wilden vooraan vliegen [We wanted to fly in front] in *De Opmaat* (December 1995), 6-10; Westerma & Rijs, *Het zwaartste scenario*, p. 158; Lutgert and de Winter, *Check the Horizon*, p. 406.

²⁴²⁹ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/10/99.

It seems, however, that the American A-10s, also present with their antitank guns and Maverick rockets, would have been more appropriate to eliminate the VRS tanks. Whether the other aircraft were equipped with smarter types of munitions was not important in this case: they could not be guided on their targets as the Forward Air Controllers in the enclave did not possess Laser Target Designators to point out targets. The Fifth Tactical Allied Airforce in fact knew that Dutchbat did not have these.²⁴³⁰

The Royal Netherlands Army signed a lease contract for Laser Target Designators at the end of December 1994 as part of the Dutchbat effectiveness improvement programme, so that the Forward Air Controllers would be able to cooperate with NATO aircraft on this point. The Laser Target Designators were supposed to have been sent to Bosnia with the troops but this did not happen. Demands on training and operation and maintaining the skills to use this equipment with the various types of aircraft were of a level which could not be met in the circumstances prevalent in the enclave at that time. Brantz remained unaware of this; he was under the impression that they were at the disposal of the Forward Air Controllers. This was incorrect because the Laser Target Designators were not present in the enclave.²⁴³¹

Later voices: the VRS on air support

It was a known tactic on the part of Mladic to make one move during an attack and then to wait in order to see how the UN responded, even though he did not do this every time. It was therefore difficult to second-guess Mladic's responses correctly. The UN then struggled with the problem of how to respond because the organisation had no military possibilities at its disposal other than a protest letter or the deployment of air power.²⁴³² The deployment of air power led to extreme anger on the Bosnian-Serb side but with hindsight it seemed not to matter too much to the VRS whether air support was given or not. The VRS assumed that the infantry could not be eliminated with air power, and this assessment was correct.²⁴³³

Close Air Support was only available during parts of the day and night. As the Bosnian Serbs had been able to maintain their Integrated Air Defence system, they could, with assistance from Yugoslav Air Defence radars around Belgrade and in Montenegro, follow the NATO aircraft from the moment they took to the air, they could also establish fairly accurately the time at which the NATO aircraft would have to refuel, and in this way the VRS could make use of the parts of the day not covered by Close Air Support.²⁴³⁴

Mladic had worked out very well how NATO air power operated and had studied the allied air attacks on Iraq right up to the tiniest detail. The Bosnian Serbs knew the limitations and the power of the NATO radar and weapon systems.²⁴³⁵ The VRS was also in possession of the UN regulations, and they knew the procedures.

ABiH Captain Hazrudin Kusic, expert on electronic warfare, thought that the VRS counted on the fact that Close Air Support would not be forthcoming if they could just get close enough to Potocari. The risk that the aircraft would hit refugees or Dutchbat troops would then be too great. The VRS would have been aware of the request by Dutchbat for Close Air Support through listening in, according to him.²⁴³⁶ Support for these statements by Kusic could not be found in the sources.

²⁴³⁰ DOPKlu STAOOPER, no No. Log 5ATAF 09/07/95, 1610Z, 1744Z and 1810Z.

²⁴³¹ BDL 94092387/252. Director of Operations RNLAf to Commander USEUCOM, 1307/95, No. DOP95.050.840/956; CRST. Memo SCIPS to the minister, 23/12/94, No. S/94/061/4497 with comment HAJO to DOP; Interview C.L. Brantz, 11/06/99.

²⁴³² Interview R. Theunens, 08/02/00.

²⁴³³ Interview Milovan Milutinovic, 20/03/00 and 22/03/00.

²⁴³⁴ DCBC, 2478. Code Feith NATO 946, 22/06/95, Conf; DOPKLU. Memo DOPKlu to SCOCIS Defence staff, 10/07/95, No. DOP95.050.141/956, Conf.

²⁴³⁵ Van der Roer, *Frontdiplomaten* (interview Owen), p. 44.

²⁴³⁶ Interview ABiH Hazrudin Kusic, 17/05/99 and 18/05/99.

Later voices: Janvier's role

The complex procedures for requesting air support were a separate factor in later discussions on air support. The hostage crisis in May/June 1995 and the Gorazde crisis had made it clear that rapid decision-making was essential. The facility to make an immediate decision on Close Air Support was crucial and was a task for the commander on the ground. This gave rise to pressure on New York to change this as soon as possible and to simplify the procedures and put the decision-making powers in the hands of the military.²⁴³⁷

The name of Janvier has often been linked to reticence in the deployment of air support. Janvier was indeed very reticent but so had been his predecessors Briquemont, Cot and de Lapresle. However, they had not been confronted with crises such as those around Srebrenica.

The view on the part of the Force Commanders in relation to air support proved to be fairly consistent over a longer period. Reticence cannot be traced purely to the person of Janvier. An explanation should consider several factors, such as the question whether deployment would lead to hostages, and whether the resupply of the population or the UN elsewhere might be at risk. Janvier had already kept Akashi informed over a number of days of the possibility that Close Air Support would have to be provided. As Akashi said: 'Janvier was tormented. He weighed up many factors.' Or as General Van Kappen put it: while Karremans believed in the arrival of massive air strikes, Janvier struggled with the proportionality principle for the deployment of Close Air Support.²⁴³⁸

On the other hand, if Janvier was so torn by the question whether or not to provide Close Air Support, could not Akashi have been able to force a decision? Akashi said on this score that as a civilian he could not have overruled General Janvier: 'I had to respect his opinions.' Akashi himself had never been to Srebrenica, but had insisted on being briefed extensively on the terrain conditions there. So he knew that: 'srebrenica is not very conducive to air action. I had no basis to contradict [Janvier].'²⁴³⁹

Air support at the 'small' debriefing in Zagreb

Once the battalion had left the enclave, it arrived in Camp Pleso near Zagreb (see also Chapter 9: 'The departure of Dutchbat from the enclave'). There an initial brief operational debriefing of Dutchbat was conducted, which is discussed below.

Even during the 'small' debriefing the idea arose that the opinions on the exact circumstances of air support to Dutchbat and/or its refusal were divided. To start with, many Dutchbat troops seemed to have their own interpretation of what exactly air support was, and what could be expected from it. Different variants were bandied about on the question as to who was authorized to enlist air support. C. Klep, one of the debriefers, received the impression that it was not clear to Karremans either. Nevertheless, Karremans as well as Franken had been convinced that they were let down. They had not doubted the arrival of large numbers of aircraft during the morning of 11 July. It did surprise the debriefers that Karremans claimed on the one hand that on several occasions he had requested air support, which in the end had not arrived, while on the other hand he had a deep-rooted conviction that the support *would* arrive at six o'clock on 11 July, and had also reported this to the population.²⁴⁴⁰

The debriefing leader was the Commander of the 11th Airmobile Brigade, Brigade-General Bastiaans. Bastiaans had earlier been Chief UNMO (United Nations Military Observer) in the former Yugoslavia and had sat at the same table as the Force Commander when decisions had to be made on requests for air support. He had experienced in Zagreb how laboriously these decisions would be arrived at and the large extent to which air support was tied to strict conditions.

²⁴³⁷ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

²⁴³⁸ Interview F.H. van Kappen, 21/06/00.

²⁴³⁹ Interview Yasushi Akashi, 25/11/99.

²⁴⁴⁰ Interview Christ Klep, 18/02/99.

Bastiaans held stronger views on the expectation on the part of Karremans and Franken that large numbers of aircraft would arrive. He said to the NIOD that he had established at the debriefing in Zagreb that Karremans, and also Franken, had inadequate knowledge of the possibilities and limitations of Close Air Support, and the difference with air strikes. According to Bastiaans, they lacked knowledge of the UN policy on air support. In his opinion, Karremans should have studied the subject in greater depth, and he could then have been in a position to draw a number of conclusions. For that matter, Bastiaans thought it primarily a responsibility of the senior commanders in the hierarchy, and first and foremost of Sarajevo, to explain the policy and the changes in it.²⁴⁴¹

Other participants in the Zagreb debriefing also confirmed that Bastiaans had arrived at this judgement immediately.²⁴⁴² Bastiaans thought that both Karremans and Franken did not know how to request air support and had not followed the correct procedure. They should never have expected air support to arrive at six o'clock on 11 July. As far as Bastiaans was concerned, this would at most be the moment in time at which the provision of Close Air Support was considered. The debriefers could not get away from the impression either that Dutchbat had missed many of the developments in relation to air support over the past months. This could have been a task for UNPROFOR in Sarajevo, not so much for Sector North East in Tuzla as regional command. Admittedly, Brantz should have updated Sector North East in this respect, taking into account the circumstances, even though Brantz had not been debriefed in Zagreb.²⁴⁴³

According to Karremans, Bastiaans tried to picture the course of events during the 'small' debriefing. Karremans was left with the impression that Bastiaans wanted to put words in his and Franken's mouth. Karremans and Franken gave their side of the story but Bastiaans had other ideas about it, according to him. Karremans said that he had not taken the reproach by Bastiaans, that he had not quite understood what the rules for requesting air support were, as a criticism. But Deputy Battalion Commander Franken had. The discussion related not only to 11 July but also to the initial days of the VRS attack, the bombardment of the town and OP-F in particular. Karremans considered the bombardment of the town a good reason to request air support but in reply Bastiaans said that air support would not have been possible, because the conditions and guidelines on which the provision of air support was based were not in place.²⁴⁴⁴

There were also members of the debriefing team in Zagreb who doubted whether it had already been quite so clear to Bastiaans at that time that things were not quite right in relation to air support; they alleged that the finer points would have not struck him until later.²⁴⁴⁵

The debriefing exposed the differences in thinking between Bastiaans and Karremans in a number of aspects. The differences related not only to air support but also to plans in relation to the OPs: according to Bastiaans, the OPs should have been included in an operations plan for the battalion, and it should also have involved the ABiH. Bastiaans had wanted to see a structured operations plan including integral air support. Karremans, as well as Franken, were on the other hand of the opinion that each OP commander could determine independently whether to abandon his OP when conditions became too dangerous, as well as determine independently whether to make for Bosnian Serb or Muslim areas, depending on what the OP commander considered safest.

This begged the question amongst the other debriefers whether Bastiaans, despite his experience in the former Yugoslavia, was exactly *au fait* with the conditions in the enclave. The response from Karremans was that he remarked to Bastiaans that the latter had not been in the enclave. Karremans and Franken thought they had a clear idea of the definition of a Safe Area, and whether and how it could, or could not, be defended. Karremans was of the opinion that the enclave was not defensible and that the ABiH was unreliable; Bastiaans thought that the ABiH should have been

²⁴⁴¹ Interview, G.J.M. Bastiaans, 26/10/00.

²⁴⁴² Interview M. Elands, 15/02/99.

²⁴⁴³ Interview Christ Klep, 18/02/99.

²⁴⁴⁴ Interview Th.J.P. Karremans, 15/12/98, 16/12/98 and 17/12/98.

²⁴⁴⁵ Interview P.M.H. Groen, 17/02/99.

involved in a defence plan. The debriefers had the impression in relation to these differences of opinion that the Deputy Brigade Commander, Colonel Lemmen, was more in agreement with Karremans than with Bastiaans.²⁴⁴⁶

The entire discussion between Karremans and Bastiaans is missing from the report²⁴⁴⁷ of this Zagreb debriefing, which was submitted to the Army Commander, Couzy. The report was no more than an overall reconstruction of the main events, without any conclusions.

Dutch people involved in the fall of the enclave had contact with Janvier on several occasions during the days after the fall but the subject of 'air support' was not raised. To start with, Generals Van den Breemen and Van Baal spoke to him on the evening of 11 July, when the subject was not raised. After his arrival in Zagreb Karremans also spoke with Janvier, and he did not broach the non-arrival of Close Air Support with him either; the discussion was limited to a general chat about the situation. Janvier had said to Karremans that he had been embarrassed about the situation because he not been able to do much for the battalion and for the Bosnian Muslims.²⁴⁴⁸ Finally, Prime Minister Kok also spoke very briefly with Janvier in Zagreb; Voorhoeve was not present. It was an almost perfunctory visit; the emphasis of Kok's presence was on a meeting with the Dutchbat troops, not on a conversation with Janvier.²⁴⁴⁹

10. Close Air Support at the 'large' debriefing in Assen, and later in The Hague

The question why the Close Air Support provided was too little and arrived too late was one of the main issues which preoccupied Dutchbat at the later 'large' debriefing in Assen.²⁴⁵⁰ Personnel at the Military History Section, which had been involved in the 'small' operational debriefing in Zagreb, had already pointed out, in preparation for those who would conduct the 'large' debriefing in Assen, that one of the subjects for discussion would have to be the request for Close Air Support in relation to its actual deployment.²⁴⁵¹ The question why Dutchbat had been refused Close Air Support was also one of the questions at issue for the debriefing inspectors in Assen, General G.L.J. Huijser Retd and former Minister of Defence and Justice J. de Ruiter. Huijser said he regretted that he had not been able to give more attention to the subject, due to the restriction imposed in relation to the period to be investigated.²⁴⁵²

If the intention was to have the question of 'Close Air Support' feature as one of the main issues in Assen, then its consideration in the debriefing report was but a pale shadow of it. No attention was paid to the question what the belief in assistance from the air on 11 July was based on. The procedural aspects of the request and approval process was admittedly touched on briefly but this was accompanied by the comment that Close Air Support could be deployed if UN troops were threatened directly, and that air strikes could be instigated following an attack on a Safe Area.²⁴⁵³ This referred to a distinction which in Bosnia was not tenable in the field. Although UN Resolution 836 allowed for the use of force, it did not define the term. The distinction between Close Air Support and air strikes related more to a difference in the technique of the deployment of air power, and in particular to the level of approval required. On the UN side this was Boutros-Ghali himself for air strikes, and formally Akashi for Close Air Support, in practice generally Janvier. The distinction between these two forms of deployment of air power had therefore nothing to do with the distinction between UN troops at risk and an attack on a Safe Area.

²⁴⁴⁶ Interview Christ Klep, 03/03/99.

²⁴⁴⁷ SMG 1007/23. C-11 Luchtmobiele Brigade to Commander-in-Chief RNLA 28/07/95, No. 172/Conf.

²⁴⁴⁸ Interviews Karremans, 15/12/98, 16/12/98 and 17/12/98.

²⁴⁴⁹ Interview W. Kok, 30/05/00.

²⁴⁵⁰ Interview G. de Groot, 28/04/99.

²⁴⁵¹ SMG/Debrief. Annex J Bundle Debriefing Srebrenica, 30/08/95, p. 15.

²⁴⁵² Interview G.L.J. Huijser, 08/10/97.

²⁴⁵³ Debriefing report, p. 11, §§ 2.24 - 2.27.

Apart from this, the report only mentions that Karremans was convinced that NATO would conduct massive air strikes on the VRS positions during the morning of 11 July, and that he expressed this belief during a meeting with the authorities locally. The report also refers to telephone contact with Sector North East, including a mention at 05.00 hours that morning of air strikes just before 07.00 hours (this referred to the telephone conversation between Brantz in Tuzla and De Ruiter in Sarajevo at 04.50 hours). As far as the rest is concerned, the reader has to be satisfied with a handful of quotes from debriefing statements, which are not analysed in detail.²⁴⁵⁴ Although the Dutch UN officers in Zagreb and Sarajevo were also debriefed, it would seem that the debriefers were insufficiently equipped to shed light on this obscure matter. The explanation relating to the refusal of air support also begged the necessary questions within the ministry.²⁴⁵⁵

The subject of Close Air Support in the process of drafting the letter to Parliament

The letter from Voorhoeve accompanying the debriefing report to Parliament tried to compensate a little for this omission. The letter pointed out that the large number of aircraft could give the impression that the massive air fleet was available for air strikes but that only Close Air Support was a possibility according to current UN policy. Zagreb headquarters assumed so, and only awaited the Dutchbat reports in case the battalion was attacked.²⁴⁵⁶

The Directorate of General Policy Matters and the Defence staff had assembled a number of views which were prevalent amongst Defence, Foreign Affairs and General Affairs during the run up to the parliamentary discussion of the debriefing report. This had been preceded by their own investigation, in order to be able to enter into matters which were not explained adequately in the debriefing report.

The results of the investigation, however, were not reproduced in the letter to Parliament. Defence concluded in respect of air support that Brantz and Karremans had wrongfully assumed air strikes would take place, while earlier UNPROFOR (here referring to Zagreb) had been clear about this point, namely in their warning to the VRS, which accompanied the order for the blocking positions; the warning stated that Close Air Support would follow a VRS attack on a blocking position (referred to in Section 9 in the previous chapter). According to Defence, Brantz and Karremans should have known on the basis of experience of the air strikes at Pale, that air strikes were no longer under discussion. The UN command lines also proved to have suffered communication breakdowns on a regular basis, when concepts had been muddled up. One of the conclusions was that the unfounded expectation of air strikes explained why Karremans had asked the Opstina to vacate the southern part of the enclave in order to prevent the Bosnian Muslims being hit during the air strikes.²⁴⁵⁷ This harsh but nevertheless correct judgement could not be traced in the letter to Parliament. The letter was a great deal more cautious, as indicated above, and did not go beyond stating that the number of aircraft might have given the impression of air strikes.

The two Directorates most involved at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (the Directorate for Political and UN Affairs and the Directorate for Atlantic Cooperation and Security Affairs) analysed the debriefing report. The judgement by the Head of the Directorate for Political and UN Affairs, Kurpershoek, in so far it referred to the subject of Close Air Support, was most acerbic. He pointed out to Minister Van Mierlo in a 'for your eyes only' memo that the 'gigantic misunderstanding' between Srebrenica on the one hand and Sarajevo/Zagreb on the other constituted 'the most revealing and shocking part' of the report. This crucial point raised numerous additional questions for Kurpershoek,

²⁴⁵⁴ Debriefing report, p. 11, §§ 3.41, 3.45 and 3.50.

²⁴⁵⁵ NIOD Coll. Kreemers. Memo from the Deputy Director of Information to the minister, 13/10/95, No. V95019355. The memo also indicated that journalist Frank Westerman had suggested to Member of Parliament Hoekema that Voorhoeve had intervened in order to have the deployment of air power on 10 July cancelled.

²⁴⁵⁶ TK, 1995-1996, 22 181, No. 129 (30/10/95).

²⁴⁵⁷ DCBC, 1220. Memo DAB to the minister, 20/10/95, No. D95/537, Confi.

and the impression remained with him that the report concealed many points as far as the appraisal of Karremans was concerned. According to Kurpershoek, everything pointed to the fact that Zagreb did not want to go beyond Close Air Support. Nowhere did the report reveal what Karremans based his expectation of air strikes on. Karremans allegedly put the offer of an unopposed and safe withdrawal for battalion and population to one side on the basis of this expectation, not giving it any serious thought. Instead, Karremans, on his own initiative, seemed to have sent the VRS an ultimatum containing a threat of massive air strikes. Karremans had wrongly assessed the VRS positions over a period of five days. Kurpershoek continued to say that these were serious errors of judgement for which the Dutchbat leadership was responsible.

Kurpershoek seemed poorly informed regarding these points. Karremans did not give the VRS an ultimatum on his own initiative; rather, the warning from Zagreb, to which Kurpershoek refers, was interpreted as an ultimatum by Karremans (see Section 9 in the previous chapter). The point that Dutchbat and the population were said to have been promised an unopposed withdrawal was also fully discussed in the previous chapter. Janvier immediately rejected the first, and the second was not a concrete offer in the sense that this was still subject to extensive negotiations afterwards. As far as the objectives of the VRS offensive were concerned, Zagreb and Sarajevo entertained similar views, and Karremans should not be blamed for the fact that the assessment was not correct.

Kurpershoek also put forward his view that the UNPF leadership in Zagreb had not had the intention to defend the enclave because they had refused Close Air Support. According to Kurpershoek, Zagreb had acted against the will of the Security Council in doing so but this proposition could not be proven. Underlying the tragedy was the alleged lack of will in Zagreb, and the extreme state of demoralisation on the part of Dutchbat, in the opinion of Kurpershoek. He believed that Karremans 'may subsequently have omitted availing himself' of an opportunity to prevent worse happening. But blaming Dutchbat for the fate of the population and the atrocities committed by the VRS cut no ice with Kurpershoek; and Dutchbat had been left to fend for themselves to a considerable extent by Zagreb.²⁴⁵⁸ Kurpershoek subsequently submitted his assessment to Defence in a more sober, and slightly more considered, form.

The Ministry of General Affairs also assessed the debriefing report, along with the supplementary investigation. The 'misunderstanding or breakdown in communication' between the commanders in Srebrenica on the one hand and Zagreb/Sarajevo on the other was one of the most delicate sections of the debriefing report, as Council Advisor J.P.M.H. Merckelbach also admitted in a note to Prime Minister Kok. Merckelbach wondered whether the erroneous expectation on the part of Karremans was not also a consequence of his contacts with The Hague; he would not be surprised if Karremans had felt himself encouraged in his belief because The Hague had also been preoccupied with the arrival of massive bombardments as expected by Karremans.

There is no evidence for this hunch on the part of Merckelbach. There had indeed been speculation in The Hague on the possibility of an air strike, and on the question whether allies knew where exactly the VRS artillery was located through intelligence. At the Defence Crisis Management Centre in The Hague, officials wondered whether the artillery could indeed be eliminated in one go by a gigantic aircraft fleet. But as far as the Defence Crisis Management Centre was concerned, it ended there.²⁴⁵⁹ It was not discussed with Karremans. The extent to which The Hague had put pressure on Zagreb/Sarajevo to provide air support *or otherwise* should also be included in a political assessment of the events in Srebrenica, according to Merckelbach. This was another reason Merckelbach was surprised that personnel at the Hague staffs (and at this point Merckelbach will have thought of the Defence Crisis Management Centre and RNLA Crisis Staff) had not been involved in the debriefing in Assen. Merckelbach and Kurpershoek both wondered whether the belief in the arrival of massive bombardments by NATO aircraft had not kept the idea alive that this backing could have helped retain

²⁴⁵⁸ ABZ, 911.31 Bosnia. Memo Head DPV to M 'For your eyes only', Conf, 12/10/95, No. DPV-1898/95.

²⁴⁵⁹ Interview J.J.C. Voorhoeve, 13/03/97.

the enclave, and that this was the reason the unopposed withdrawal, which the VRS had guaranteed, had not been pursued, even though the latter was not a foregone conclusion.²⁴⁶⁰

Voorhoeve and Van Mierlo were not unaware of the fact that the Bosnian Serbs had promised an unopposed withdrawal to the Bosnian Muslims. They had discussed it even before the fall of the enclave with the Bosnian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sacirbey. Voorhoeve had suggested that the Displaced Persons should be moved to Central Bosnia, under UNHCR command. In response, Sacirbey declined such a preventive evacuation on 10 July, because he considered it did not fit in with the Bosnian political framework. His government thought the retention of the enclaves essential for a united Bosnia, according to Sacirbey.²⁴⁶¹

The meeting at the Defence Crisis Management Centre on 1 November 1995

It was clear even at the time of dispatch of the letter to Parliament on 30 October that this would not end the confusion on the issue of Close Air Support once and for all. The Defence staff therefore made a final attempt two days later, on 1 November, to obtain more precise information on the situation surrounding the Close Air Support. On 1 November the argument at the Defence Crisis Management Centre meeting (in the bunker) went that the debriefing in Assen had not created sufficient clarity, also because confrontation had been avoided in the case of conflicting statements. A rather distinguished assembly attending this meeting was to provide clarity. Those present included Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen, his Deputy Schouten, Deputy Chief of Defence Staff for Operations Hilderink, Army Commander of the Royal Netherlands Army Couzy, Nicolai (at that time Deputy Chief of Operations), Director of the Directorate of General Policy Matters De Winter and UN officers Nicolai, Brantz, De Jonge and De Ruiter. Conspicuous by their absence from this list were Karremans and Franken; the report does not give a reason.

The question to be answered was again whether air strikes or Close Air Support had in fact been at issue on 11 July. UNPF Chief of Staff Kolsteren, who was not present at this meeting, had announced in advance that only Close Air Support had been mentioned in Zagreb, and this would only be given if Dutchbat was attacked (the smoking gun principle). Nicolai did attend, and he also indicated that Close Air Support could only be given in response to a smoking gun. He said that Janvier had been extremely reticent, and had not wanted to proceed too soon with the use of force. Nicolai also pointed out that the authority for air strikes had continued to lie with New York. Brantz countered this by saying that it made not much difference to a commander on the ground whether the deployment of air power was termed Close Air Support or air strikes; he merely required support. This was also the stance the absent Karremans had taken. Brantz supposed that the request to Karremans from the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo on 10 July to submit targets had given the battalion commander the idea that there would be air strikes, as well as the fact that a fleet of forty aircraft were involved. The idea was also prompted by the 'ultimatum' (Brantz) that the VRS had been set on 9 July, namely that air strikes would follow if the VRS did not retreat. Brantz was wide of the mark here because the warning (not an ultimatum) only referred to Close Air Support. Brantz and De Jonge did indeed believe that Karremans could have known that air strikes were out of the question; he could have guessed this from the Post Air Strike Guidance dated 29 May, and De Ruiter had told him so again on 6 July.²⁴⁶²

The Post Air Strike Guidance by General Smith, however, did not indicate that Close Air Support was absolutely out of the question following the hostage crisis. Although the guidelines hinted at caution, they also indicated that violence could be deployed as a last resort if necessary; in practice, the obstacles to new air strikes were greater than for the deployment of Close Air Support. The main

²⁴⁶⁰ AZ. Memo J.P.M.H. Merckelbach to the Prime Minister, 19/10/95, No. 2028/95M007773.

²⁴⁶¹ DCBC, 631. Code Van Mierlo Circ. 425, 10/07/95.

²⁴⁶² DCBC, 1281. Notes on the meeting dated 01//99 relating to the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995, no date.

indication in this directive was that the execution of the mandate came second to the safety of UN personnel. Janvier's instructions to Smith, which also preceded this directive, demanded reticence in the use of force and the deployment of air power. UNPROFOR should resist the temptation to use force, except in the case of self-defence, according to Janvier. Whether this should be interpreted in the sense that a 'smoking gun' attacking a unit would first have to be identified, cannot be deduced from the instruction; Janvier's letters in which he stated his policy were not distributed down to the level of Sector North East or to Dutchbat. The intentions behind the directives will therefore have been known better in Zagreb and Sarajevo than in Tuzla and Srebrenica.²⁴⁶³

During the continued discussion at the Defence staff on 1 November, General Couzy recalled that the supposed 'ultimatum' and the number of aircraft to be deployed gave rise to the idea in the Netherlands also, that something big was about to happen. Voorhoeve also confirmed that this expectation was prevalent in the Hague bunker. As a result, expectations in Srebrenica, Tuzla and The Hague were completely different to those in Zagreb and Sarajevo. The difference in perception between Dutchbat and Tuzla on the one hand, and Sarajevo and Zagreb on the other, only came to light when Close Air Support was not forthcoming during the morning of 11 July. Karremans then proceeded to request Close Air Support, in accordance with the procedure.

The deliberations on 1 November in the Hague bunker did not manage to arrive at the core question, namely how was it possible that such different perceptions prevailed in relation to air support on 11 July? Journalists managed to penetrate to these evaluating confidential 'bunker discussions', even though Deputy Chief of Defence Staff Schouten had requested to keep matters private. Journalist Frank Westerman had called the Directorate of Information even while the discussion was under way, in order to ask what the discussion in the Defence Crisis Management Centre was about. This resulted in an investigation by the Dutch Military Police into the so-called 'bunker leak' (See also Part IV, Chapter 8).²⁴⁶⁴

A new letter to Parliament

The debriefing report, once it reached Parliament, led to a large number of questions by Members of Parliament to the Ministers of Defence and of Foreign Affairs. The answers reached Parliament on 30 November and were largely repeats of views voiced previously; the Hague view remained unchanged in that technical information from the Air Operations Coordination Center in Sarajevo on the numbers of aircraft, and the order to Dutchbat to draw up an inventory of largish numbers of targets had caused the misunderstanding in Tuzla and at Dutchbat that massive air strikes were being prepared. This was the reason the battalion had expected massive air strikes on 11 July; only when it became evident that these were not forthcoming did Karremans apply for air support.²⁴⁶⁵

The Ministry of Defence deduced from this that headquarters were not cooperating efficiently and were not adequately staffed, which might have led to confusion on the distinction between Close Air Support and air strikes. This requires refinement: the confusion existed at the lower headquarters in Tuzla and Potocari, rather than in Sarajevo and Zagreb, and then mainly between the Dutch themselves.

With hindsight, Minister Van Mierlo was surprised that Karremans had had such unequivocal faith in air strikes, and had ignored the lessons learned by the hostage taking. Karremans should at least have had reservations on the dependability of air power, according to Van Mierlo, and should have had an idea of the complex structure of the double key. Karremans, in Van Mierlo's opinion, had needed only to keep up to date with the reports on the hostage crisis in order to arrive at these conclusions. He

²⁴⁶³ SMG 1004. UNPROFOR Directive 2/95, 29/05/95, UN Confidential; NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Letters Janvier to Smith, 02 and 27/06/95.

²⁴⁶⁴ Interview J.J.C. Voorhoeve, 13/03/97; DCBC, 1281. Notes on the meeting dated 01/11/95 on the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995, no date.

²⁴⁶⁵ TK, 1995-1996, 22 181, No. 134 (30/11/95).

added: 'Perhaps one's awareness becomes restricted if one finds oneself over there to do that job. In that case one should be assisted by people who are deemed not to suffer from such restricted awareness.'²⁴⁶⁶ Karremans was not backed on this point, at least not by The Hague. Knowledge there of the procedures to enlist air power was not exactly extensive, so that one wonders whether it would have been sufficient. Karremans did not ask for this in The Hague either; instead he consulted commanders immediately superior to him, especially Brantz. But Karremans landed from the frying pan into the fire by relying on his reports, because Brantz had the same incorrect expectations in relation to air assistance as Karremans himself. This did not absolve Karremans from the obligation to arrive at his own assessment on such an important issue. But it would have been better if Tuzla and Srebrenica had been fully aware of the problems surrounding the deployment of air power before the days in July when it mattered.

Views in hindsight on the Forward Air Controllers

The fact that two Dutchbat Forward Air Controllers, Voskamp (active for some time as Windmill 02) and the Forward Air Controller who broke down in the morning of 10 July, had not performed as well as might have been expected, was no secret within the battalion. This became evident even at the 'small' debriefing in Zagreb. Virtually nothing was said about the role of the JCOs and the commandos as substitute Forward Air Controllers during the 'small' debriefing.²⁴⁶⁷

Experiences with the two Forward Air Controllers had not been altogether favourable, even during the period prior to the fall, and the battalion viewed them with a certain measure of suspicion. They had to be available at all times, and were therefore excused guard duty, they did not need to go on foot to OPs because of the equipment they carried, and they seemed to be very much a law unto themselves.²⁴⁶⁸ Their commander, Second Lieutenant F.S. Fundter, had not been able to return to the enclave following his leave. He had recommended that the two, as 'genuine' Forward Air Controllers, give further training to the commandos as substitute Forward Air Controllers but the Forward Air Controllers had not actually done so. This was also resented by the battalion.²⁴⁶⁹

There was some trouble after one of the Forward Air Controllers had overslept before a trip to an OP. He was woken up roughly by the Commander of the Forward Air Controllers, and promptly filed a complaint on account of the Commander's use of force. The Forward Air Controller in question then reported sick during the trip to the OP, and returned to the compound. This created bad feelings in the battalion.

The reputation of Forward Air Controller Voskamp within the battalion suffered badly in retrospect from events around the fall. This seemed not altogether justified; Voskamp at least remained active as a Forward Air Controller when things started to hot up, in contrast to his colleague, who broke down during the shelling of the compound in Potocari, and who was no longer operational afterwards.²⁴⁷⁰

The strained relations with the Forward Air Controllers came to the surface when the blocking position was taken up. At that time arguments arose between Lieutenant Egbers, the Commander of Bravo-1, and Forward Air Controller Voskamp. The Dutchbat troops in the APCs were regularly shot at by a VRS tank. As already mentioned in chapter 6 Egbers and Voskamp argued about the question whether or not they should return to their original position. Voskamp feared troops might be killed or wounded. Experience also played a role, even though neither of these two had experience of war. Voskamp had been a sergeant for twelve years; Egbers had just arrived from the Royal Military Academy. Voskamp also pointed out that he was the only remaining Forward Air Controller, and therefore should not run any unnecessary risks. Although the commandos had also attended a Forward

²⁴⁶⁶ Interview H.A.F.M.O van Mierlo, 19/05/00.

²⁴⁶⁷ Interview Christ Klep, 18/02/99.

²⁴⁶⁸ Interview, V.B. Egbers, 02/09/99.

²⁴⁶⁹ Debriefing statement L.C. van Duijn, 12/09/95.

²⁴⁷⁰ Debriefing statement L.C. van Duijn, 12/09/95.

Air Control course, they did not have adequate practical training, according to Voskamp. He did not yet know at that time that the commandos had also already been directed to the front for Forward Air Controller tasks.²⁴⁷¹ With hindsight, Voskamp believed that he had not acted correctly by entering into a discussion with his superior.

Chapter 6 stated that Egbers received an order on the afternoon of 10 July to join the other YPRs who had already retreated to the town of Srebrenica. The blocking position was therefore moved towards the town. This order came at an inopportune time, as Close Air Support was imminent, according to Voskamp, and moving targets in particular had to be watched. Voskamp was against returning to the town in the valley, as a Forward Air Controller could accomplish little in a valley, from where he was not able to see anything.

Voskamp therefore initially refused to accompany the blocking position back to the town, and he asked Egbers for protection. In the end he decided not to stay behind after all, because of continuous shooting by the VRS and ABiH. So the group finally left for the town.²⁴⁷² A few Dutchbat soldiers present commented that Voskamp was upset and were of the opinion that this was an additional reason for his failure to guide an aircraft to the target on 11 July.²⁴⁷³

Voskamp believed that his performance had wrongly been put in a bad light and that the debriefing report also gave a one-sided picture because many Dutchbat troops had believed that his performance was below par. The accusations particularly related to the point that he had allegedly not played any role in guiding the aircraft to their targets on 11 July, and that the commandos' Tactical Air Control Party had undertaken that task (in reality Voskamp and a commandos' Forward Air Controller had simultaneously and independently tried to guide the aircraft to their targets in a not altogether felicitous fashion, as mentioned in the previous chapter). This resulted in an appraisal which was not exactly favourable. Voskamp appealed against the report, with the result that the RNLA Advisory Board for the Settlement of Administrative Disputes destroyed the performance report following a thorough and time-consuming investigation. It is beyond the scope of this work to report on the investigation in detail but the committee was not convinced beyond any shadow of doubt that Voskamp 'could no longer cope', which had been the basis for the performance report. The question as to which of the two Forward Air Controllers had had the best view of the target (this could no longer be established) and the fact that both had lost radio (UHF) contact with each other also played a role. The committee judged that Voskamp *had* been active as a Forward Air Controller, had issued actual instructions to the F-16s, and for the rest it agreed with the verdict of the Air Force Commander in question that the deployment of the F-16s had succeeded partly due to the contribution made by both Forward Air Controllers.²⁴⁷⁴

Voskamp believed that the lack of understanding had arisen largely because Dutchbat troops did not know exactly what the job of a Forward Air Controller implied. The job involved identifying targets and monitoring their position from time to time until the aircraft arrived. Egbers, on the other hand, was of the opinion that Voskamp had been assigned to his blocking position and therefore was under his command. Egbers in turn could conceive that the task of the Forward Air Controller did not require him always to be at the front of the blocking position but unfortunately Voskamp no longer had his own YPR, the engine of which had overheated, due to an error by the driver.²⁴⁷⁵

The state of mind Voskamp was in also played a role in Egbers' opinion. He considered that Voskamp at one time had seemed to act much like a 'zombie'. Voskamp partly confirmed this; he blamed lack of sleep, tension and uncertainty. Voskamp subsequently suspected that Egbers had declared him 'no longer available for work' for this reason, and that the commandos thereafter had

²⁴⁷¹ Interview R. Voskamp, 08/10/98.

²⁴⁷² Interview R. Voskamp, 08/10/98.

²⁴⁷³ Debriefing statement Soldier 1st Class A. Hagenaars, 14/09/95.

²⁴⁷⁴ NIOD, Coll. Voskamp. RNLA Advisory Board for the Settlement of Administrative Disputes, 17/06/96, No. 6001/96.

²⁴⁷⁵ Interview, V.B. Egbers, 02/09/99.

received the order to act as Forward Air Controllers. This was not correct, the commandos had been deployed as Forward Air Controller before, on 10 July.

Another misunderstanding was also said to play a part. At one time Egbers thought that Voskamp had requested leave to return to the compound, while Voskamp had meant position Bravo-1, as there was a good view of the surroundings from there.

It is impossible to establish to what extent some measure of competition between Voskamp and the commandos played a role in the later conceptualisation on the performance by the Forward Air Controllers. The idea that competition existed cannot be excluded. Commandos liked to see Forward Air Control as part of their task; it meant attending an attractive training course in Canada, where the trainee was allowed to fly in F-16s.²⁴⁷⁶

The relationship between the commandos and the battalion leadership was also far from ideal. The commandos believed that their skills, in particular in relation to reconnaissance, were not utilized to the full by Karremans. The relationship between the three British Joint Commission Observers (JCOs) assigned to the battalion on the one hand, and Dutchbat on the other, was not ideal either. There was suspicion and animosity between Dutchbat and these JCOs; the latter attributed this to the poor information provided to Dutchbat on their role. Information on the JCOs was lacking in other respects too. At the time, the Defence Crisis Management Centre, for instance, did not know of the JCOs' presence of in the enclave.

JCOs considered on the whole that Dutchbat 'put up a reasonable performance'. There had been examples where the JCO Commander and Karremans had not seen eye to eye. The JCOs had witnessed a number of courageous acts by young soldiers in particular. They concluded their assessment of Dutchbat with the statement that there could not have been any question of a defence of the enclave, due to the lack of military resources.²⁴⁷⁷

11. A retrospective at the blocking positions and the Rules of Engagement

The concept of the blocking positions had been that Dutchbat had to prevent a VRS advance to Srebrenica using the resources at its disposal which had not been carried out in the way the higher echelons in Zagreb and Sarajevo had intended. It was one of these orders which fit the category 'easier said than done.' The peacekeepers were now asked to change from acting 'blue' to acting 'green', and that posed a problem from a conceptual as well as from a practical point of view. The resources available for the blocking positions were totally inadequate in order to halt the VRS. Concern about the safety of the neutral peacekeepers was also difficult to reconcile with a fighting role, within the Rules of Engagement, which had not changed and were still aimed at peacekeeping.

The order was also formulated very briefly and moreover interpreted differently at the various levels. Telephone explanations had been supplied with the order, between Zagreb and Sarajevo, as well as between Sarajevo and Srebrenica, and within Dutchbat. These explanations were not recorded, and it cannot be determined exactly how much scope there was for a different interpretation of the order and whether all consequences of the order had been discussed thoroughly with the higher levels.

Nicolai called Karremans about the order. Karremans did not ask for further clarification of the order but did object to it: he considered a defensive battle not feasible in the circumstances. It would also put the lives of Dutch military troops at risk while the battalion would not have been able to turn the situation around against the superior VRS power. There was little discussion on the essence of the order between Karremans and his deputy Franken on the one hand, and the Commander of B company, Groen, on the other. This also left room for an individual interpretation on the part of Groen.

²⁴⁷⁶ Interview R. Voskamp, 08/10/98.

²⁴⁷⁷ Interview C.G.J. Hilderink, 11/08/00; confidential information (1).

Nevertheless, Karremans was of the opinion that Groen had carried out the instructions of the battalion staff in broad lines.²⁴⁷⁸

The concept of the blocking position was all in all not sufficiently unambiguous, and ultimately proved unworkable. Feedback between the various levels, from Janvier down to the company commander in charge of the execution of the order, was poor. This was the reason for different interpretations of the assignment.

The situation in Srebrenica was the subject of a discussion on 10 July in the UN Security Council. There the question also arose what exactly was meant by the order to set up blocking positions. The Security Council was not clear whether self-defence on the part of the UN troops, or actual defence of a Safe Area was at issue. The Security Council also noted that the Bosnian Serbs were not asked to move their troops and vehicles from the enclave in the warning issued.²⁴⁷⁹

In practice, the VRS activities did not lead to the unequivocal 'smoking gun' which was required for a decision to deploy Close Air Support. On the one hand, this was a result of the cunning positions taken up by the VRS in relation to Dutchbat, and on the other of the withdrawing movements by the blocking positions which prevented an actual confrontation. Even though Lieutenant Egbers was shot at by the VRS, he did not believe that the VRS deliberately shot at Dutchbat.²⁴⁸⁰ Neither did the Dutchbat liaison section gain the impression that the VRS was aiming to shoot at UN units.²⁴⁸¹

Karremans was, in retrospect, extremely critical about the order to take up the blocking positions, and he was also scathing in relation to the support he was given by UNPROFOR during the fall of the enclave. Karremans believed that the higher echelons had made a mistake in not responding to the shelling on 6 July and subsequent days. Both UN compounds had been under fire several times and the population within the Safe Area had been attacked directly. The blocking position was attacked on 10 July and this had not elicited any response either. Karremans stated that he had never received any explanation of the inactivity by the higher echelons.²⁴⁸²

As far as the blocking positions were concerned, Karremans even went so far as to state that someone had 'flipped', meaning his army colleagues in the higher UN staffs. Karremans' wrath was aimed primarily at De Jonge. Karremans saw him as the spiritual progenitor of the plan for the blocking positions. The Battalion Commander ignored the fact that ultimately it was Janvier who issued the order.

Karremans reproached De Jonge that he had not weighed up the feasibility of the order and the risks which accompanied it. The order was doomed to failure in Karremans' opinion, because the unit which had to carry out the order was operationally and from a logistical point of view not capable of conducting a defensive fight. Dutchbat was not able to defend itself, according to him, let alone the population. Karremans also reproached De Jonge that the latter seemed to have forgotten what the tactical rules said about the defensive battle.²⁴⁸³ Karremans called the consequences of the order to take up the blocking positions 'possibly disastrous' and expressed his bitterness about the fact that colleagues in the Royal Netherlands Army organisation were instructing men and women at the blocking positions, who according to him were 'too good to be sacrificed', which might occur due to a 'lack of decisiveness, insight and action', particularly in Zagreb. This, and the entire aftermath of Srebrenica, had nearly caused him to decide to leave the Royal Netherlands Army.²⁴⁸⁴

One of these colleagues, Kolsteren, thought that Karremans should not have opposed De Jonge, as the latter was in a position completely different from Karremans' own. Karremans received his orders from Sarajevo and via Tuzla. Kolsteren was of the opinion that Karremans could 'say what

²⁴⁷⁸ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. Correspondence Karremans, 25/11/00.

²⁴⁷⁹ DCBC, 681. Code Biegan 603, 11/07/95.

²⁴⁸⁰ Interview V.B. Egbers, 02/09/99.

²⁴⁸¹ Information based on confidential debriefing statement (42).

²⁴⁸² Interview Th.J.P. Karremans, 25/06/98.

²⁴⁸³ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 176-77.

²⁴⁸⁴ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 176-77.

he wanted but there are no other indications than that the situation worsened very rapidly indeed, almost invitingly so. He may be annoyed, but he should first examine whether the blame lay not with him', according to UNPF Chief of Staff Kolsteren.²⁴⁸⁵

Karremans again listed the reasons in his book why in his opinion the blocking positions, which must be set up with six armoured cars and fifty infantry troops, were doomed to failure, in order to clarify his objections. The personnel had had to depart for the positions at night, which caused the noise made by the APCs to carry a long distance. The VRS knew therefore of their arrival. Cover for personnel and vehicles could not be built through lack of time, lack of equipment and the condition of the soil. This also applied to alternative and secondary positions. The white armoured vehicles could hardly be camouflaged. There were no natural obstacles in the front and at the flanks of the positions, and fire support was not available, neither were long-range anti-tank rockets. Ammunition for small-bore weapons and the machine guns was inadequate, and resources to compile a reserve battalion were lacking. There was no time to set up the blocking position in the dark, and finally the positions had not been reconnoitred, causing units to get lost and vehicles to run off the road. According to Karremans all this caused so much delay before the order could be executed that even Close Air Support could no longer compensate for it.²⁴⁸⁶

Brantz, as Sector North East's 'acting commander', saw the blocking position as a green order for a blue unit. Units equipped and trained, and consequently prepared for peacekeeping could not and should not be expected to go into battle, in his opinion. If the blocking position was to become the trigger for the deployment of the NATO air force, then Brantz, just like Karremans, saw this as a 'dangerous, unnecessary and incorrect assignment'. This also led to a discussion between Brantz in Tuzla and Nicolai in Sarajevo but without any result.²⁴⁸⁷ Brantz later even used terms such as 'criminal', in relation to the act of having a blue unit occupy a clearly visible position, hence, attracting enemy fire, and thus initiating Close Air Support.²⁴⁸⁸

According to Nicolai in Sarajevo, there had been much debate in retrospect on the order to take up blocking positions. Nicolai recognized that he had been all too aware of the fact that white vehicles were to be used in the blocking positions and that an order had been issued in haste, for which Dutchbat was not prepared. A blocking position would normally be prepared beforehand and they would have operated from well-covered positions. On the other hand, Nicolai pointed out that the terrain was hilly so that positions could be found which were more or less covered. As far as he was concerned, the idea was to issue a response and to help the VRS make the right decision. Nicolai could not say to what extent Karremans had briefed his personnel properly on this point. He stated that it was sometimes necessary to run a risk, and in the case of a further advance the response by the VRS had to be probed at in an early stage.²⁴⁸⁹

Nicolai pursued the issue of anti-tank weapons separately. Long-range anti-tank weapons (two to four kilometres), the TOW, were present. Deployment, however, presented a problem because these weapons required regular servicing, and they could not be serviced any longer because the enclave became isolated (see Section 9 in the previous chapter). The UN staff in Sarajevo knew about the TOW anti-tank weapon situation, because Karremans had reported their condition more or less regularly, and said that he could no longer rely on them. Nicolai stated that he had told Karremans: 'Try to also take the anti-tank weapons with you to the blocking position.' Nicolai did not consider these weapons to be so unreliable that they would explode on pulling the trigger; at worst they would deviate from their course or explode prematurely. But even if this weapon did not hit any targets, it would give a tremendous bang, which would deter the VRS, so Nicolai's argument went.

²⁴⁸⁵ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/09/99.

²⁴⁸⁶ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 182.

²⁴⁸⁷ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Diary Brantz, version August 1999.

²⁴⁸⁸ Brantz before the Van Kemenade Commission, 04/09/98.

²⁴⁸⁹ Interview C.H. Nicolai, 11/06/99 and 09/07/99. According to Nicolai, General Couzy had not been happy with the situation either.

Nicolai believed that the anti-tank weapons had been taken along to the blocking positions, but had not been fired, possibly out of fear for repercussions. We mentioned in the previous chapter that anti-tank weapons were indeed carried to the blocking positions but that they were not fired. Nicolai refused to comment on this point because he thought it not fair to lecture Karremans any further. Nicolai did recognize that there were reasons to fear the VRS, especially since the opponent possessed much superior military power consisting of heavy weapons and infantry. A short-term heroic action at a blocking position was possible but Nicolai admitted that this would not amount to much if thereafter a Dutchbat compound would be shelled and demolished by the VRS. On the other hand, Nicolai insisted that taking a risk was sometimes necessary.²⁴⁹⁰

The order to set up blocking positions also led to extreme uncertainty in The Hague. This order constituted one of the more difficult moments for Voorhoeve, because he understood that it was 'madness' from a military point of view to block the road using eye-catching white vehicles. The situation which Voorhoeve feared would arise, was Dutchbat carrying out the order, whilst the military in The Hague shook their heads. Even so, a last warning could not have contained anything other than the deployment of blocking positions, as a demonstration that the UN would not let the enclave be run over, according to Voorhoeve. At the same time, Voorhoeve and the military in The Hague hoped that the personnel would be sensible enough to leave their vehicles and seek cover, so that they would not be in a situation where the armoured cars full of Dutch troops would be a target for the VRS.²⁴⁹¹

It had not been easy for Zagreb to comply with the order to set up blocking positions, due to objections in Sarajevo. According to Kolsteren in Zagreb, they only succeeded in getting the order passed 'after nagging and coordinating with Sarajevo.'²⁴⁹² The operations officer (G-3) in Sarajevo, Hatton himself had difficulty believing in the usefulness of the blocking position, but he thought it was not up to him to doubt orders: 'as a soldier I was ordered to do so'. Nevertheless, Hatton believed that the battalion could have done more than it had.²⁴⁹³ Kolsteren did not agree; he considered that Dutchbat would not have been able to do much more with the resources available because it was impossible to set up a position which could not be circumvented by the VRS. On the other hand, he was somewhat disappointed that Dutchbat gave up the positions as quickly as they had. There seemed to be some question of Dutchbat repelling an attack from the south at one stage during the afternoon of 10 July, because the VRS advance halted. This resulted in a degree of relief in Zagreb: at last some serious resistance was being offered.²⁴⁹⁴ This was also the impression which Colonel De Jonge got after he had spoken with a number of freed Dutchbat hostages in Zagreb: 'The attack was stopped as soon as the BSA [VRS] found out that this time UNPROFOR did hold the ground instead of withdrawing after the first fire'. De Jonge reported to Janvier what he had heard from the Dutchbat troops. De Jonge also concluded that the VRS, which had attacked Srebrenica, had apparently received orders to avoid any combat contact with UNPROFOR. The only exception had been a tank firing at a Tactical Air Control Party, as soon as it had been recognized.²⁴⁹⁵

Once the attack had apparently been halted, the VRS circumvented the blocking position, and Mladic was also sighted in the vicinity of Srebrenica. This really made it crystal-clear to Zagreb that they were not confronted with a local initiative and a limited operation but that the entire enclave was at stake.²⁴⁹⁶

Colonel De Jonge, on his part, expected that the order to take up blocking positions would be carried out properly. He stated that Karremans had shown earlier that he tried to carry out his assignment as best he could, despite all the problems his unit faced and the lack of resources. The initial

²⁴⁹⁰ Interview C.H. Nicolai, 11/06/99.

²⁴⁹¹ Interview J.J.C. Voorhoeve, 13/03/97.

²⁴⁹² NIOD, Coll. Kolsteren. Notes COS 3 July-29 August.

²⁴⁹³ Interview Rick Hatton, 16/11/99.

²⁴⁹⁴ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/09/99.

²⁴⁹⁵ NIOD, Coll. Segers. Interoffice Memo G3 Land Ops to FC, 18/07/95.

²⁴⁹⁶ Interview A.M.W.W.M. Kolsteren, 07/09/99.

impressions De Jonge had of the execution of the assignment had been positive: a unit had been assembled in the night, positions had been taken up, mortars had been put in position, Forward Air Controllers were present, and the personnel had been briefed that this was a 'green assignment'. Reports arrived saying that weapons had been fired, although it was shown later that the shooting had been mostly over the heads of the VRS. All this gave Zagreb the impression that the blocking position had been carried out as good as possible. De Jonge knew also that conducting a real defence was impossible and that simply no more could be achieved with the resources available. De Jonge thus arrived at the same verdict as Kolsteren.

Initially, the presence of the blocking position seemed to deter the VRS infantry but it was shown later that the same infantry could easily circumvent the blocking position. There was no clear 'smoking gun' because the tanks did not fire directly at the APCs. But De Jonge believed that enough shots landed in the vicinity to speak of a 'smoking gun'. De Jonge concluded that the blocking positions had been effective as a method to make Mladic jump one way or another, despite the difficulties; it certainly became clear that the VRS intended to take the entire enclave. This would have justified Close Air Support but this could not be taken advantage of, due to the tardy decision-making in Zagreb, as De Jonge himself admitted.

There remained the negative judgement on the part of Karremans in relation to the blocking positions assignment; this could be explained, in the opinion of De Jonge, by the low level of fighting power on the part of the battalion, which was also diminishing by the week. Moreover, it had been difficult for Karremans to gain insight in what was happening at the UN levels above Dutchbat. According to De Jonge, a factor in the negative judgement of Karremans was also the fact that his request for air support had not been granted immediately.²⁴⁹⁷

The B Company Commander, Groen, judged in relation to the actions by the blocking positions that he had fulfilled his task in respect of UNPROFOR and the population. The enclave could not have been saved anyway, in his opinion, and he had therefore made the safety of the Displaced Persons a priority. Groen was satisfied with the large number of Displaced Persons who could be evacuated from Srebrenica and wondered what would have happened if Dutchbat had not been present. He was also happy with the way in which B Company personnel had carried out its tasks in relation to the blocking position; the strong ones had dragged the weaker ones along.²⁴⁹⁸

As a member of blocking position Bravo-4, set up on the road from Zeleni Jadar to Srebrenica, Lieutenant Mustert was convinced that this had affected the speed with which the VRS advanced. He believed it was not so much the military equipment which Dutchbat put into the field as purely the presence of the blocking position. The VRS had clearly not welcomed this presence as it slowed down its activities. He believed that the problem was just that there always came a point at which the VRS seemed to have had it with the Dutchbat presence, and subsequently became stronger. According to Mustert, their attitude towards Dutchbat was something like this: 'that's it, push off, and if you don't leave now, I'll blow you away.'²⁴⁹⁹

According to Groen, the idea within Dutchbat originally was not that the Bosnian Serbs were actually intending to attack the entire enclave. The battalion was in theory prepared for the eventuality but this did not mean that it was seen as a real option for the VRS to overrun the enclave.²⁵⁰⁰ Mustert also said that the assumption within Dutchbat was that the VRS would not continue the advance, because the Bosnian Serbs could see UN vehicles blocking their way (these were the blocking positions). The Bosnian Serbs were expected to comply with the warning issued. They also had the idea at the back of their mind that Close Air Support would help out in case the VRS persisted regardless. Briefings to Dutchbat troops also always emphasized that Close Air Support would arrive if things started to get out of hand. Dutchbat's task, it was generally assumed, would then be to map the VRS

²⁴⁹⁷ Interview H.A. de Jonge, 27/09/99.

²⁴⁹⁸ SMG 1007/25. Report debriefing Captain Groen, 22/07/95.

²⁴⁹⁹ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

²⁵⁰⁰ Interview J. R. Groen, 14/01/00.

positions and to pass this information on to the higher echelons. Close Air Support would then finish the job because the battalion itself could not do so with the means available.²⁵⁰¹

The dominant thought amongst the blocking positions personnel was therefore entirely different to what Zagreb had thought it to be. Zagreb had thought that the VRS would be given a signal, something of the kind of 'to here and no further'; but the perception of the blocking positions task amongst B Company was that this comprised observation and the reporting of VRS troop movements.²⁵⁰² It also explains why it was pointed out that it was not necessary to send the blocking position ahead in the direction of the VRS just for this purpose, as the Dutchbat reconnaissance platoon was also able to see the VRS tanks and was in contact about this with the Battalion Staff.²⁵⁰³

The subject of the blocking positions was also raised during the 'small' and 'large' debriefings. The report on the debriefing in Zagreb is brief on this point. It mentions a number of factual observations and states that the ABiH barely defended the town and that the blocking positions as well as the Forward Air Controllers were threatened by the ABiH, in an attempt to have Dutchbat fire at the VRS. The report also notes that Karremans as well as Franken described the assignment as a 'green assignment', and that company Commander Groen, following analysis of the assignment, adopted the line that the positions would be occupied by YPRs, and that the personnel had to stay inside the APC as much as possible for their own safety; that in case of a VRS attack firing would take place only over the heads of the VRS, and that shooting to kill was only permitted in response if the VRS targeted them. The mortar (81 mm) would only fire light grenades. The report did not analyse the blocking position in greater detail. It did point out that the instruction to use force had been applied restrictively, and that it had been aimed at the safety of the Dutch personnel, and to prevent victims. For this reason they had fired only high, or low over the heads of the enemy.²⁵⁰⁴ Karremans stated during the debriefing that Sarajevo had never given the order to use the weapons. He also said he had made it clear to the subunits of the blocking positions (B company and battalion reserve) that this concerned a green assignment. Nevertheless, Brigade-General Bastiaans, who chaired the debriefing, added a comment that the execution of the order for the blocking position had evidently been more 'blue' than 'green'. He deduced this from the resources deployed and the instruction about using force.²⁵⁰⁵

The draft report of the 'small' debriefing was discussed at the end of July in Schaarsbergen, together with the debriefers from Zagreb: Bastiaans and his staff, as well as Royal Netherlands Army Military History Section personnel. The assembly certainly proved it could identify the weak points in relation to the blocking positions but this was not recorded in the report.

Bastiaans appeared to consider it a problem that Karremans, Franken and Groen each had attached their own interpretation to the order to set up blocking positions. According to Bastiaans, the order had been to prevent further break through and advance of the VRS with the resources available. This seemed to have been reduced in practice to the use of a mortar with light grenades, and responding to targeted fire. The question whether Karremans' order had been so unclear that it allowed for such an interpretation, or perhaps even whether an order had not been obeyed, was not answered in Bastiaans' opinion. Bastiaans realized that the decision to have Dutchbat carry out an active defence, with the risk of deaths amongst the personnel, was passed on from UNPF in Zagreb to UNPROFOR in Sarajevo like a hot potatoe, and via Karremans to Groen. The latter had determined how much risk he was prepared to expose his personnel to. It begged the question why Groen had not gotten back to Karremans to ask for clarification of the order. On the other hand, there was no doubt that this was not the only vague order issued by the battalion leadership, so that B Company received and appropriated more leeway to act independently.

²⁵⁰¹ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

²⁵⁰² Debriefing statement Soldier 1st Class A. Hagenars, 14/09/95.

²⁵⁰³ Interview A.A.L. Caris, 03/03/00.

²⁵⁰⁴ SMG 1007/23. Commander 11 Airmobile Brigade to Commander in Chief RNLA, 28/07/95, No. 172/Confi.

²⁵⁰⁵ SMG 1007/23. Report debriefing C-Dutchbat III, Lt-Col Karremans, 22/07/95.

The assembly also considered that Karremans was to blame for the fact that he did not grab the opportunity to go through the plans, or to clarify them, with Groen during the night from 10 to 11 July, on the way to Srebrenica for a discussion with the ABiH and the Opstina. He had even passed the B company compound on his way. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Karremans did call in at the B company compound on his return to Potocari but the discussion was limited to the arrival of the supposed air strikes the next morning.

Bastiaans considered it a mistake of an entirely different order that Karremans had confirmed the 'green' character of the assignment while in fact it remained 'blue'.²⁵⁰⁶

The report on the 'large' debriefing in Assen did not enter into such speculations. The debriefing report therefore does not offer any analysis or assessment on the issue of the order to set up blocking positions, and the interpretation and execution of the order. The text of the UNPROFOR order to Dutchbat was recorded in the report, as well as the fact that the battalion designated this order as 'green.' According to the debriefing report this was understood to mean: 'entering into battle if necessary'.²⁵⁰⁷

Otherwise the debriefing report only indicated that Groen decided 'that shooting to kill should not be done immediately, the initial shots should be aimed beside, over or below targets, in order to prevent escalating the fight from the start. Shooting to kill shall take place in response to a direct attack on vehicles or personnel.'²⁵⁰⁸

Karremans was, in fact, in full agreement with the conclusion on this point in the debriefing report, which said that the blocking positions had constituted not much more than a 'symbolic road block'. With hindsight, he thought that it was an order not feasible, which could have resulted in a great many victims. But the clarification of the order in the debriefing report was too brief for Karremans' taste as well.²⁵⁰⁹

The UNPROFOR order issued to Dutchbat itself did not contain the words 'green assignment'. This term was used first in the fax confirming the order from Franken to Groen. Legal experts at the Ministry of Defence considered in retrospect that this was an unfortunate term to have chosen; it was misleading as it could imply that the UN units had lost their neutrality.²⁵¹⁰ The Dutch Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (NJCM) came up with similar objections in a comment on the debriefing report, not least because the debriefing report included the explanation that the term 'green' military action meant that if necessary battle had to be entered into with the VRS.²⁵¹¹ The argument was that the soldier involved in a 'green' operation was at that moment a combatant, rendering him a legitimate target for enemy fire according to the Geneva Conventions. The Geneva Conventions did not prohibit opening fire on UNPROFOR members but this prohibition as referred to here had been laid down in various Security Council resolutions.²⁵¹² This indicates that the concept of the blocking position had not been fully considered, at least as far as its legal implications were concerned, and the caution which Dutchbat and Groen showed in this respect seemed justified.

The letter from Minister Voorhoeve to Parliament which accompanied the debriefing report did not arrive at an explanation as far as the blocking position was concerned. The paragraphs on the blocking position only emphasized that Dutchbat had carried out its military and humanitarian tasks as best as possible, despite the narrow margins, as stated by Voorhoeve. Dutchbat did not have sufficient resources at its disposal to fight the Bosnian Serb superior powers. Voorhoeve referred to the

²⁵⁰⁶ SMG 1006/18. Report of the discussion report debriefing personnel Dutchbat III by staff 11 Airmobile Brigade, Schaarsbergen, 27/07/95.

²⁵⁰⁷ Debriefing report, § 3.31.

²⁵⁰⁸ Debriefing report, § 3.32.

²⁵⁰⁹ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 176-77.

²⁵¹⁰ DJZ. Memo PH-IJB (B. van Lent) to DJZ, 28/11/95, no number.

²⁵¹¹ Debriefing report, § 3.31.

²⁵¹² DJZ/BST. Letter *Nederlands Juristen Comité voor de Mensenrechten* to minister of Defence, 18/12/95.

unreliability of the TOW and Dragon anti-tank weapons and noted that only sixteen percent of the operational requirement for ammunition was available.²⁵¹³

Shooting to kill?

There is some ambiguity regarding the question what the orders to open fire from the blocking positions meant exactly. It is already mentioned that Zagreb had not issued instructions on this which were contrary to the Rules of Engagement, and that in practice Groen issued instructions merely to fire over the heads of the enemy; shooting to kill was only supposed to occur if required to ensure the safety of Dutchbat troops.

According to Karremans, the Rules of Engagement were of a restrictive nature. His policy had been aimed at all times at keeping the spiral of violence as low as possible; Dutchbat would only return fire if they were fired at directly. This had not happened during the entire Dutchbat III period, and in his opinion this also explained why the Netherlands, in contrast to France and the United Kingdom, had suffered so few victims. Karremans had also ordered merely to fire over the heads of the enemy, also in the case of the blocking positions, and neither had Franken issued instructions when to shoot to kill.

Karremans did not discount the fact at the 'small' debriefing in Zagreb that one or two APCs had indeed fired directly at the enemy.²⁵¹⁴ Karremans later told NIOD that the order to fire directly at the enemy had been given once only, after an order had been issued in the first instance to aim beside, over or below the target. Karremans could no longer remember at the time whether the order had been issued by himself or by Franken. He did not know what the outcome of the order was.²⁵¹⁵ VRS Colonel Jankovic reported to Franken after the fall that this had led to VRS losses,²⁵¹⁶ but this was not confirmed.

Deputy Battalion Commander Franken, on the other hand, stated during the debriefing in Zagreb that he had certainly ordered the .50 machine gun to be fired at the enemy but using the mortar to fire light grenades only. The order had been given via the battalion network. At the time this was not discussed, and Franken had assumed that it had been complied with.²⁵¹⁷ Reussing, on the other hand, who was in the APC intended for transporting casualties, thought he had heard Franken order the VRS to be fired at with a mortar (81 mm) over the radio, but that Groen had not done so and instead had fired light grenades from the mortar at the VRS, instead of real (in military terms: highly explosive) grenades.²⁵¹⁸ Groen could not recall at all that Franken had given an order to fire directly at the enemy, either with the machine gun, or with the mortar. He stated that he himself had not issued any orders to that effect in any case.²⁵¹⁹

Whether Franken issued an order to shoot to kill can no longer be established. The B Company log does indeed indicate that Groen ordered the troops to fire over the heads of the VRS troops, and to fire illumination using a mortar from the compound on 10 July. The log does not contain any other reports on orders to fire;²⁵²⁰ allegedly Franken advised Groen to deploy anti-tank weapons,²⁵²¹ but this did not actually take place.

²⁵¹³ TK, 1995-1996, 22 181, No. 128. (30/10/95).

²⁵¹⁴ SMG 1007/23. Report debriefing C-Dutchbat III, Lt-Col Karremans, 22/07/95.

²⁵¹⁵ Interview Th.J.P. Karremans, 07/09/99.

²⁵¹⁶ Interview R.A. Franken, 31/03/99.

²⁵¹⁷ SMG 1007/23. Report debriefing Franken, 22/07/95.

²⁵¹⁸ Debriefing statement G.W. Reussing, 12/09/95.

²⁵¹⁹ SMG 1007/25. Report debriefing Captain Groen, 22/07/95.

²⁵²⁰ SMG 1004/56. Log B-Company, 10/07/95 18.36. The Ops room Dutchbat monthly record contains mainly incoming and hardly any outgoing reports.

²⁵²¹ SMG 1007/25. Debriefing Sergeant 1st Erkelens and First Lt Caris, 22/07/95.

Finally, on 11 July Franken passed on to Groen over the radio that firing was ‘free’, which means that Groen could open fire at his discretion.²⁵²² The B company log does not mention whether the order was passed on to the APCs in the blocking position. As mentioned in chapter 6 this resulted in firing directly at the enemy by Bravo-4 only but that no results were observed.

The Rules of Engagement in retrospect

Members of Parliament asked several questions on the Rules of Engagement, the ‘green’ order to set up blocking positions and on the firing, whether directly or otherwise, at the VRS, following the debriefing report. The answers by Minister Voorhoeve on these questions were extremely brief; he replied that the usual UNPROFOR instructions for the use of force had applied. These stated that shooting to kill was only permitted when the military or the population for whom they were responsible were fired at with the aim of killing or wounding them. Voorhoeve stated that Dutchbat had acted in accordance with these rules. The order to shoot to kill if necessary had been issued by Karremans in accordance with the instructions for the use of force. The answers did not elaborate on the term used, namely ‘green order’.²⁵²³

The draft answers compiled by the Netherlands Army did do so, and were more comprehensive. They stated that the purpose of the blocking position was to prevent a further breakthrough and advance by the VRS, using the resources available. They also stated that Karremans had reported to Nicolai that the order was not feasible on the basis of the mandate and the means available. The draft answers also indicated that if the order was to prevent a break through and advance on the part of the VRS to Srebrenica, it was ‘clear’ to a commander that he should have defensive positions manned, and conduct defensive combat. Within such a ‘green’ order it was not in itself incorrect to fire directly at the target but it had to be done in compliance with the Rules of Engagement.²⁵²⁴ These draft answers did not find their way to Parliament precisely because such a ‘green’ order to fire directly at the enemy and the Rules of Engagement were at loggerheads with each other, as is evident from the following view on the Rules of Engagement.

The Rules of Engagement, including rules for when UNPROFOR was allowed to open fire, were intended to set limits to the use of force and to indicate in which situations force could be used. These rules had a strong legal character, as the UN and individual countries could be held liable under international law, and an individual soldier could be prosecuted.²⁵²⁵ The rules operated in practice at the interface of policy, legal and operational requirements and limitations. They referred to authority to use force, not to a duty in this respect. The distinction was raised as early as October 1992 when PvdA MP Van Traa referred to the example of what to do when the life of a Muslim woman was threatened in the presence of the Dutch troops. The Rules of Engagement in that case allowed the use of proportional force, but whether force would actually be used was a decision for the soldier present there and then and depended on orders issued to him by his commander.

The Rules of Engagement originally dated from 24 March 1992. They were confidential, which limited awareness of them outside UNPROFOR circles.²⁵²⁶

²⁵²² SMG 1004/61. Ops room Dutchbat Monthly record, 11/07/95 11.17 hours. SMG 1106/18.

²⁵²² SMG 1004/61. Monthly Register Opsroom, 11/07/95, 11.17. SMG 1106/18.

²⁵²³ TK, session 1995-1996, 22 181, No. 134. (30/11/95).

²⁵²⁴ DCBC, 1314. Contribution RNLA to parliamentary Questions Srebrenica, 17/11/95.

²⁵²⁵ DJZ/BST. Memo DJZ to CDS, cc BLS, CKMar, 09/06/92, No. JZN92/0336/BST.

²⁵²⁶ BSG, DAB 91-92. Memo DAB to the Minister, 19/10/92, No. D92/447 (with Annex DJZ JZN92/0771/IJB). See: R.M. Eiting & J.S. van Duurling, ‘De aangeliijnde waakhond: Conceptuele gedachten over ‘Rules of Engagement’ [Watchdog on a leash: Conceptual thoughts on Rules of Engagement], *Militaire Spectator*, 167(1998)168-179 for a discussion on ‘Rules of Engagement’.

Abstract problems in relation to the Rules of Engagement

To start with, there were a number of more abstract problems with the Rules of Engagement, which nevertheless had considerable consequences for the execution of the assignment by Dutchbat. They made clear within what limits the battalion should operate.

The Rules of Engagement contained, for instance, the phrase that resistance against violent attempts to prevent the UN force from completing its tasks was permitted; a phrase which the Ministry of Defence indicated as ‘much too open to interpretation and undesirable’.²⁵²⁷ The judgement whether violent attempts were made to prevent UNPROFOR from fulfilling its tasks could only take place under the personal supervision of the Force Commander. In practice things never got that far.

The rule ‘to resist deliberate military or paramilitary incursions into the United Nations Protected Areas (UNPA’s)’ was hardly more specific. Persons authorized to resist a deliberate incursion of protected areas were not defined. This rule was not activated either.

On 19 July 1993, the following phrase was added to the rule referred to above, in order to update it: ‘or Safe Areas’, after these Safe Areas had been established. It was never made clear what exactly had to be protected in the Safe Area, and it remained unclear whether this referred to a demarcated area, or the population within the area. International law did not offer anything to go by either because a Safe Area, in contrast to a safe haven, is a non-defined concept. This made for the curious situation that incursion of the Safe Area Srebrenica by the VRS did not violate international law; this only came into play with the compulsory displacement of the population and the mass murder which followed the fall of Srebrenica.

The last time that the Rules of Engagement had been changed substantially by Zagreb *before* the fall of Srebrenica was on 27 November 1994. It was then made possible to use force in order to defend individuals who had been placed under protection of UNPROFOR.²⁵²⁸ The Rules of Engagement, however, did not give any indication how individuals (or areas) under UN protection should be defended against a direct attack. In practice, UNPROFOR personnel in that case acted under orders of the highest officer on the spot.

A new version of the rules of Engagement was issued on 17 July 1995, following a number of small changes.²⁵²⁹ This version was therefore not yet in force during the fall of Srebrenica. The change was necessary, due to ambiguities which had come to light in practice, and especially in connection with the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force, which would bring along heavy weapons such as artillery and mortars. UNPROFOR would still remain a peacekeeping mission even with this change; the fact that here was something of a paradox was raised in chapter 1.

Use of force in accordance with the Rules of engagement

The possibility to avail itself of force was already available to UNPROFOR even before the change made in November 1994. The UN had a standing instruction that the use of force had to be limited to

²⁵²⁷ DJZ/BST. Memo DJZ to CDS, cc BLS, CKMar, 09/06/92, No. JZN92/0336/BST.

²⁵²⁸ ICTY, (IT-98-33), Krstic Judgement, paragraph 118. The Directive as revised on 19 July 1993 is reprinted in Bruce D. Berkowitz, ‘Rules of Engagement for U.N. peacekeeping Forces In Bosnia’, *Orbis*, (Fall 1994) 635- 646. This represents a UN Restricted document. The classification had earlier been a reason not to submit the Rules of Engagement to Parliament. See also W.B. Kroon & J.C.B. van der Veer, ‘Rules of Engagement: Ervaringen van Nederlandse land- en luchtmachtmilitairen tijdens UNPROFOR en IFOR’ [Rules of Engagement: Experiences of the Royal Netherlands Army and Airforce troops during UNPROFOR and IFOR], *Militaire Spectator*, 166(1997)463-472.

²⁵²⁹ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 080, File 6.0, Legal, 05/05/95 – 21/08/95. A proposal for change dated from 07/06/95. UNPROFOR Interoffice Memorandum Legal Adviser Lt Col Jost van Duurling to Comd, No. 20/19/95. The draft Rule of Engagement for artillery and mortars indicated that where possible smoke grenades had to be fired first. Although this instruction did not find its way to the approved Rules of Engagement, a parallel can be drawn with the firing of light grenades by Dutchbat.

a minimum, and could normally only be used in self-defence.²⁵³⁰ The Rules of Engagement for UNPROFOR leaned heavily on the traditional peacekeeping concept, and were geared mainly to lightly-armed peacekeepers in an environment which was not hostile to any great extent. They were intended in their practical implementation for individual members of the forces and *not* for operations in a military context, such as the case of a blocking position; only minimum force was to be used at any time. Should it prove necessary to open fire, then warning shots had to be fired in the air initially. Individual, aimed shots could be fired only if the warning shots were ignored. Use of automatic fire (for instance machine guns) was permitted as a last resort. The guidelines assumed that the phrase: ‘United Nations, halt, hands up’ would be shouted out before firing took place, followed by ‘United Nations, stop or I fire’. If necessary, the warning had to be repeated to prevent any misunderstanding, and only then could the weapon be made ready, followed by a shot to be fired into the air – if there was any time left.²⁵³¹ These guidelines have been referred to in chapter 1 of Part II.

These were hardly practical instructions for combat conditions. The instructions in the original Rules of Engagement dating from 1992 were even worse: according to these, the manning, preparing, moving and firing of weapons in the presence of warring factions – as was the case with the blocking position – was prohibited.²⁵³²

Despite these extremely restrictive rules, the UN did not reject the use of force in peacekeeping out of hand. Since the UN operation in the Congo, and later also, force could be used during peacekeeping operations, in self defence, and also when the peace force was prevented from carrying out their mandate. This formulation was again used during peacekeeping operations such as UNEF (Suez Canal), UNDOF (Golan Heights), UNIFIL (Lebanon) and also in Bosnia. Force Commanders seldom used this possibility, however, because they did not want conflicts to escalate, for which they did not have the military means at their disposal either.²⁵³³ But Boutros-Ghali had also already de facto excluded the use of force other than for self defence since the start of the UNPROFOR mission.²⁵³⁴

The UNPROFOR commander in Sarajevo and the Sector commanders were entitled to change the Rules of Engagement but this was not done for the purpose of setting up the blocking positions. The use of force around these blocking positions therefore complied with the then current Rules of Engagement: a cautious position with firing over the head of the enemy, and the use of light grenades. Use of force in this situation was permitted to a Dutchbat soldier in order to defend himself, as well as individuals and areas placed under protection of Dutchbat, against a direct attack but this did not rule out the limits set by UNPROFOR to the use of force. These rules were not intended for a deliberate attack with approaching tanks; they were silent on the question of how to respond when being fired at with mortars or artillery.

Only the new Rules of Engagement dated 17 July 1995 provided for the use of anti-tank weapons and mortars. These stipulated in relation to fire from anti-tank weapons that the rifleman as well as the commander on the spot should have positively identified the target, that both had to have the target as well as the surroundings in their sight, and that they had to be in contact with each other. The rule relating to fire from mortars was that an observer had to identify the target, that the latter should have the target continuously in view, and that the unit’s Fire Coordination Center had to give permission to fire the first shot. Moreover, the rule that multiple weapons could only be used for firing after a UN unit had been fired at, applied to anti-tank weapons as well as mortars. And the choice of ammunition for antitank weapons and mortars had to ‘be appropriate to the target and the effect desired’.

²⁵³⁰ Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to SCR 721(1991), 11/12/91, Annex III, para 4.

²⁵³¹ CRST. Force Commander Directive No. 01, 24/03/92. UN Restricted.

²⁵³² CRST. Force Commander Directive No. 01, 24/03/92, Rule No. 6 Option A. UN Restricted.

²⁵³³ Confidential interview (63). Boutros-Ghali used this formulation in S/24440, 10/09/92.

²⁵³⁴ ABZ, Yugoslavia, res 770 (1992). Code d’Ansembourg 783, 19/08/92.

Protection of the population or of the Safe Area?

There were other discrepancies between theory and practice in relation to the use of force. The subsequent current Rules of Engagement did, for instance, not contain a definition of the important principle of proportionality in the use of force. But the question of how to deal with the use of force to protect the population was of the utmost importance. UN Resolution 836 dated May 1993 was an important guideline in this context, in addition to the Rules of Engagement. The Resolution dealt with the fulfilment of the UNPROFOR mandate through deterrence, by threatening to deploy weapons. An order for UNPROFOR was given 'to deter attacks against the Safe Areas'. This concept, however, was of a different order; in practice it only referred to the presence of UNPROFOR, possibly backed up by NATO aircraft, of which it was hoped that they had a deterrent effect. The resolution never led to a change in the Rules of Engagement already in force at that time; the principle of deterrence was not elaborated there.²⁵³⁵ The crux of this resolution was, however, that it was aimed at deterring attacks on Safe Areas, not at resisting such attacks.

The interpretation by e.g. the former legal advisor at UNPF in Zagreb, Gary F. Collins, implied that UNPROFOR was only permitted to use force in practice when its own personnel was at risk, and not in order to protect the population. Boutros-Ghali had sent a non-official working paper to the Security Council on 28 May 1993, according to Collins, with the question whether the Security Council expected UNPROFOR to use force in an attack on a Safe Area. The Security Council had never answered this question. Requests from Zagreb to the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations for guidelines on this point were never complied with by New York. Subsequent Force Commanders therefore considered Resolution 836 as not practicable, according to Collins, and no further attempts were made in practice to make the resolution practicable in retrospect as far as this point was concerned. It therefore remained a resolution without teeth, because the traditional Rules of Engagement for peacekeeping remained in force. The protection of the population therefore lacked a legal basis.²⁵³⁶

Another legal adviser in Zagreb, Dutch Lieutenant Colonel Jost van Duurling, also concluded that Resolution 836 allowed the use of force with the weapons available on the ground and Close Air Support, but both only in self defence. Protection of the population could not be included in the concept of self defence, in his opinion.

But this conflicted with the political interpretation given to it. Van Duurling pointed out that, for instance, the Secretary-General of the UN adhered to the principle that protection of the population was more important than the terrain of the Safe Areas. He considered that Boutros-Ghali did not view protection of the Safe Areas as a goal in itself; it was only intended as a temporary measure which did not mean that UNPROFOR should lose sight of the original mandate. The purpose of the mandate was to allow for humanitarian aid and to promote the peace process. This meant that priorities could conflict with each other, certainly in view of the limited resources at the disposal of UNPROFOR.²⁵³⁷ When asked, Boutros-Ghali concurred that it was indeed his philosophy to protect the population, rather than the territory.²⁵³⁸

These views are not just expressed in hindsight; day-to-day experience in Zagreb included the feeling that UNPROFOR was about the protection of the population, rather than the Safe Area in a geographical sense. But that argument proved difficult to explain externally, as became evident during the Senior Staff Meeting in Zagreb on 10 July, in which Akashi and Janvier participated, and where the

²⁵³⁵ DCBC, 1589. Force Commander's Policy Directive Number (13), Issued 24/03/92, Revised 17/07/95. UN Restricted. The 17/07/95 rules read: 'The amount of force which is reasonable in intensity, duration and magnitude, based on all facts known to the commander at the time, to decisively counter the hostile act or hostile intent and to ensure the continued safety of UN forces or non-UN personnel that are protected by UN personnel'.

²⁵³⁶ Correspondence with former Legal Adviser Gary F. Collins, 05/03/01.

²⁵³⁷ NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. 'Briefing on Safe Areas, NAC decisions and Demilitarized Zones', 17/04/95.

²⁵³⁸ Interview Boutros-Ghali, 30/01/01.

issue of a guideline for press briefings on this point was raised. This discussion was continued in Akashi's office and was not recorded.²⁵³⁹ An explicit answer on the question as to what had to be protected, the terrain or the population, has not been found anywhere.

NATO commanders, on the other hand, were under the impression that protection of a Safe Area related to territory. SACEUR General Joulwan as well as NATO Admiral Smith thought so.²⁵⁴⁰ They also saw this as a simple gauge to check whether the parties complied with a truce. Protection of the Safe Area related to both, in the mind of the Bosnian Government; UNPROFOR should not only protect the population, the territorial integrity of the enclave should also be safeguarded.²⁵⁴¹

But the UN opted for protection of the population, rather than protection of the enclave's territorial integrity. This was not understood properly outside the UN organisation, according to an intelligence officer in Zagreb,²⁵⁴² and there were even misunderstandings about this within the UN organisation. It seemed to be recognized in Sarajevo but whether it was realized by many Dutchbat troops is extremely doubtful. According to De Ruiter in Sarajevo, this UN policy surfaced when the VRS passed a particular geographical line, and it was not considered a sufficiently serious violation to reach for a remedy such as air support. It was worth a protest but not much more than that.²⁵⁴³

Protection of the population *was* part of the UN mandate in its interpretation by the Dutch Government. But the Government stated in June 1995, even before the fall of Srebrenica, that the population centres could not be protected adequately even if the UN had large numbers of additional troops at its disposal, this also applied to the Safe Areas. The Ministerial Council then judged that it would have been better if NATO had established the Safe Areas, rather than the UN. The only thing which could really deter the Bosnian Serbs was the deployment of air power, the meeting felt. But the Council realized that this could not be used as long as reprisals on the ground were a risk. Reprisals would become less easy only after reinforcement of the ground troops. This stance reflected the proposals made in May by Janvier and Boutros-Ghali to leave the eastern enclaves due to the vulnerability to hostage campaigns, which did not receive backing from the Dutch side at that time either.²⁵⁴⁴ (see Chapter 1).

The conclusion relating to the Rules of Engagement is that the UN troops were in a vulnerable position, for a number of reasons. They were reactive and were not allowed to undertake offensive operations; they were wholly equipped for peacekeeping, not for situations which lacked peace. The rules were so restrictive that they did not allow UNPROFOR units to operate effectively with acceptable risks. The Rules of Engagement were not suitable for combat situations which UN troops got drawn into, because they were not allowed to use more force than strictly necessary. It was not realistic to expect military troops under fire to read and decipher the respective ten pages of definitions, guidelines and flow charts. The Rules of Engagement were clear on two points only: never to take the initiative in the use of force, and no reprisals.²⁵⁴⁵

In practice, it was the local commander of a single weapon system who had to find his way amongst these rules in difficult and unforeseen circumstances. They also had to account for their application afterwards.

²⁵³⁹ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 88040, File 4-2, SRSG Meeting, May-Oct 95. Senior Staff Meeting, 10/07/95. Another remarkable statement in this connection during the Staff Meeting was that the ABiH had begun an offensive from Srebrenica and was sufficiently strong to defend itself. There is no record as to who made this statement but Janvier had held a similar point of view on other occasions

²⁵⁴⁰ Interviews George Joulwan and Leighton Smith, 08/06/95 and 06/06/00.

²⁵⁴¹ DCBC, 673. UNPF HQ, G2 Military Information Branch, Interoffice Memorandum from G2 to COS, 12/07/95. UN Restr.

²⁵⁴² Interview R. Theunens, 08/02/00.

²⁵⁴³ Interview J.A.C. de Ruiter, 29/06/00.

²⁵⁴⁴ Objectivized summary for the NIOD research of the Ministerial Council meeting held 07/06/95.

²⁵⁴⁵ Response Bruce Berkowitz to Major-General John A. MacInnis, 'The Rules of Engagement for U.N. Peacekeeping Forces in Former Yugoslavia: A Response', *Orbis*, (Winter 1995)97-100; Bruce D. Berkowitz, 'Rules of Engagement for U.N. peacekeeping Forces In Bosnia', *Orbis*, (Fall 1994)635- 646.

There was also ambiguity in relation to the question whether UNPROFOR protected the population, or the terrain of the Safe Areas. From a military point of view the latter seemed the most logical, but this was countered from political quarters: in this way the suggestion could be created that UNPROFOR was not there to protect the population, and that was not the intention. As a result, the question was not answered explicitly, which gave rise to many misunderstandings.

In practice, the Rules of Engagement basically only allowed force in self defence.

The safety of the peacekeepers

In practice, use of force would therefore be allowed mainly in self defence. This was a reflection of the fact that the safety of the peacekeepers was a source of continuing concern within the UN. The policy laid down that the safety of the troops had priority over the carrying out of the mandate, as mentioned in several chapters of this part. Government leaders had regularly asked UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali for guarantees for the safety of their troops. This was a reason for Boutros-Ghali to state that the political aspect of the mandate had been more important than the military aspect. He considered it a matter of political diplomatic psychology to show the Bosnian Serbs that the UN would not stand for any nonsense, but at the same time he said that the UN had assumed that the Safe Areas would never be attacked.²⁵⁴⁶

The commanders in the operational area thought little different on the safety of the troops. General Smith stated in a guideline in March 1995 that the population, in so far it was practically possible in conditions of war, should be protected, but also that any risk to UN personnel while doing so had to be avoided. UNPROFOR did not have a mandate in his opinion to fight a war on the side of one of the warring factions; the safety of the UN personnel was therefore of the utmost importance to Smith.²⁵⁴⁷ Janvier largely agreed. Janvier had asked Kofi Annan on 27 April to let the troop-contributing nations troops know that Akashi as well as himself considered the safety of the UN personnel as their prime responsibility.²⁵⁴⁸ Concerns about the safety of the peacekeepers had only grown in New York and amongst the governments concerned since the hostage crisis at the end of May. Akashi instructed General Smith that the execution of the mandate was subordinate to the safety of the personnel,²⁵⁴⁹ and he received the same instruction from Janvier. Loss of lives merely to defend positions had to be prevented, Janvier emphasized. On the other hand, Janvier wanted real key positions to be retained and defended if necessary. Fire from one of the warring factions would have to be answered but with adherence to the principle of proportionality.²⁵⁵⁰ Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali also wrote in his report to the Security Council on 30 May 1995 that the safety of the UN personnel was paramount.²⁵⁵¹ And on 11 July, just before the deployment of Close Air Support at Srebrenica, Akashi wrote to New York that the protection of the Dutch troops at the OPs and in the blocking positions took precedence.²⁵⁵² These statements by four main players at the UN left therefore no doubt what the UN thought about the lives of peacekeepers.

Concern about the safety of the personnel was no different on the Dutch side. Voorhoeve and Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen discussed this point as soon as the blocking positions were being set up. They arrived at the line that human lives should not be lost unnecessarily. It did not result in

²⁵⁴⁶ Interview Boutros-Ghali, 30/01/01.

²⁵⁴⁷ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Commander BHC Directive 1/95, 15/03/95, Conf.

²⁵⁴⁸ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 27/04/95, No. UNPF-HQ Z-674.

²⁵⁴⁹ Confidential information (24).

²⁵⁵⁰ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Force Commander to Lt Gen R. Smith Only, 29/05/95, File Ref: FC/95/0801, UN conf.

²⁵⁵¹ Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to Security Council Resolutions 982 (1195) and 987 (1995), 30/05/95, S/1995/444.

²⁵⁵² NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1130.

intervention on the part of The Hague; the government was confident that the local UN commanders could be trusted to ensure the safety of the Dutch personnel.²⁵⁵³

The Dutch Government therefore did not go as far as, for instance, the Canadian Government; the Canadian Prime Minister issued an order on 13 July to abandon two Canadian battalion OPs at Visoko for safety reasons, which were besieged by the ABiH.²⁵⁵⁴ Minister Voorhoeve had taken the view in the Ministerial Council on 29 May 1995 that if it were to come to a pitched battle between the VRS and Dutchbat, Dutchbat would have to opt for self-preservation.²⁵⁵⁵ There was no battle but neither did The Hague issue any instructions which put self-preservation above carrying out the assignment.

The safety of the Dutch troops played a similarly large role within Dutchbat. Company Commander Groen, for instance, stated that he considered care for his own personnel to be his main task and that safeguarding the safety of the population came second.

Giving priority to the safety of one's own troops is not unusual among military organisations. The general principles of war generally mention safety as the first principle, an essential prerequisite for the preservation of one's own resources and freedom of action. Groen had the impression that the task to protect the population as best as possible with the scarce resources available could be performed best if Dutchbat took the most neutral stance possible. This was a lesson which in his opinion had also been learned from the experience of the predecessors, Dutchbat I and II.²⁵⁵⁶ That is also why the interpretation of the order to take up the blocking positions resulted in the instruction to fire over the heads of Bosnian Serbs. The general opinion within B Company was that this interpretation would have been the best solution, otherwise more victims would have fallen, amongst Dutchbat as well as amongst the population. The – 'green' – order was also thought to have been in conflict with the Rules of Engagement by the B company.²⁵⁵⁷

The death of Van Renssen on 8 July also played a significant role in the thinking in relation to the safety of the Dutch troops. His death, caused by the ABiH, can be seen as a turning point; afterwards, many a Dutchbat soldier was watching the actions of the ABiH just as much as those of the VRS. In that sense the death of Van Renssen had a considerable effect on the attitude of the Dutch troops. Dutchbat troops realized then that they found themselves continuously between two fires, with the advancing VRS before them and the ABiH behind, threatening the Dutchbat personnel out of fear that the battalion would withdraw from the enclave.²⁵⁵⁸

Several incidents occurred after 8 July when the ABiH took a hostile stance against Dutchbat. Shortly after midnight on 9 July the ABiH demanded that a Dutchbat APC drove on some five hundred metres to defend a position there, together with approximately forty ABiH soldiers. Behind the APC was a 'blockade' of ABiH soldiers threatening to throw hand grenades. After the APC turned round anyway, one of these ABiH soldiers threw a hand grenade after the vehicles, without causing any damage.²⁵⁵⁹

The experiences of the blocking positions with the ABiH were different. The ABiH did not actually fire on Lieutenant Van Duijn's vehicles but threatened to do so. One ABiH soldier sat down in front of one of the APCs armed with an RPG anti-tank weapon and said that the group had to remain and start fighting, otherwise the weapon would be fired at the APC. This led Van Duijn to wonder what the Bravo-3 soldiers should do; from time to time grenades exploded so close to them that it would be better to leave the personnel in the YPR for that reason; but what if the anti-tank weapon exploded and the personnel was in the YPR? He tried negotiating.²⁵⁶⁰

²⁵⁵³ Diary Voorhoeve, p. 100.

²⁵⁵⁴ Interview Barry Ashton Retd, 30/05/00.

²⁵⁵⁵ Diary Voorhoeve, p. 83.

²⁵⁵⁶ *Koninklijke Landmacht, Militaire Doctrine*, (1996), p. 88; Confidential Information (81).

²⁵⁵⁷ SMG/Debrief. Feitenrelaas [Factual Account of the Debriefing], p. 173.

²⁵⁵⁸ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99; interview J.J.C Voorhoeve, 15/04/97.

²⁵⁵⁹ SMG 1004/44. Capsat B1A to 90E, 09/07/95, 00.15.

²⁵⁶⁰ Interview L.C. van Duijn, 02/07/99.

Lieutenant Mustert at his blocking position, Bravo-4, reported he was fired at several times with small bore weapons and once with a .50 machine gun, or a 12.7 bore. The hits could be heard to land on the YPR but the vehicle was able to withstand this.²⁵⁶¹ The YPR was again fired at and hit with small bore weapons at the time the blocking position was abandoned. Mustert could not establish who had done so but because the VRS was a little further away at that time, the occupants tended to think that it was the ABiH. The same YPR was fired on a couple of times more at a later stage, and the armour-plating showed indeed some dents and pits on the right- and left-hand side.²⁵⁶²

The weekly situation report from Akashi to New York reported three cases of ABiH attacks on the blocking positions: with small-bore weapons, with a hand grenade and with an anti-tank rocket.²⁵⁶³ The fact that the ABiH fired an antitank weapon at a YPR at 10.49 hours on 10 July, which missed its target, cannot be verified from Dutchbat logs. It is possible that this was confused with the threat to deploy anti-tank weapons.²⁵⁶⁴ The ABiH also fired at the British Joint Commission Observers (JCOs). After they were ordered to return to Potocari in the evening of 10 July, ABiH troops who were fighting around OP-H prevented this, until an ABiH soldier who knew the JCOs agreed to let them leave.²⁵⁶⁵

12. First impressions of Dutchbat action

The way in which Dutchbat carried out the assignment to set up blocking positions seemed to have aroused false expectations in a number of cases; as a result, the initial euphoria in respect of the Dutchbat achievement soon turned into disappointment and criticism. The military results achieved by the blocking positions seemed to have been overplayed.

Expectations as to what Dutchbat could do about a VRS advance were inflated even shortly before the blocking positions were set up. An Intelligence Summary mentioned, for instance, that after the loss of the four southern observation posts and the detection of four VRS tanks on 9 July, Dutchbat 'deployed antitank guided missile teams' along the southern confrontation line, in an attempt to halt any further VRS advance.²⁵⁶⁶

Colonel Brantz reported to The Hague on the operations of blocking position Bravo-3; he reported that B Company opened fire using six .50 machine guns when the VRS with eighty men descended in the early evening of 10 July.²⁵⁶⁷ The previous chapter showed that this concerned a threat only, as the VRS troops did not actually descend from the hills.

Akashi reported to New York late in the evening of 10 July that blocking positions had fired over the heads of the VRS but that 'the Dutch engaged in direct firefights with the VRS, using personal weapons and .50 calibre machine guns' when the VRS continued their advance regardless. According to Akashi, the advance was halted as a result.²⁵⁶⁸ The latter was actually a consequence of darkness (little fighting took place at night), rather than a response to action by blocking position Bravo-1, as Akashi seemed to infer. Neither did logbooks or debriefing reports mention the use of personal weapons by personnel in blocking positions in an exchange of fire, as Akashi believed; the VRS was too far away.

Reports by Akashi to New York on 11 July initially mentioned that the Bosnian Serbs had not advanced beyond the blocking positions.²⁵⁶⁹ This statement seemed to be of a positive nature but neither the reports compiled during the last few hours of 10 July in Zagreb, nor the 11 July morning

²⁵⁶¹ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

²⁵⁶² Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

²⁵⁶³ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Akashi to Annan, Weekly Situation Report, 20/07/95, No. Z-1212.

²⁵⁶⁴ SMG 1004. Interoffice Memorandum G3 LAND OPS to FC, 13/07/95.

²⁵⁶⁵ Confidential information (1).

²⁵⁶⁶ Confidential information (6).

²⁵⁶⁷ DCBC, 648. Coll. Brantz to Sitcen BLS, Sitrep 101900B Jul 95.

²⁵⁶⁸ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 10/07/95, No. Z-1128.

²⁵⁶⁹ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1130.

report indicated that the blocking positions had returned to the town during the night: all APCs were parked in the market square.

This assessment outlined by Akashi founds its way to New York in no time at all. Akashi's reports from Zagreb formed the basis for a statement during a UN briefing in New York to the effect that fire from a blocking position had halted the VRS advance during the evening of 10 July. The spokesman added that Dutchbat had not only halted the VRS advance temporarily but had also managed to stop the shelling of the town. However, as said earlier, the level of activity displayed by the warring factions fell sharply after nightfall. It was further mentioned at the briefing that the VRS had taken the B company commander captive, which was incorrect.²⁵⁷⁰ It is not known how New York obtained this information. From New York, such information found its way back to the national governments; for instance, the British Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, who had just taken office, stated in the House of Commons that the VRS launched an infantry attack during the evening of 10 July, and that Dutchbat had returned fire from the blocking position, after which the attack had been discontinued.²⁵⁷¹ And the Defence Crisis Management Centre also heard that eighty VRS troops attacked a blocking position but that the Dutch fired back. This message arrived by telephone from the Deputy Military Adviser to the Permanent Representative at the UN, Major Sondag. Another report which arrived at the Defence Crisis Management Centre from New York indicated, for instance, that 34 VRS troops were positioned at the southern edge of Srebrenica, and that the blocking position there returned fire too.²⁵⁷² Matters were stated less explicitly than in New York in a situation report compiled by the Defence Crisis Management Centre on 10 July but this report also indicated that fire was returned from the blocking position; the type of weapon was not known.²⁵⁷³ Firing had indeed taken place but it will not have been immediately clear to everyone that this was merely firing over the head of the enemy.

Another notable point in the reports by Akashi to New York was that 'the Dutch blocking position is running out of ammunition and, in the face of a BSA [VRS] concerted attack, will be unable to defend their position on the ground'.²⁵⁷⁴ This was not quite correct either; there *was* a shortage of ammunition but this was not the reason why blocking positions had been withdrawn²⁵⁷⁵; it will be clear from the earlier discussion that the VRS facing the blocking positions were simply too great in number. This was the reason for the retreat, rather than lack of ammunition. Akashi had already reported earlier²⁵⁷⁶ that he had been told that Dutchbat had little ammunition. This was strictly correct. The amount of ammunition available to the blocking positions was indeed scant; the APCs carried approximately ten boxes of ammunition each. Firing a few times over the heads of the VRS soon meant two or three boxes of spent ammunition. That strategy rapidly got through the supply available, leaving little for any serious combat.²⁵⁷⁷ Dutchbat, on the other hand, considered the scant ammunition a fact of life with which they had to live with. The B Company logbooks did not report it as a problem. Dutchbat dealt with this in practice by firing the .50 machine gun on the APC at length once only; the crew at a blocking position then made themselves scarce, partly because they were not in a position, nor did they have the means, to continue the fight upon retaliation by the VRS, and partly in order not to risk becoming an easy VRS target.²⁵⁷⁸

²⁵⁷⁰ DCBC, 668. Briefing Note Srebrenica, sent with fax Milad/PVVN to minister of Foreign Affairs, minister of DEF/DS and DEF/DAB, 111842 LT Jul 1995, No. NYV-4334.

²⁵⁷¹ Statement by the Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, in The House of Commons, 12/07/95.

²⁵⁷² DCBC, 528. Daily reports DCBC.

²⁵⁷³ DCBC, 607. Annex to Situation Report Peace Operations No. 137/95, 10/11/07/95.

²⁵⁷⁴ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1131.

²⁵⁷⁵ Interview J. R. Groen, 05/07/99.

²⁵⁷⁶ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1130.

²⁵⁷⁷ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

²⁵⁷⁸ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

Akashi stated on 12 July during a meeting at the UNPF headquarters in Zagreb that the Dutch had conducted a strong defence and that their action had been ‘very admirable’. He said that Dutchbat had done well in setting up the blocking positions, unfortunately the VRS had circumvented these.²⁵⁷⁹

Initial praise for Dutchbat from the Netherlands and the rest of the world...

During later days, positive reports on the blocking positions’ performance came from Dutch Defence circles in particular. The Deputy Army Commander, Major-General Van Baal, said in a speech to the NATO Chiefs of Defence Staffs that B Company (which had set up the blocking positions) had successfully withstood the first attack on the town of Srebrenica. The APCs had indeed had to give up their positions but Van Baal emphasized that they had managed to temporarily halt the attack by firing their .50 machine guns and mortars in the direction of the VRS positions.²⁵⁸⁰ Van Baal’s statement too was partly incorrect; the previous chapter has shown that the mortars had not fired live ammunition (merely light grenades as a warning), and that the .50 machine gun was only fired occasionally. The VRS had indeed been brought to a temporarily halt only, as Van Baal said. But this had probably been the result of caution on the part of the VRS so as not to bring about victims amongst their own personnel and amongst Dutchbat troops, rather than it influencing the will of the VRS to take possession of the enclave, as Van Baal seemed to suggest.

Minister Voorhoeve stated during the parliamentary debate in December 1995 that Dutchbat had not surrendered the enclave without a struggle. He considered that commentators who had used the word ‘cowardly’ had not put themselves in the position of the lightly armed troops, in white vehicles, who had been ordered to set up a blocking position – according to Voorhoeve in order to serve as a target for a Bosnian Serb superior force. Dozens of Dutch troops could have been killed or wounded, the Minister said. That would have given rise to a completely different political debate, and he himself would have been blamed for causing loss of lives.²⁵⁸¹

A year after the fall of Srebrenica, Minister Voorhoeve again stated that the blocking positions could have resulted in many Dutchbat victims. The Close Air Support could have resulted in a bloodbath amongst the hostages and the population. The VRS had earlier also shown that giving Close Air Support could have led to shelling the population, Voorhoeve said.²⁵⁸² These statements contained some measure of rhetoric; the fact that the VRS began shelling after the deployment of Close Air Support was not unusual: the enclave came regularly under fire during the days in July. But the VRS had never dared to kill hostages under the UN troops before that time.

Initially there was nothing but praise for the Dutchbat action, including at international level. The Military Advisor to the Secretary-General of the UN, Van Kappen, indicated to UN Ambassador Biegman in New York during the morning of 12 July that the more information became available on what had happened on 10 and 11 July, the more appreciation seemed to grow for the professionalism and the courage Dutchbat had shown in carrying out its task. Van Kappen also praised the way in which the Dutch troops had carried out the order to set up blocking positions during a briefing on 12 July. He substantiated this by pointing out the enormous superior military strength and the scarcity of Dutchbat arms. He believed that Dutchbat had taken the decision to retreat at the right time, having

²⁵⁷⁹ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 88040, File 4-2, SRSG Meeting, May-Oct 95. Senior Staff Meeting, 12/07/95; NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Dairy Banbury, SRSG’s briefing 12/07/95.

²⁵⁸⁰ SMG 1007/12. Speech PBLs, A.P.P.M. Van Baal, meeting COS NATO, no date. The English translation is entitled: ‘Address by the Deputy Commander in Chief RNLA, Major General A.P.P.M. Van Baal, on the occasion of the meeting by the NATO Military Committee on Monday 11/09/95’.

²⁵⁸¹ TK, 1995 – 1996, Proceedings [*Handelingen TK*] 40-3176, 19/12/95.

²⁵⁸² Speech by the Minister of Defence, J.J.C. Voorhoeve, during the memorial service for the fall of Srebrenica held on 11 July 1996.

initially offered powerful resistance by a fighting withdrawal. Moreover, Close Air Support was provided at the time that the hostages were in the hands of the VRS.²⁵⁸³

UN Ambassador Biegman subsequently reported to The Hague that ‘the quality of the action by the Dutch peacekeepers has not gone unnoticed in New York circles’. Biegman also quoted extensively from words of praise for Dutchbat. During the Contact Group consultations, Kofi Annan had on his own initiative included a passage in the preamble of what would become UN Resolution 1004 in order to ‘emphatically express appreciation for the quality of the Dutchbat actions.’ The initiative for this did not stem from Annan himself but from Akashi. The spokesman for the Secretary-General of the UN had earlier in a press briefing referred to the ‘invaluable humanitarian work’ which Dutchbat had carried out: medical assistance was being given (see Annex ‘Dutchbat and the population – medical issues’) and the Dutch shared what little food they had with the refugees.

Van Kappen later commented that nobody in New York assumed that Dutchbat should have continued to fight to the end. He said that the initial reports from Zagreb created the idea that Dutchbat had drawn a line in the sand and that the battalion had therefore done what they had been ordered to do, namely offer resistance to the Bosnian Serbs. The mood in New York in the first instance was that Dutchbat had carried out its tasks well and courageously. There had been reports in New York of a retreat under fire from Srebrenica to Potocari.

When in the days following 11 July things turned out not to have been as they seemed, and when it became clear that the blocking positions in the end amounted to much less than first thought, the mood in New York rapidly changed, according to Van Kappen. This also happened to the claim that Dutchbat shared its last rations with the refugees. It slowly became known what had really happened to the refugees, and at the same time the earlier regard for Dutchbat diminished. Van Kappen said that the expectation was more or less that Dutchbat would take up a firm position morally speaking, as Morillon had done earlier (see also Parts I and II). Disappointment grew when it turned out that Dutchbat had not done so, even though it was recognized in New York that fighting was no longer an option for Dutchbat once it arrived in Potocari, because there were so many refugees there who could have easily been drawn into any fighting.²⁵⁸⁴

Initially Dutchbat was showered with praise for their actions. During the formal assembly of the Security Council to adopt Resolution 1004 (see Chapter 8 for the creation of this resolution), many delegates sang Dutchbat’s praises; the Bosnian delegation thought that the courageous but lightly-armed Dutch peacekeepers had been overrun; the Italian representative declared solidarity with the ‘courageous Dutch soldiers’ who shared the hardship of the population and who had been faced with ‘overwhelmingly superior forces’, and this under disheartening psychological conditions with a large number of hostages; the Czech Republic spoke of the ‘very courageous way’ in which resistance had been offered to superior forces and the way in which assistance had been offered to the population. Argentina complimented Dutchbat on the work it had done in critical circumstances; Indonesia praised Dutchbat for the courage and the resolve it had displayed against a superior force; Nigeria had words of praise for the willingness on the part of Dutchbat to make sacrifices; the United Kingdom complimented Dutchbat on the ‘bravery with which they have withstood attacks’ by the VRS; Germany said that Dutchbat had shown great courage in carrying out its task and that ‘they had acted in an exemplary manner’ to alleviate the suffering on the part of the population; and finally the United States, in the person of the Permanent Representative Madeleine Albright, even spoke of Dutch peacekeepers ‘who set a standard for bravery and dedication that will be long remembered’.²⁵⁸⁵

Bilaterally there was also fulsome praise for Dutchbat during the first few days after 11 July, for instance from the United States; similar voices were heard during the daily press briefing on 13 July from the American State Department. The spokesman said on behalf of the Secretary of State, Warren

²⁵⁸³ ABZ, DPV/ARA/00797. Code Biegman 610, 12/07/95.

²⁵⁸⁴ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1138; interview F.H. van Kappen, 21/06/00.

²⁵⁸⁵ ABZ, DPV/ARA/00797. Code Biegman 610, 12/07/95; ABZ, PVNY. The opinions have been copied from Security Council 3553rd meeting (S/PV.3553) held on 12/07/95.

Christopher, that the brave conduct on the part of Dutchbat was highly appreciated, as were their efforts to offer protection to innocent citizens; ‘the Dutch - under very difficult terms - are trying to do the best they can to protect the refugees and to monitor the behaviour of the Bosnian Serb forces towards the refugees’, said spokesman Burns.²⁵⁸⁶ Christopher himself voiced further appreciative words to his Dutch colleague Van Mierlo a few days later, when nothing was yet known of the mass murders which had taken place:

‘Let me express my admiration for the courage and dedication with which your troops are handling an extremely difficult situation in Srebrenica. The Dutch Battalion’s action, under fire, to care for the wounded and the thousands of refugees was truly heroic. The priority you have placed on the safety of the refugees at the risk of your own soldiers, is an example of you country’s leading role in addressing humanitarian crises all over the world. Srebrenica was the most exposed enclave and the most difficult assignment in Bosnia. When the crisis came, brave Dutch soldiers averted what could have been a much greater humanitarian catastrophe.’²⁵⁸⁷

The British Government struck a similar note: Prime Minister Major told Prime Minister Kok that ‘the Dutch peacekeepers in Srebrenica did their duty magnificently and with great courage. The Netherlands can be proud of them’.²⁵⁸⁸ And the Security Council on 14 July again declared its appreciation for the courage shown by the UN personnel in Srebrenica. The Security Council also remarked that ‘the presence and bravery of the troops has undoubtedly saved the lives of many civilians’.²⁵⁸⁹

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately tried to forge political capital out of these judgements; the regional Directorate for Europe composed an official briefing text, which was distributed widely, including amongst posts abroad. The text did not mince words: ‘All sides, not least the Security Council, have expressed appreciation for the professional and courageous action by the Dutch blue helmets. Attempts to block the Bosnian Serb advance from the south and the crucial assistance they offered the population in the transfer from Srebrenica to Potocari were singled out in particular. (...) Dutchbat has done everything in its power in Srebrenica to prevent the fall of the enclave and to adequately protect the Srebrenica population but unfortunately this was unsuccessful. (...) Dutchbat currently shares its scarce provisions with the population and is trying to exert a favourable influence on developments.’

The surprising thing about this text issued on 14 July was not just that it was out-of-date (there were no longer any refugees in the compound on 13 July), it was also not sent out until after the weekend on 17 July. Also surprising was the fact that Foreign Affairs through this text called on the Bosnian Government to release the eight Dutch blue helmets held by the Bosnian Government army (the ABiH);²⁵⁹⁰ Dutchbat troops had never been in the hands of the Bosnian Muslims, and there had not been a government army in the Srebrenica enclave since 11 July.

²⁵⁸⁶ FOIA US Dept of State. SecState WashDC to All Diplomatic and Consular Posts, No. State 169604, 142046Z.

²⁵⁸⁷ ABZ, DAV 999.241. Letter K. Terry Dornbush to Hans van Mierlo, 17/07/95, with a letter from Warren Christopher to Hans [van Mierlo], 17/07/95.

²⁵⁸⁸ General affairs [AZ] 95moo5637. Ambassador Sir David Miers to W.J.P. Geerts Advisor to the Ministry of General Affairs, 19/07/95.

²⁵⁸⁹ ABZ, dossier DAV 999.24. Presidential statement on Bosnia, 14/07/95, No. S/PRST/1995/32. Sent by fax PVVN to M-Secretariat, 14/07/95, No. NYV-4410.

²⁵⁹⁰ ABZ, dossier DAV 999.241. Memorandum DVL/BZ, 14/07/95, No. 619/95.

...but not from the French minister of Foreign Affairs and the French President

Critical words from the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hervé de Charette only provided a note of discord in this chorus of appreciation. His view was the result of a French debate in which President Chirac had also participated, according to Wijnaendts, the Dutch Ambassador in France. Surprise had been expressed there on the speed with which Dutchbat had given up the enclave, while the order had been given to halt the VRS advance by setting up blocking positions; the French idea had been that Dutchbat could have defended itself against the 1500-strong VRS and four tanks. When this proved unsuccessful, Close Air Support had been promised and delivered. The fact that the Dutchbat Forward Air Controllers had abruptly stopped indicating targets for the NATO aircraft had subsequently given rise to surprise in Paris.²⁵⁹¹ As shown in chapter 6, a complicated set of factors caused Close Air Support to be cancelled. It was incorrect that the Forward Air Controllers had stopped indicating targets after the initial bombs had been dropped. The second wave of attack, comprising American F-16s, had not been able to identify the target indicated. Only then was a more reticent stance adopted in relation to the bombardments, due amongst other things to the threat which the Bosnian Serbs voiced against the hostages and refugees, as discussed in chapter 6, and as a result of the Bosnian Serbs shooting at a Forward Air Controller (Windmill 03).

Minister De Charette then also accused Dutchbat in public, in the French national and international press. He said on French television on 13 July that he found it hard to accept the fact that Srebrenica had fallen without a genuine response on the part of UNPROFOR. The Dutch UN troops had not offered adequate resistance in his opinion, and their presence in the coaches used for deporting the population made them an accessory to ethnic cleansing²⁵⁹² (see Part IV for these events). De Charette also wondered why the thousands of Bosnian soldiers had not defended the enclave. He said to have understood from Western intelligence services that the Bosnian Serbs with their tanks were a superior force but that it had nevertheless been expected that the ABiH would have resisted for longer. The speed of the capture had surprised Paris. This suggested either lack of will amongst the ABiH to defend the enclave in his opinion, or it suggested an ABiH strategy to pull the UN into the war on their side.²⁵⁹³

De Charette's words marked a turnabout in the earlier appreciation for Dutchbat and struck a heavy blow in the Netherlands. The responses in the Netherlands to the statements by De Charette were furious. Minister Van Mierlo said that De Charette's statements were so wide off the mark that he could not imagine that it was true that De Charette had in fact spoken these words.²⁵⁹⁴ The messenger who brought the bad news from France was the Dutch Ambassador in Paris, Wijnaendts. The latter raised it in a telephone call to Van Mierlo on 13 July. The minister was angry and took umbrage at Wijnaendts because the latter had reported that Paris was displeased that Dutchbat had not resisted, as mentioned before. The Dutch troops were some of the best NATO had, in the opinion of Van Mierlo. Wijnaendts countered this by saying that Van Mierlo should have known that Dutchbat was demoralized as a result of creeping deterioration and had not exactly distinguished itself, and Wijnaendts thought so too. The fact that most of the Dutch troops were still very young was not relevant, according to Wijnaendts; British and French professional soldiers were young too but their training was much harder and more intensive, in his opinion. Wijnaendts was also displeased with the reports by UN Ambassador Biegman in which the latter stated that all members of the Security Council had praised Dutchbat. 'As if Biegman did not understand that this was diplomatic courtesy within the

²⁵⁹¹ ABZ, DAV 999.241. Code Wijnaendts 218, 12/07/95. Wijnaendts believed, incorrectly, that the Forward Air Controllers had suspended their activities on the orders of General Van den Breemen. Van den Breemen was on the way to Zagreb at the time Close Air Support was carried out (interview H. Wijnaendts, 08/06/00).

²⁵⁹² ABZ, PVNY. Interview de M. de Charette, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, à France 2 (Paris, 13/07/95), attached to fax DPV to PV New York, 14/07/95; *Reuters* 132145 GMT Jul 95; *ANP*, 132045 Jul 95; *NOS journaal* 13/07/95, N.3, 22.00 hours.

²⁵⁹³ *Financial Times*, 14/07/95.

²⁵⁹⁴ *NOS Journaal*, 13/07/95, N.3, 22.00 hrs.

Security Council, which was in no way related to the real state of affairs in Srebrenica', according to Wijnaendts.²⁵⁹⁵

The Dutch press too responded to criticism on the part of De Charette on 14 July, following the initial indignant response by Van Mierlo. This was couched in terms such as 'malicious and unacceptable',²⁵⁹⁶ 'criticism which is neither here nor there' and 'empty words and a transparent attempt' to bolster the UN prestige.²⁵⁹⁷ France, as a member of the Security Council, was co-responsible for the situation in Bosnia; grounds why De Charette should be 'rather less outspoken' wrote the *Algemeen Dagblad*.²⁵⁹⁸ Prime Minister Kok stated he was 'livid'. He said in *Den Haag Vandaag* that if a French Government minister indicated that the Dutch had 'let themselves be overrun, it makes your blood boil', and also: 'hats off to the minister somewhere in an elegant building in Paris, who knows it all.' Kok compared this criticism with the international recognition Dutchbat had received and he again praised the fantastic way in which Dutchbat had conducted itself and had tried to defend the enclave to the end by returning fire. For him it was 'cast in stone' that the Dutch could not have fulfilled their task any better. According to the Prime Minister, Dutchbat would not leave Srebrenica because the wounded would first have to be assisted in leaving the enclave and he also considered that relief for the separated men would have to be arranged first.²⁵⁹⁹

The words voiced by De Charette also led to surprise and indignation amongst the UNPF staff in Zagreb.²⁶⁰⁰ Even the French press, as well as the international press, showed surprise at the words used by De Charette; *Le Monde* considered the terms used by De Charrette lacking in diplomacy. The newspaper wrote that De Charette might have been basically right in that the Dutch had not succeeded in their mission to protect the Safe Area, but *Le Monde* noted that he had omitted to refer to the circumstances under which Dutchbat operated; UNPROFOR was at the mercy of Bosnian Serb reprisals and the Bosnian Muslim action had also thrown Dutchbat out of balance, according to the paper.²⁶⁰¹ The *Financial Times* wrote that Paris had surprised its allies with the 'bluntness of its reaction' to the fall of Srebrenica. This, in the opinion of the *Financial Times*, was partly linked to the cool reception of French recapture plans for Srebrenica; Paris was on its own in this respect.²⁶⁰² (See chapter 8, 'Plans for the recapture of Srebrenica.')

Neither was there much support from the French military for the words by De Charette. The French Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral Lanxade, telephoned his Dutch colleague Van den Breemen after the statement by De Charette and said that his own view was different, which he would make known to President Chirac.²⁶⁰³ The Elysée, however, seemed to lean more towards De Charette's point of view; President Chirac basically considered the action by Dutchbat amounted to UNPROFOR 'militairement [avait] mal conduit' in Srebrenica. The French military top was in complete disagreement with these critical remarks, and supposed that they could be explained on the basis of Chirac's views on, and his unfamiliarity with peace operations; Chirac allegedly believed that Srebrenica related to a 'situation de guerre' but forgot that UNPROFOR was not equipped for combat.

The question whether Dutchbat should have offered resistance was '*absurde*' for the French military top, because that would mean that the battalion would have had to switch to hostilities and sacrificing troops. The reactions by Chirac and De Charette allegedly fitted in with the 'Elysée code'; the French military top was said to have tried to make clear to Chirac on the basis of the above argument that his criticism was not justified. Chirac had responded irritably and had not changed his

²⁵⁹⁵ Interview H. Wijnaendts, 08/06/00.

²⁵⁹⁶ Editorial, *Rotterdams Dagblad*, 14/07/95.

²⁵⁹⁷ Editorial, *Trouw*, 14/07/95.

²⁵⁹⁸ Editorial, *Algemeen Dagblad*, 14/07/95.

²⁵⁹⁹ NOS, *Den Haag Vandaag*, 14/07/95, N.3, 23.00 hours.

²⁶⁰⁰ De Jonge in *NRC Handelsblad*, 27/07/95.

²⁶⁰¹ *Le Monde*, 15/07/95.

²⁶⁰² *Financial Times*, 14/07/95.

²⁶⁰³ NIOD, Coll. Hilderink. Note 'Herovering Srebrenica hoe verder' [Recapture of Srebrenica what next] in anthology 'Chronologie der gebeurtenissen' [Chronology of events].

mind. The president made it clear that what was especially important to him was that Dutchbat had not complied with the code of conduct, namely that *'l'honneur de la nation'* of the Netherlands was at stake and that the battalion should have defended itself against the attack at all cost. The French military top then repeated that Chirac misjudged the situation because there was no 'situation de guerre'.²⁶⁰⁴

Minister Van Mierlo summoned Daniel Bernard, the French Ambassador in the Netherlands, following the statement by De Charette. Van Mierlo told him in the presence of Voorhoeve that De Charette's words were not merely unfriendly but also not in accordance with the truth; there was no question of Dutchbat being an accomplice to ethnic cleansing. Van Mierlo pointed out that there had been wide acclaim internationally for the courageous action by Dutchbat; the battalion had requested Close Air Support while Dutch individuals had been taken hostage, the blocking position had conducted a defence against the Bosnian Serbs and Dutchbat troops had evacuated the hospital under artillery fire. Van Mierlo considered that the statement by De Charette did not accord with the telephone conversations he had had with the French Minister. Van Mierlo admitted that there were differences of opinion between the Netherlands and France on what approach to be taken by UNPROFOR but De Charette had gone too far with his statement.

Voorhoeve told the ambassador that he assumed that De Charette had not made the statement as it stood, and that the Minister was quoted incorrectly. He pointed out that the Bosnian Serbs had had an artillery force, which was superior by a factor of twenty. This explained why the Bosnian Muslims had cried off and left the defence to Dutchbat. Voorhoeve also pointed out that other countries had, in fact, praised the courageous conduct on the part of Dutchbat. The Dutch had considered the improvement of the humanitarian situation of the population their primary task, and the battalion had distributed food amongst the population when they had provisions for 24 hours only. Regarding the reproach that Dutchbat was an accessory to ethnic cleansing, Voorhoeve stated that Karremans had on the contrary insisted that Dutch troops accompany the coaches and that the Battalion Commander had refused to leave at the same time as the population; they first had to be sure that the population had found a safe haven. Karremans had also demanded that the men who had been transported to the Bratunac stadium be returned; part had indeed returned, said Voorhoeve.²⁶⁰⁵ This last statement was incorrect, this point will be discussed in Part IV, Chapter 4.

Ambassador Bernard returned only thirty minutes later with the message that the French Government had been perfectly well aware of the difficult position in which Dutchbat had found itself. It was not relevant to the criticism of the Dutch troops, according to the ambassador. The *Reuters* press agency had compiled an unacceptable summary of De Charette's statement; it referred to UNPROFOR in general, not to Dutchbat, the ambassador explained.²⁶⁰⁶ The Dutch Government then considered the matter closed as 'evidently a misunderstanding'.²⁶⁰⁷ This would, however, prove to be a relative assessment.

Prime Minister Kok also told NIOD that he considered the statement by De Charette to be a slip-up. According to the Prime Minister, the French-Dutch relations had been somewhat at loggerheads at the time, partly because of the drugs issue, but this was certainly not the case in NATO or UN context. In Kok's opinion, the statement by De Charette said something about the way the French ally treated its Dutch ally.²⁶⁰⁸

Kok did not know that Van Mierlo in the meantime had been in touch with De Charrette and that they had talked the matter through. This information had not reached the Ministerial Council and neither had Kok been told of it in the meantime. This is why Kok used such strong language during the usual press conference after the meeting of the Ministerial Council on 14 July, and this in turn had upset De Charette again.

²⁶⁰⁴ Confidential interview (1).

²⁶⁰⁵ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Code Van Mierlo 83, 14/07/95.

²⁶⁰⁶ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Code Van Mierlo 83, 14/07/95.

²⁶⁰⁷ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05279. Memorandum DVL/BZ to Yugoslav distribution, 14/07/95, No. 619/95.

²⁶⁰⁸ Interview W. Kok, 30/05/00.

Kok did add that even if the message that van Mierlo had talked the matter through with De Charrette had reached him in time, he was not at all sure whether it would have made any difference; he admitted that it would have been difficult for him to dispose of the matter with the words that Van Mierlo and De Charrette had talked things over, after what had happened during the previous days. Kok stated that he would have found it difficult not to have shown something of his original opinion in that case;²⁶⁰⁹ the issue clearly rankled the Prime Minister.

The Netherlands did not refrain from praising the action by Dutchbat during subsequent days, even though by then the first reports on the violation of human rights were arriving piecemeal. Van Mierlo again pointed out the 'brave and professional conduct by Dutchbat' at the European General Council on 18 July. He also expressed his gratitude for the 'almost unanimous appreciation' expressed internationally. The fall of Srebrenica had certainly and painfully shown up the relativity of the Safe Area concept in Van Mierlo's opinion. He said that the will and the ability to defend the enclave had been proven to be more symbolic than real but this was based on a tacit agreement with the Bosnian Serbs, according to the minister: 'we defend symbolically, you do not attack'.²⁶¹⁰ He thus reiterated the words used earlier by UN ambassador Biegman in a report to the Hague.

Van Mierlo's words contrasted sharply with the view stated simultaneously by the Dutch social scientist Jan Willem Honig, the later co-author of *Srebrenica: Record of A War Crime*. He was one of the earliest critics of Dutchbat and stated that the battalion had surrendered the enclave more or less without offering resistance. The statement by Voorhoeve that Dutchbat had conducted itself very well indeed had been hollow words in his opinion.²⁶¹¹

13. Later criticism of Dutchbat

French criticism continued unabated after the first few days. The French media persisted in paying attention to the action by Dutchbat and later also linked this with the excesses, details of which became increasingly known. Ambassador Wijnaendts pointed out in September that the tenor had now become that Dutchbat had only been concerned about its own safety during the attack, and had not bothered about the actual assignment. The main concern of the battalion was said to have been to do nothing which might endanger a safe Dutchbat retreat. That was also supposedly the reason why Dutchbat closed its eyes to excesses, according to Wijnaendts.²⁶¹²

During hearings by the *Mission d'Information*, the French parliamentary investigation commission on Srebrenica in 2001, Janvier delivered an extremely harsh judgement on the conduct of Dutchbat at the blocking positions. The former French Minister of Defence, Léotard, a member of the commission, asked him whether the affairs in Srebrenica would have taken a different course if four hundred French instead of four hundred Dutch troops had been stationed in the enclave. Janvier answered in the affirmative. He said that the French would have fought, and he was convinced that the French would have made the Bosnian Serbs draw back: 'in all honesty I say that French soldiers would have fought and not shrunk back from the risks.' Janvier argued that the Dutch troops had received orders to do battle, which is why the battalion had taken up blocking positions, and the battalion should therefore have done battle. According to Janvier, this was Dutchbat's mission; the French considered setting up blocking positions was the same as engaging the enemy. French troops would have turned to their weapons after setting up the blocking positions; they would have deployed the 81 mortars, as well as every tank equipped with a .50 machine gun. Janvier pointed out that the Dutch also had powerful

²⁶⁰⁹ Interview W. Kok, 30/05/00.

⁴¹⁶ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. Code Van Mierlo 93, 18/07/95.

²⁶¹¹ *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 17/07/95. Voorhoeve wrote a letter in defence to the editor which appeared on 18/07/95 in *De Volkskrant* following criticism from Honig as well as from Herman Wigbold on the Forum page of *De Volkskrant* dated 15/07/95 and 17/07/95.

²⁶¹² DCBC, 2783. Code Wijnaendts 255, 11/09/95.

antitank weapons but that they had not deployed these. Janvier had to admit that Dutchbat lacked the resources to eliminate the VRS artillery.²⁶¹³

These judgements by Janvier are difficult to reconcile with the discussions he had with VRS General Tolimir in the evening of 10 July. As already discussed in Section 15 of the previous chapter, rather than adopting a tough attitude at that time, Janvier was concerned; he wanted to prevent the VRS from firing at Dutchbat again. It was concluded in the previous chapter that the question remained how his stance then could be reconciled with the order to set up blocking positions, which Janvier had issued in the meantime; this order had, in fact, been intended to draw fire from the VRS.²⁶¹⁴

Janvier's judgement of Dutchbat as stated to the parliamentary commission also varied quite a bit from what Janvier had told Chief of Defence Staff General Van den Breemen on 2 November 1995. At that time Janvier wrote: 'Investigations conducted by both the Netherlands and in United Nations on the events surrounding Srebrenica clearly show that peacekeeping forces conducted themselves honourably, within the mandate and the spirit of the aims of the UNPROFOR mission during this most difficult time'.²⁶¹⁵ More than a month previously, the UN had asked in New York whether an appraisal of the action by Dutchbat had been conducted within UNPF in Zagreb. Janvier had answered that this was not the case but at the same time he asked Kofi Annan to assure the Dutch Permanent Representative at the UN that Dutchbat 'behaved in a commendable manner under difficult circumstances'.²⁶¹⁶

In short, Janvier's view had more than a hint of chauvinism in it. This resulted in a question by the parliamentary commission as to how Janvier was able to judge that French soldiers would indeed have done battle. The question was prompted by a directive from Janvier dated 29 May 1995, which literally read: 'I would like to reiterate my utmost confidence in the tactical commanders who have tremendous responsibilities on their shoulders and my support for any decision that they alone can make.' Janvier had therefore left the decision whether the threatened positions had to be abandoned to the local commander if peacekeepers' lives were at risk. The commission raised the point that this was exactly what the Dutch had done.²⁶¹⁷ Janvier then came back with the surprising answer that this directive should not be applied to Srebrenica; he said that the directive related to Sarajevo and the Weapon Collection Points. Janvier was wrong in this because the eastern enclaves were indeed mentioned in his directive. Janvier also argued that the situation during the month of July was totally different to the situation at the time of the directive; he said that it had been necessary after all for Dutchbat to go to any length by entering into combat, even during a peace mission. This in turn begs the question why Janvier did not issue a new directive, if the situation in July had really been so different from the one at the end of May. The result of that was recorded in a directive issued by General Smith on 29 July: 'I am particularly sensitive to the situation of the units in Sarajevo and the Eastern Enclaves who, for no fault of their own, are without clear direction'.²⁶¹⁸

So Janvier maintained before the *Mission d'Information* that it had been the choice of the Dutch not to fight and not to commence firing. He considered this against the spirit of the order but maybe the Dutch had had their reasons to depart from the order. But if the Dutch had interpreted the order to resist by shooting over the heads and by not deploying antitank weapons, then this would obviously have allowed the Bosnian Serbs to advance. Dutchbat could have changed the situation by deploying weapons and entering into combat, said Janvier.

⁴¹⁹ *Mission d'Information commune sur les événements de Srebrenica, Audition de M. Bernard Janvier*, 25/01/01 and 21/06/01.

⁴²⁰ See the transcripts of the conversations between Janvier and Tolimir in: ABiH Tuzla. ABiH Komanda 2. Korpusa, 10/07/95, Str.pov.br. 02/8-1-1205 and 11/07/95, Str.pov.br. 02/8-1-1215.

⁴²¹ DCBC, 1284. Letter Lt-Gen Bernard Janvier to Chief of Defense Staff H.G.B. Van den Breemen, General RLNMC, 02/11/95.

⁴²² NIOD Coll. Kolsteren. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 27/09/95, No. 1768.

⁴²³ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87302, Vol. II, Air Operations - Air Strikes 01/01/95 – 09/11/95. FC's Personal directives to UNPROFOR Cmd, Fax Force Commander to LtGen R. Smith Only, 29/05/95, File Ref FC/95/0801.

⁴²⁴ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box, File 3300-6 Vol 5, 01/06/95 – 15/09/95. Commander HQ UNPROFOR Directive 3/95, 29/06/95.

What Janvier omitted from his statement was that entering into combat would have been contrary to the Rules of Engagement, which only allowed for self-defence. The question is why Janvier did not change the Rules of Engagement for this occasion; after all, he was authorized to do so as Force Commander. Janvier's statement that French troops would have done battle should therefore be interpreted as the French in that case ignoring the Rules of Engagement. It was Morillon who explained before the *Mission d'information* that the French would have done just that: 'The entire time I spent in Bosnia, I told my commanders that only passiveness is dishonourable. I would not have wanted anything to do with the Rules of Engagement; the mandate made me sick. Everybody knows that this has always been my attitude.' In answer to the question whether he would have fought, he said: 'If the French had had Foreign Legion soldiers there, yes. Fighting to save face is not prohibited under military law, on the contrary, it is applauded. I have been a soldier in the Foreign Legion myself.' He considered that combat should have been entered into, 'in order to uphold the honour of the UN. The issue in Srebrenica in 1995 was to save face. This would have fitted in with the French tradition but I refuse to condemn the Dutch.'²⁶¹⁹

Janvier also said that his statement was not intended to put the blame for the fall of Srebrenica on the Dutch. He realized the soldiers were physically exhausted and morale was low; it was impossible to live for four months as they had done, under terrible stress from the side of the Bosnian Serbs as well as from the Bosnian Muslims. Janvier believed that the unit had been under extreme pressure. But Dutchbat should have done something as a matter of principle, to save face. Nevertheless, Janvier said that he did not want to blame Dutchbat, although he obviously did so with his statement. It should also be noted that Janvier did not at any time prompt Dutchbat, either in person or via the command line, to enter into combat and that he himself hesitated considerably about providing Close Air Support.

His statement seemed to reveal a different military culture to the Dutch one; this was also evident from his statement that the restoration of peace in Bosnia was mainly due to French efforts. Janvier considered this was obvious from the pure fact that the French were mourning 56 deaths, as opposed to 216 for the other countries together.²⁶²⁰

Janvier repeated his critical words in an interview later in 2001. In answer to the question why the Dutch had not entered into combat, Janvier said that he did esteem the Dutch soldiers, but that he merely stated the facts. Dutchbat had not fought and had said so themselves. According to Janvier, Dutchbat, which he characterized as hardly a homogenous unit with soldiers from eighty different units, was below strength and demoralized, not an infantry unit which was equal to the situation.²⁶²¹

Marie-Hélène Aubert, a member of the French parliamentary investigation commission, seemed to disagree with Janvier that 400 French troops would have fought: 'every country would have been confronted with the same problems in the enclave. I believe that a French battalion would not have acquitted itself any better than Dutchbat.' French soldiers were rather proud and arrogant in her eyes; they assumed that the French army was the best in the world. She put this into perspective by pointing out that the Dutch were more modest about their role. According to her, the *Mission d'Information* also wondered how much Janvier really knew about the situation in Srebrenica; it seemed that for the French in general and for Janvier in particular everything revolved round Sarajevo, rather than Srebrenica. She also pointed out that Janvier was far away, in Zagreb, and that he was not at his post at the start of the VRS attack.²⁶²²

There seems to be no escape from the conclusion that the statement by Janvier before the *Mission d'information* in 2001 cannot be reconciled with the caution he displayed in 1995 in his function as Force Commander, and with the reticence which characterized his attitude to General Smith at that time, who out of the two had been the 'fighter', and to VRS General Tolimir.

⁴²⁵ *Mission d'Information commune sur les événements de Srebrenica*, Audition de M. Philippe Morillon, 25/01/01.

⁴²⁶ *Mission d'Information commune sur les événements de Srebrenica*, Audition de M. Bernard Janvier, 25/01/01 and 21/06/01.

⁴²⁷ Interview Général Janvier in *Valeurs Actuelles*, No. 3393 paru le 7 Décembre 2001.

²⁶²² Rudolf Bohr, 'Luchtsteun of luchtaanval: Nederlandse getuigen voor Franse parlementscommissie' [Close Air Support or air strike: Dutch witnesses before the French parliamentary committee], *HN*, 05/05/01,

Could Dutchbat have done more?

The question what would have happened if Dutchbat had actually met the advancing VRS square on on 10 and 11 July has been asked frequently in public. The answer to that question is by its very nature speculative but we can nevertheless say something about it.

The mandate did definitely not include defence of the enclave because the mandate did not go beyond deterrence. The VRS could have overrun the enclave any time they wished; they possessed the military resources required and they hardly needed any additional reinforcements. This was the case even during the period that the Canadian battalion was present in Srebrenica (before Dutchbat I), and things did not change during the Dutchbat period. Dutchbat I had established at the time of arrival of the Dutch early in 1994 that the Bosnian Serbs around the enclave possessed a handful of tanks (type T-54/5), artillery pieces (three 152 mm and nine 105/122 mm guns) one multiple rocket launcher (MRLS), a few dozen mortars (five 120 mm mortars and many 82 mm ones) and an unknown number of anti-aircraft guns.²⁶²³ Dutchbat, undermanned and lightly armed, did not stand a chance from the start against a VRS with these weapons.

Medical doctor Ilijaz Pilav from Srebrenica believed that each battalion of any which nationality could have been responsible for Srebrenica but he did not think the nationality made any difference, when speculating on what Dutchbat could, or could not have done. The 430 Dutchbat troops simply were not able to halt the Bosnian Serbs or to enter into combat with them; the enemy's strength was too great, he admitted. According to him, it was more a question of what the UN and NATO could have done; Dutchbat had needed assistance, and the primary responsibility for this lay with Akashi and Janvier. In the eyes of Pilav this did not mean that Dutchbat was innocent; Dutchbat had made mistakes because it did not pass on sufficient information to the higher echelons in the UN hierarchy on what was happening around Srebrenica. Pilav believed, and many with him, that Dutchbat knew that the VRS were about to attack but that the battalion had not given out information on this. Dutchbat had been too tolerant during the VRS attack in his opinion, and the OP had been abandoned too quickly following verbal threats of shelling by the VRS. Dutchbat had also prevented the ABiH from doing something when this was still possible, because Karremans had assured them on the evening of 10 July that air strikes were imminent. Here again Pilav voiced the feelings which prevailed fairly generally amongst the inhabitants of Srebrenica.²⁶²⁴

It was not feasible for the blocking positions to actually halt a VRS advance from a military point of view. On the other hand, political and psychological considerations may have come into play amongst the Bosnian Serbs. The VRS tried to see how far it could go and in that case offering obvious resistance might have been sufficient to make the Bosnian Serbs reconsider their decision on 9 July to continue the attack on Srebrenica after all and also to take possession of the enclave's population centre. The order for the blocking positions arrived too late for this. Such resistance would have demanded deployment of military resources which were beyond the level Dutchbat possessed.

If the anti-tank weapons (TOW and Dragon) had been deployed and proved to be serviceable, then there might have been losses amongst the four VRS tanks operating in the south but the APCs and the Dutchbat infantry would then as a target have been relatively defenceless against VRS artillery and heavy mortars. The Dutch mortars (81 mm) would at most have been able to score a brief victory against the VRS infantry before they would have come under fire from artillery themselves. Observation and firing was no great problem for the VRS, as all high and tactically important areas of the terrain around the enclave were in their possession. The VRS infantry had relatively free play in the extremely hilly terrain, and in the end played a larger role than the tanks, which were tied to the road in large parts of the enclave.

²⁶²³ MID/RNLA. DOKL, Intelligence and Security Dept., Intelligence Division, Supintrep enclaves Zepa and Srebrenica, 09/02/94. Confi.

²⁶²⁴ Interview Ilijaz Pilav, 22/10/97.

No means were available other than Close Air Support to eliminate the VRS artillery. But NATO aircraft would not have had the field to themselves because the VRS around the enclave had anti-aircraft guns, and deployed these. The Bosnian Serbs were also very well aware of the mandate with which UNPROFOR had to comply, and with the problems which were linked to Close Air Support requests and deployment. Infantry (soldiers on foot) did not constitute a target for Close Air Support, due to the lengthy response time before it could be carried out.

The VRS could easily deploy their infantry to circumvent the blocking positions' vehicle line-up in the hilly terrain. Dutchbat only had the .50 machine guns on the APCs and medium mortars to oppose the infantry, while the troops occupying the blocking positions had formed an easy target for the VRS artillery and mortars. It also proved to be a disadvantage at the blocking positions that the .50 machine gun and the anti-tank weapons could not be operated from below armour, and it rendered Dutchbat even more vulnerable if this was used.

Behind all this was the fact that peacekeepers had not been sent out, and were not equipped for entering into combat. They could only protect themselves to a limited extent. Moreover, the largest part of the meagre Dutchbat fighting power was distributed amongst the OPs. They could hardly take a stand with the battalion reserve (the Quick Reaction Force) which was below strength anyway due to troops no longer being allowed into the enclave on their return from leave.

The blocking positions showed that six white painted vehicles distributed in pairs across the terrain were no match for an opponent equipped with tanks. Their own weapons were intended primarily for self defence and there had never been any question of an order to defend the enclave by force of arms until 9 July. The Dutchbat tasks were aimed at deterrence and protection, by observing to what extent the parties complied with the agreements and to report on this. The Rules of Engagement were geared to these tasks.

Were the weapons available the decisive factor?

Even if Dutchbat had been able to avail themselves of heavier weapons to defend the enclave, it would have made little difference to the outcome of the VRS attack. (The extensive debate on the Dutch arms was discussed in Chapter 6, Section 9). Even if the APCs had been equipped with a 25 mm onboard gun, it would have made little difference in the situation in which Dutchbat found itself in respect of the blocking positions. This had been a regularly recurring topic, and it was discussed again during the relief of Dutchbat III by a possible Dutchbat IV still to be created.²⁶²⁵

The Dutchbat anti-tank weapons exercised the minds to a greater extent. As far as the weapons were concerned, the army spokesman present at the Karremans and Couzy press conference in Zagreb had already warned that journalists might ask why the TOW anti-tank weapon had not been deployed at the blocking positions.²⁶²⁶ This did not happen at that time in Zagreb²⁶²⁷ but the British newspaper *The Independent* did indeed do so on 21 September 1995. It certainly kicked up some dust, particularly because the newspaper also included negative statements on Dutchbat in missiles could have halted the VRS advance but that the Dutchbat troops had been told not to use these rockets. A British OP had

²⁶²⁵ DJZ, doss. Srebrenica. Lt-Col A. de Ruiter to DCBC and RNLA Crisis Staff/SCO, 14/08/95. Notwithstanding this view, Commander 1st Army Corps, Lieutenant-General R. Reitsma, who, as Director of Operations in the Royal Netherlands Army had earlier played a role in the deployment of Dutchbat and the weapons to accompany them, appeared to have now concluded that acts of war had significantly increased in the operational area. The current idea was that the 42nd battalion Limbuge Jagers which was ready to leave, replace the APC equipped with a .50 machine gun by an APC with a 25 mm onboard cannon. In addition, the allocation of heavier resources such as APC-TOW and APC120 mm mortars was required, as well as equipping the reconnaissance platoon with APCs. (CRST. Draft letter C-1Lk to C-1 Div, C-NATCO, C-CORNLA, C-11 Lumblbrig, C-CSG, Crisis Staff, 08/08/95).

²⁶²⁶ Interview J.S. Riepen, 19/07/95.

²⁶²⁷ SMG 1007/13. Statement Lt-Col T. Karremans and Lt-Gen Couzy and questions, press conference Camp Pleso (Zagreb) 23/07/95.

successfully deployed just such an anti-tank missile in order to stop a VRS tank in its tracks in Maglaj two months previously, according to Block.

The newspaper referred to Sergeant Johan Bos as the source for the non-deployment of these anti-tank weapons by Dutchbat, who had said: 'We had the TOW system, two in each APC, and it was working, but we were not allowed to use them.' The report did not make clear whether Bos referred here to the prohibition to deploy the weapons because they were unreliable and therefore unsafe, or whether this had been dictated by commanders during the operations after 6 July. Moreover, Bos was not in the best position to act as a source on the events during the last few days and the blocking positions because he was one of the hostages in Bratunac after his APC had already been overpowered during a reconnaissance trip on 9 July. For that matter, Bos did not refer to the action by the blocking positions in the article but stated that the TOWs could have been deployed on two earlier occasions in his opinion (on 7 and 9 July), when VRS tanks approached Dutchbat OPs. An unintended effect of the interview was that it reinforced the idea that all OPs and APCs disposed of well-functioning TOW anti-tank rockets. This was not certain, as described in Chapter 6, Section 9 in the passage on Dutchbat weapons.

Because Dutch newspapers ran a paraphrased version of the report in *The Independent*, an even more distorted picture was created. *De Telegraaf* wrote that the ample TOW anti-tank weapons had remained unused.²⁶²⁸ The *Algemeen Dagblad* was a little more circumspect in its reporting by stating that Dutchbat possessed TOW anti-tank weapons but that they had not been allowed to use them. A spokesman for Defence added that the weapons were unusable, due to lack of spares.²⁶²⁹ *NRC Handelsblad* also referred to *The Independent*, as well as to Dutchbat Corporal H. Berkers, who had confirmed that part of the TOW anti-tank weapons were, in fact, operational. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Defence had responded by stating that the anti-tank weapons were no longer usable.²⁶³⁰ The Ambassador in London, J.H.R.D. van Roijen, submitted a 'Letter to the Editor' to *The Independent* as a response by the Ministry of Defence. The newspaper, however, deleted the statement it contained that the TOW anti-tank weapons could not have been deployed.²⁶³¹ The response by Defence was also submitted to all Dutch papers,²⁶³² but not a single paper paid any attention to it by then.

The reasons that the TOW anti-tank weapons had not been deployed were not just of a technical nature. The fact that the operators of the weapons were exposed and visible (in other words, they were not protected by armour) and therefore vulnerable, also played a part. Deployment of the TOW anti-tank weapon had not been an option, according to Deputy Battalion Commander Franken.²⁶³³ Lieutenant Mustert, who carried Dragon as well as TOW anti-tank weapons at blocking position Bravo-4, stated that he had not considered firing these, because he had no suitable targets in view for them, and, additionally, there were obstacles in the terrain which prevented the deployment of these wire-guided missiles. The entire VRS advance route from Zeleni Jadar to Srebrenica could only be overseen from the position of Bravo-1, and only from there might the firing of a TOW anti-tank weapon have been effective.²⁶³⁴

²⁶²⁸ *De Telegraaf*, 22/09/95.

²⁶²⁹ *Algemeen Dagblad*, 22/09/95.

²⁶³⁰ Frank Westerman in *NRC Handelsblad*, 23/09/95. Westerman refers in the article to a statement by Sergeant Bos which was distributed by the ministry of Defence, which referred to 'two operational TOWs'. No statement by Sergeant Bos was found in the Defence archives. The deputy director of Information did compile a response, which indicated that the TOW was no longer operational. This response was distributed to all senior officers working for the UN, as well as NATO officers involved in the UN operation. (DCBC, 2446, Annex B to fax DCBC, 211500Z Sep 95, No. 754)

²⁶³¹ *The Independent*, 25/09/95. Letters to the Editor, 'How the Dutch soldiers acted during the fall of Srebrenica'.

²⁶³² DGP, SOD/95.17602. DGP to participants Sector discussions Defence, 26/09/95. This process was repeated one month later when the Dutch ambassador to Hungary, H.J.M. Sondaal, submitted an almost identical letter to the *Budapest Sun* on 20 October 1995, which had featured an article written by N. Doude van Troostwijk under the title 'The shameful 'Dutchbat' role in Srebrenica's fall' (DAV doss. 999.241).

²⁶³³ SMG 1007/23. Report debriefing Major Franken, 22/07/95.

²⁶³⁴ Interview J.E. Mustert, 18/06/99.

14. The Dutchbat command

‘Those he does command move only in command, nothing in love’.²⁶³⁵ This maxim from William Shakespeare’s pen indicates that recognition of authority should not be taken for granted. Below we look back at the Dutchbat command, which comprised the battalion commander, the deputy battalion commander and the company commanders. The question is raised how the battalion perceived the performance during the last few days of Dutchbat’s stay in Srebrenica. Karremans and Franken occupied the highest posts in this hierarchy and formed the most obvious target for criticism; they are the main focus for attention. Dutchbat’s Deputy Battalion Commander was formally Major P. van Geldere; he was stationed with Dutchbat A company in Simin Han, outside the Srebrenica enclave. Franken was the logistics staff officer (in military terms: S-4) and was also the most experienced staff officer in the enclave. Karremans therefore chose him to be his deputy in Srebrenica.

This section focuses on the views amongst military circles and within Dutchbat, and the relationship between Karremans and Franken. The section then builds on what has already been said on this subject in Part II, Chapter 9.

Comments on forming a judgement

There is no objective way to judge the performance of leaders. Observations on the operation of the command in a military unit, by superiors as well as subordinates, are subjective. Within a battalion, a commander is someone who is regarded with a certain measure of reserve; this was not just the case with Dutchbat III, but also with Dutchbat I and II. Everybody soon forms an opinion of a commander but it is not easy to establish how this opinion is formed and to what extent personal positive or negative experiences, frustration, conflicts, punishment, individual observations or other people’s opinions play a part in this.

We must also guard against viewing the performance by the Dutchbat command as decisive for the events during the respective days in July when considering the performance of the Dutchbat command. The fall of the enclave cannot be ascribed to the command performance, taking into account the circumstances. The Bosnian Serbs were responsible for the Srebrenica tragedy.

Dutchbat also occupied the lowest rung of the ladder in the UN chain of command; Dutchbat command cannot be held responsible for what happened higher up on the ladder. The Secretary-General of the UN was ultimately responsible for the implementation of the peace mission but had delegated the day-to-day responsibility to Undersecretary-General Kofi Annan and his Special Representative in Zagreb, Akashi. General Janvier was responsible for the military control of UNPF in Zagreb. He laid down the conditions within which in Bosnia UNPROFOR (Bosnia-Herzegovina Command) had to operate in Sarajevo. Sector North East in Tuzla in turn came under Sarajevo as the next higher level headquarters to Dutchbat. The Security Council was responsible for the mandate and the Safe Area concept, which proved to be inoperable. The original plans for the Srebrenica Safe Area provided for a 5000-men strong brigade equipped with heavy weapons. Instead, there was now a lightly armed battalion consisting of 430 men; it was not able to defend a large area such as the Srebrenica enclave and neither was this Dutchbat’s job. A battalion of that strength from whichever country under whose ever leadership was no match for the VRS who were equipped with tanks and artillery, notwithstanding the later statements by Janvier, related in the section above, on the pervasive French willingness to fight. An assessment of the Dutchbat command should therefore be considered separate from the question whether an aggressive stance on the part of UNPROFOR might for political reasons have prevented the Bosnian Serbs from pushing through, because the Bosnian Serbs had decided at the highest political and military level to capture the enclave.

²⁶³⁵ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V. ii.19.

The circumstances under which Dutchbat had to operate before as well as during the fall of Srebrenica were extremely unfavourable. General Janvier had good reasons for describing the battalion, after its resupply had almost ceased, as ‘semi-operational’. In Chapter 4 ‘The mood in the enclave: May – July 1995’, is briefly outlined under what circumstances Dutchbat had to operate.

Moreover, nobody could have reasonably suspected in UN circles that the battalion would be faced with an attack on a Safe Area. An attack, followed by deportation of the population, was not an event for which the UN, UNPROFOR, Dutchbat command and the battalion troops were prepared. Such exceptional circumstances do not, of course, make the task of leadership any easier but on the other hand an army is meant to operate under difficult circumstances.

Dutchbat soldiers’ views on the battalion’s command

Surprisingly, internal criticism of Dutchbat command is for the most part not centred on the days of the fall themselves. The sometimes rather frank opinion which Dutchbat soldiers entertained of the command was already largely established during the period prior to the fall. There are no real examples from interviews and debriefing statements where criticism is aimed specifically at the performance of the battalion command during the days in July immediately after the attack. Rather, the reverse is the case: there is some evidence of recognition, in particular for Deputy Battalion Commander Franken, including the judgement that he had performed exceptionally well under extreme circumstances.²⁶³⁶

The earlier ‘small’ debriefing of a number of officers and NCOs in Zagreb had already shown that there was some criticism of the command performance. This was, however, not reflected in the brief report on this debriefing, as was the case with the proceedings around Close Air Support. Neither were there any questions about the performance by the Battalion Staff when answering questions in Parliament and during conversations with Minister Voorhoeve.

Neither did the report on the ‘large’ debriefing in Assen devote much attention to the Dutchbat III command performance, although it is raised in various debriefing reports. The report only lists aspects which might have affected Dutchbat performance, such as: ‘composition of the battalion, atmosphere/morale, relationship between superiors and subordinates’.

As far as the composition of the battalion is concerned, the report on the ‘large’ debriefing does make a distinction between the core of Dutchbat III (the 13th Airmobile Infantry Battalion of the Airmobile Brigade) and the personnel which was attached to this core. It became evident that Dutchbat was a composite unit in which ‘airmobile culture’ played a large role. The troops belonging to this core saw themselves as an elite force, causing the personnel attached to the battalion to feel less accepted; the attached personnel experienced this as real, and it rankled.

The report on the ‘large’ debriefing mainly refers to the relationship between the battalion command and the surgical team called KHO-5 in respect of atmosphere and morale (see Appendix ‘Medical issues: Dutchbat and the population’). This gave rise to a conflict in which the battalion command was involved, and the latter was not able to control an escalating conflict. The debriefing report states that the atmosphere and the morale at the OPs were good otherwise, apart from the odd exception. The atmosphere in the compounds was also described as good. These matters have been discussed extensively in Part II, Chapter 8.

The aspect ‘relationship between superiors and subordinates’, mentioned as a factor in the performance of the battalion, is not dealt with at all in the debriefing report.²⁶³⁷

The Factual Account of the debriefing (*Feitenrelaas*), an internal document in which several statements from the separate debriefing statements had been categorized by subject, and which was used to help with compiling the actual debriefing report, represents an anonymized collection of different opinions recorded in the debriefing statements. In Assen, opinions about the battalion

²⁶³⁶ SMG/Debrief, Feitenrelaas, [Factual Account of the Debriefing], § 3.1.1.

²⁶³⁷ Debriefing report, pp. 68-69.

command were elicited, or they were offered spontaneously. Several debriefing statements therefore contained references to action by the command. These sometimes contain harsh words but it had been decided from the start that matters relating to the commander and personal relations within the battalion would be kept out of the report, according to one of the editors of the report on the 'large' debriefing in Assen.²⁶³⁸ The debriefing report therefore does not contain any criticism of the battalion command but this does not mean that it did not exist.

The Factual Account contains a number of passages with observations on the command grouped under headings such as: 'Command within DUTCHBAT and interaction with higher levels', 'Decision-making and command by the battalion staff', 'Command exercised by the subcommanders and the lower levels' and 'DUTCHBAT orders, directives and instructions to the subcommanders and interaction between the battalion staff and the subcommanders'. We may therefore assume that information on the command was categorized, even if it did not find its way into the report.

The Factual Account contains harsh words: 'A soldier explained that the negative attitude on the part of the Battalion Commander definitely affected the performance of the unit. (...) Every action by [this soldier] was checked by [the Deputy Battalion Commander] on the orders of the battalion commander. He did not think that the Battalion Commander was the person whom you could approach at any time. (...) He believed that the Battalion Commander displayed an interest in his personnel, which appeared forced.'²⁶³⁹ There were complaints that the communication between the battalion command and the battalion was awkward, which was attributed to the person of the Battalion Commander as well as to his deputy. Not everybody in the battalion was clear as to who was in charge, the Battalion Commander or his deputy. The impression arose, particularly during the fall of the enclave, that operational command was in the hands of Deputy Battalion Commander Franken and that the latter was also more capable of the two from an operational point of view.²⁶⁴⁰ He remained calm under the given circumstances and was in control.²⁶⁴¹ A staff NCO even stated that the battalion command had been a 'one man band', in the person of Franken. That was not as it ought to be but he believed it was a good thing Franken was there. Karremans had not displayed adequate leadership according to this NCO.²⁶⁴²

Many Dutchbat soldiers voiced the opinion that the Battalion Commander had had relatively little contact with his personnel, a complaint which was heard frequently. The 'invisibility' on the part of the commander was, however, not just related to his character but was also based on agreements between Karremans and Franken on the division of labour, and they also conferred. 'That is why we were talking every night about who would do what,' according to Karremans. The outcome was announced by Karremans at the staff meeting, in so far it concerned the staff. Karremans maintained all contact with the world outside the enclave: the reports to the higher UN echelons (Tuzla and Sarajevo), to The Hague, and he also maintained contact with the press. Franken's involvement with the higher echelons was limited to essential logistics and administrative matters. He did not bother with incoming telephone calls.²⁶⁴³ A deliberate choice had been made, on the other hand, in relation to contact with the warring factions and the Opstina in favour of a system where it was not the commander who maintained contact. This was done by the section for civil-military relations, Section 5, which dealt with matters within its mandate. Franken was the right man to take over discussions in the case of issues outside the mandate, and Karremans only intervened in exceptional cases. This allowed Karremans to keep his hands free during

²⁶³⁸ Interview F. Pennin, 07/03/00.

²⁶³⁹ SMG/Debrief, Feitenrelaas, [Factual Account of the Debriefing], § 3.1.1.

²⁶⁴⁰ SMG/Debrief, Feitenrelaas, [Factual Account of the Debriefing], § 3.1.3.

²⁶⁴¹ SMG/Debrief, Feitenrelaas, [Factual Account of the Debriefing], § 3.2.2.

²⁶⁴² The various judgements voiced on the command are not annotated. They represent a compilation of opinions which were voiced by various members of Dutchbat during interviews with NIOD and in debriefing statements. It was deemed inadvisable to add comments here, because many are still part of the Defence organisation.

²⁶⁴³ Interviews J.Th.P. Karremans, 15, 16, 17/12/98.

earlier stages of contact with the warring factions and the Opstina. This had worked well, according to Franken.²⁶⁴⁴

Franken was the person who was especially visible for the battalion, because he implemented the policy line agreed between Karremans and Franken. Franken stated that a Battalion Commander could not be everywhere, and that Karremans should definitely not even try and do so. In his view the commander was supposed to stay in the centre of the web and retain an overall view. There were individuals, including some amongst the battalion staff, who had not agreed with this method of operation but Franken said that this had also been the case in the Netherlands, even before Dutchbat III had left. Franken emphasized that there had only been one person in charge, namely Karremans.²⁶⁴⁵

Many within Dutchbat did not perceive this to be so; the reason was that Franken was much more visible than the Battalion Commander, due to the arrangements he had made with Karremans. To the mind of many this seemed like a reversal of the more usual pattern within a staff, namely that the commander keeps his hands free as much as possible to do what he thinks necessary within the battalion, acts as a front, and appears before his men, while the chief of staff deals with matters in the background, coordinates the work of the staff and makes sure the flow of paper is not held up. One problem thrown up by the explicit or implicit arrangements agreed between Franken and Karremans was that these often had passed the men by.

The role of a battalion commander according to the book...

The arrangements between Karremans and Franken on the division of labour were also at loggerheads with the so-called Netherlands Army doctrine: 'In so far the operational conditions permit [the commander] must see and be seen; his staff must not form a barrier between himself and the troops. (...). An interest in the person behind the soldier and in the working of his mind allows the commander to assess the readiness of the unit and in particular, the morale of the troops.'²⁶⁴⁶

Literature studies on command, issued by the Royal Military Academy [*Koninklijke Militaire Academie*] also refer to the importance of the role of the commander. The battalion commander and his company commanders are the main executors of policies issued by the authorities. They are also the persons who must ensure that the troops comply with the rules of conduct laid down for them, that they are adequately prepared, have been given sufficient information, are determined but not aggressive, and that incidents are dealt with correctly. Commanders must therefore be in constant contact with their men. During peace operations in particular, small groups of troops operate at a great distance from their commanders, and mutual trust is essential in such situations.

The underlying idea here is that a commander who is no longer in close contact with his men will hear little of what they are really concerned with. If he does not show his face, or seems not to be interested in the problems his men are facing, then he will receive little information. This applies even more when the team spirit is strong and distances make it difficult to stay in contact. A commander must show concern when problems occur and be prepared to resolve these. A commander should also recognize symptoms of stress and frustration, and should try and work on this with personnel trained for this work. In addition, he must convey to his men a realistic picture of the task of the unit, and of what is to be expected from the local population. Commanders will set their sights high in order to keep their unit motivated. High expectations, however, can also turn into frustration if a unit feels that it is not succeeding in achieving the goals. A commander will therefore find himself walking a fine line between motivation and feasibility.²⁶⁴⁷ All this does not make his role particularly easy, certainly not

²⁶⁴⁴ Interview R.A. Franken, 05/05/01.

²⁶⁴⁵ Interview R.A. Franken, 18/05/01.

²⁶⁴⁶ RNL*A doctrine publication, Part I: Military Doctrine*, 1996, paragraphs 0658 and 0569.

²⁶⁴⁷ A.L.W. Vogelaar, 'Norm Violations during Peace Support Operations: a Social-Psychological Explanation' in A.L.W. Vogelaar, K.F. Muusse and J.H. Rovers, eds. *NL Arms: Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies 1998*, Royal Netherlands Military Academy, Breda, 1998, pp. 144-46.

under the conditions prevalent in Srebrenica, where many soldiers increasingly wondered what the real point of their presence was.

Units without internal conflicts do not exist but a commander must try and detect conflicts at an early stage, and confront them. Denial of conflicts only raises the tension and has a negative effect on the performance of the unit. Conflict resolution demands some measure of courage but can also generate respect. It was not enough, particularly in the case of composite units such as Dutchbat, to know what other people's tasks were. They had to know each other's capacities, views and needs. Problems may well ensue if soldiers in a composite unit remain strangers to each other, according to a study by Ambaum on this subject.²⁶⁴⁸

The literature also points out that a commander must be aware of his own behaviour and that he must have the courage to be confronted with his own conduct and how it is perceived by those under his command. This requires feedback.²⁶⁴⁹

...and in practice

The question is whether the Dutchbat III Battalion Commander received such feedback from the battalion. The battalion staff, who were already undermanned during the last few months of their stay in Srebrenica, did not possess the cohesion which could guarantee an optimum performance from the commander and the staff. Karremans had not been happy with the composition of his staff even before the mission; he had not been able to exert influence to any great extent and considered that not all officers and NCOs in the staff had performed equally well.²⁶⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Franken said during the final phase of Dutchbat's presence in Srebrenica that he had got on very well with the key officials in the staff. But Franken said that these did not include individuals who sometimes showed signs of a nervous breakdown during the last few days.²⁶⁵¹

Judgements by Dutchbat troops of company commanders are generally positive. Captain Groen, the B Company Commander, had quite definite ideas on strict discipline in his company. There was a fair amount of resistance in the battalion against the strict uniform rules, for instance, but Groen was very definite about the uniform his men had to wear. Franken was also a stickler for this, and felt annoyed that Karremans had been less strict on this point during Franken's leave.²⁶⁵²

The compound in Potocari was not subject to the same discipline as the compound in the town of Srebrenica. B company stood out for its strict and direct methods of operation. Groen mixed with his staff there but it would never enter anyone's mind to get familiar with him. This had also been the consideration for stationing Groen in the compound in the town of Srebrenica. Franken considered this a felicitous choice in hindsight. Captain Matthijssen, the C company commander in Potocari, was less hard and consulted more but did have a cohesive company with relatively young personnel.²⁶⁵³ There had been little cause for conflict or ambiguity amongst Major Otter's Service Support Company, also stationed in the compound in Potocari.²⁶⁵⁴

The relationship between B Company and the battalion was characterized by aloofness. Instructions issued by the battalion were said not always to have been clear but this in turn gave B Company a certain degree of freedom. The Battalion Staff was said to have appreciated the work by the company but Karremans' appreciation had not been very apparent. The relationship between Battalion Command and C Company was good. They were stationed in the same location.

²⁶⁴⁸ Ambaum in *NL Arms 1998*, p. 176.

²⁶⁴⁹ Ambaum in *NL Arms 1998*, p. 176.

²⁶⁵⁰ Interviews J.Th.P. Karremans, 15, 16, 17/12/98.

²⁶⁵¹ Interview R.A. Franken, 05/05/01.

²⁶⁵² Interview R.A. Franken, 05/05/01.

²⁶⁵³ Interview R.A. Franken, 05/05/01.

²⁶⁵⁴ SMG/Debrief, Feitenrelaas, [Factual Account of the Debriefing], § 3.2.1.

There was allegedly some tension between the Company Commanders and the Battalion Staff during the fall. There was some talk amongst the Dutchbat III officers that in their opinion the battalion staff had known little about what exactly took place in the field during the days around the fall. This was deduced from the instructions, which were lacking in practicality. The actual situation in the terrain was said to have been beyond the imagination of the staff. Company Commanders such as Groen and Matthijssen were, however, capable enough, so that the lower levels hardly noticed these shortcomings. Although not everyone appreciated Groen's style of leadership, many were of the opinion that he had been a good leader during the fall of the enclave and in particular during the implementation of the blocking position. He showed controlled behaviour and took care of the safety of his personnel, despite having enjoyed little sleep. His leadership during those last days was demonstrated by issuing clear-cut orders. He remained calm and was highly regarded for this reason. Groen was seen as a good leader and a good soldier and for this reason was admired by his men.²⁶⁵⁵

At times, what was frequently seen as the urge for regulation and control on the part of Franken, led to irritation. Some said that the higher echelon should have had more trust in the lower level. Conversely, there were also examples according to Franken when there was doubt during the VRS attack whether the logistics personnel attached to the battalion were in fact willing to do work outside the safe walls of the bunker which was not part of their actual job. The Battalion Command did not always have an easy job of it during the fall of the enclave. According to Franken, it was not the soldiers who posed a problem during the last few days. It had rather sometimes been the NCOs who presented problems. Occasionally the command had been called upon to get the odd NCO moving again. According to Franken, there had been individuals who stated: 'the minister has said that unacceptable risks must not be run and I consider this unacceptable.'²⁶⁵⁶

The relationship between Karremans and Franken, and how they related to each other, passed most Dutchbat soldiers by. Nevertheless, there remained the idea that the relationship was not always as good as it might have been. Karremans was seen as not very approachable and withdrawn; whether he behaved that way deliberately, or whether he was unaware of it, was not clear to the personnel. There were few conflicts between the men and Karremans; conflict mostly arose with Franken, also because he was the person carrying out the policy of the commander.

Franken was an outspoken and extrovert individual. He 'was a large, imposing figure who dealt summarily with everyone and showed little patience'. Karremans was much more of an introvert. 'He did speak but he seemed to hold back a lot. It always seemed as if Franken wore the trousers and Karremans was allowed to tag behind. This is just my impression, it may well not have been so at all', said a Dutchbat soldier. Franken was someone who was quite prepared to make a decision, on anything, and he had the freedom to do so. He adopted a clear point of view; after all, he had to make sure he kept Dutchbat together and that could not always be done tactfully. Sometimes he had to make unpleasant and difficult decisions but this could not be avoided under the circumstances. Most people understood that conflict in that case should not be looked for; the odd person did though, which only made the situation worse.

Members of the battalion were pretty much united in their judgement that Karremans found it harder to relate informally to his men without giving the impression it was a chat out of duty. Karremans was not viewed by the battalion as a person who found it easy to relate to his personnel. Sometimes he was perceived as being rather blunt, yet at other times he was regarded as amicable. The feeling was that some people required an interest taken in them, and a commander had to stick his neck out for them. A good atmosphere in a battalion where everybody knew each other and knew what they could expect from each other frequently forms the basis for a good performance. Dutchbat soldiers, however, stated that they had seen little of Karremans, not even in the compound in Potocari where the Battalion Commander was stationed. Karremans was not a 'trooper' surgeon Kremer judged; he

²⁶⁵⁵ SMG/Debrief, Feitenrelaas, [Factual Account of the Debriefing], § 3.2.1.

²⁶⁵⁶ Interview R.A. Franken, 05/05/01.

had never received a spontaneous visit at the Field Dressing Station from Karremans, who was also stationed at the compound in Potocari.²⁶⁵⁷

There were further similar comments from the battalion; a judgement such as ‘Karremans was an individual who was considerably reserved in his dealings with us. In contrast, we had a good relationship with Franken’ was typical. Karremans was seen more as a solo performer than Franken. While Franken was always in conversation with anybody, Karremans kept himself aloof, which made the Dutchbat troops act aloof too. A factor which affected this was, of course, the lack of fuel - this restricted personal contact between the staff in Potocari on the one hand and B Company in Srebrenica and the OPs on the other hand to a minimum, and made it also more difficult for the commander to visit if he wanted to do so.

Brantz, who as Deputy Commander of Sector North East in the days of the VRS attack had been in frequent contact with Karremans and had known him for longer, publicly said in an interview that he was not surprised at the irritation amongst the battalion in relation to Karremans’ conduct. Karremans could be quite cynical, he said, did not mix easily in company and was not always very flexible. On the other hand, Brantz pointed out that nobody had ever gone through what Karremans had had to go through, and that all his critics should first prove that they could have done a better job.²⁶⁵⁸

As far as Deputy Battalion Commander Franken was concerned, many may have had personal reservations about him but they nevertheless declared to have got on well with him. He made a good impression and without him the decision-making process within the battalion would not have been of the same quality because Karremans was less able to take on the command, which in turn became evident from Franken’s role. The troops had on the whole worked incredibly hard during the fall, but the general opinion was that it had above all been Franken who had distinguished himself in this respect. In particular people close to him spoke with admiration of Franken. For many people he was instinctively the man who pulled the strings. The officers had a high regard for Franken’s military skills. The men only objected to his strict insistence on maintaining dress regulations.

So Franken was the man who arranged matters, which was in fact part of his task as Chief of Staff. This contributed to the general impression that he was the person making decisions. It should be noted that Karremans did not shrink from action if he considered something important. This related to negotiations other than the routine negotiations with the VRS and the ABiH and the Opstina. Karremans, for instance, visited B Company to tell them personally that Soldier Van Renssen had died. On the other hand, there was some irritation about the fact that Karremans, following his discussion with the Opstina during the night of 10 to 11 July, had not shown an interest in the personnel at the blocking positions who had assembled in the market square. The same could be said in relation to the Dutchbat hostages: they were held in the same hotel (Fontana) where the discussion between Karremans and Mladic had taken place following the fall.

The first question which Bastiaans raised in the interview with Franken at the debriefing in Zagreb was the issue of the command at the time of the fall; he wanted to know who had in fact been in charge. Franken answered with a straight face that it had been him, according to a debriefer who was present during this discussion. The debriefers noted even during the conversations in Zagreb that it was Franken in particular who was taken seriously. When Captain Groen spoke of the command, he referred to Franken. Nobody spontaneously mentioned Karremans, and nearly everyone used words such as: ‘Franken ordered me to ...’. Karremans argued that all this had taken place with his full agreement but the impression was given, and remained, that Franken had pulled the strings. Franken appeared as someone who had done more than was expected from him. This gave Bastiaans the impression that it had probably been a good thing in the circumstances.

²⁶⁵⁷ Interview G.D. Kremer, 13/07/98. Karremans did call in when Kremer invited him to a drink on his birthday.

²⁶⁵⁸ G.Nage, ‘Charlie we zijn verneukt’, De geknakte loopbaan van luitenant-kolonel Karremans, *HP/De Tijd*, 22/12/95.

Karremans did not deny during the ‘small’ debriefing that Franken had played a large role. He explained this by saying that he had been busy with all kinds of issues which were less related to operations. Karremans did not give the impression that Franken had taken up the more dominant position. Karremans had an explanation for everything when confronted with issues presented to him in Zagreb which allegedly proved that this had been the case.

It can be deduced from other conversations in Zagreb that many within the battalion thought that Karremans really should have fulfilled the role of battle captain – leading the battle – but that this role had been played by Franken.²⁶⁵⁹ Franken himself said that he definitely had not conducted ‘his own battle’ but had been ‘prominently present’ and had indeed made a number of decisions of his own accord when lack of time had made this necessary. He knew the terrain well, which is why, as he said, it was easy to make decisions.²⁶⁶⁰

Members of the Military History Section involved in the debriefing in Zagreb arrived in respect of the internal relations at the conclusion that Karremans had performed moderately and that Franken had seemed to be the actual person in charge. They had also listened to what was said outside the debriefing rooms, and the tenor of the conversations heard there was that Karremans seemed less suitable for his function. In contrast, there were positive words for Franken and Groen. Kamphuis, the Head of the Section, had informed the Netherlands Army Director of Operations, Major-General Van Baal, of these findings; they evoked disbelief in Van Baal, who had a different impression, because he had understood from a number of matters which had occurred at the battalion that Karremans had taken firm action. Van Baal expressly told NIOD that he had great regard for Karremans in this respect. The latter had, according to Van Baal, decided to continue occupying the OPs against the order from Gobilliard, had continued to request Close Air Support time and time again, against all logic, and had ordered the blocking positions to be set up against all logic.²⁶⁶¹ According to Van Baal there had not been any doubt in The Hague on the basis of these issues as to who had been in charge: Karremans.²⁶⁶²

As far as the actual combat command during the fall was concerned, Franken was indeed the man who held sway. The fact that the personnel did not hear Karremans over the battalion radio network during the days around the fall also played a role in the judgement of Karremans. It was not in itself customary that Karremans was heard over the network but in this type of situation some expected the commander to broadcast in person over the radio network from time to time. But this also was due to arrangements made between him and Franken, according to Karremans; Franken acted as battle captain and was in charge of combat,²⁶⁶³ Karremans was present in the Opsroom (the command post) of the battalion from where he could issue instructions or intervene. To what extent this actually happened, and whether Karremans actually fulfilled a directional role, is not made quite clear in the debriefing statements.

Neither Karremans nor Franken was very visible for the personnel during the days in question. This could be explained by the fact that the battalion lacked an operations officer (S-3) who normally would have been in charge of military operation affairs. Franken took over that role and Karremans was continuously called to the telephone by several UN headquarters who took an interest in Srebrenica. Sarajevo regularly breached the hierarchical line with Dutchbat, which should have run via the Sector North East headquarters. This caused Dutchbat to deal with two headquarters (Tuzla and Sarajevo) who preferred to do so with the Battalion Commander personally. In addition, there were the Royal Netherlands Army Crisis Staff and the Defence Crisis Management Centre from the Netherlands. As referred to in the introduction to this chapter, at a given moment this even resulted in

²⁶⁵⁹ Interview Christ Klep, 18/02/99.

²⁶⁶⁰ SMG 1007/23. Report debriefing Major Franken, Camp Pleso, 22/07/95.

²⁶⁶¹ Interview A.P.P.M. Van Baal, 12/12/01.

²⁶⁶² Interviews P.H. Kamphuis and Chr. Klep, 08/04 and 18/02/99.

²⁶⁶³ Interview J.Th.P. Karremans, 15, 16, 17/12/98.

the fact that Sarajevo had to ask The Hague to restrict telephone communications because the commander had other things to worry about besides answering the telephone.²⁶⁶⁴

Haukland, the commander of Sector North East, was well pleased with Karremans. Although Haukland was not in a position to be able to consult regularly with Karremans in person, and was also absent during the days of the fall, he called Karremans an excellent and capable officer: 'He was deadly right in all his assessments'. According to Haukland there was little to reproach Karremans for; working conditions in Srebrenica had been impossible and his task was impossible too.²⁶⁶⁵ Haukland seemed to base his judgement particularly on the staff work and the letters which Karremans wrote to the higher echelons. He was less well informed about the internal operations of Dutchbat.

Brantz felt he had a better overview at Sector North East. Moreover, he knew both Karremans and Franken. Brantz thought that Karremans and Franken could have complemented each other. The question was merely one of what was left by one, and done by the other. If proper arrangements had been made, and this seemed to be the case during the posting in Srebrenica, then in his view there was not a problem. It only became a problem if Franken had already embarked on matters before this was agreed, and this had possibly been the case according to Brantz during the last period of the stay. Franken stepped in as soon as he saw that someone left something undone. According to Brantz, Franken was not able to leave matters be, and Karremans was not inclined to put him in his place. According to Brantz, Franken was also domineering, which sometimes gave rise to negative views about him, not least because people were afraid of him. This also meant, on the other hand, that Franken had been mentally resilient under the strain of the moment, and that he, still according to Brantz, acted more alert than Karremans because of his strongly analytical mind. Franken held his own in the military tactics field; he knew the terrain because he had been on many patrols.²⁶⁶⁶

There seems to be a lot of truth in this judgement by Brantz when compared with the cited views of Dutchbat troops. However, one thing should be added: ultimately it was Karremans and not Franken who carried the burden of final responsibility on his shoulders. A deputy does not carry that burden, so he is able to act with greater ease.

Conclusion

Deputy Battalion Commander Franken put Battalion Commander Karremans in the shade. This was on the one hand a result of the agreements in relation to work and the division of labour which the commander and deputy had agreed, which made Franken more visible to the battalion than Karremans. But it did deviate from the more usual pattern in the division of labour between commander and deputy, and contributed considerably to the fact that the men began to consider Franken as the driving force behind the battalion. It posed a problem that the Dutchbat men did not see the actions by Franken and Karremans as based on arrangements agreed between both. The characters of each of them also played a role. The nature of the relationship between the two was already known before Dutchbat III was sent out, and the consequences could have been foreseen. By sending them out in this combination, the command of the Airmobile Brigade was in some measure co-responsible for the performance of Dutchbat command.

The test for leadership in a crisis only comes when the crisis actually materializes. Training is only partly effective and gives insufficient indication in order to predict conduct during a crisis. There had even been some doubt on this point before the dispatch of the battalion, as explained in Part II, but there were not enough reasons to make changes in the leadership. If the battalion had found itself in different circumstances and with sufficient resupply, and if the enclave had not been overrun by the Bosnian Serbs, then there would have been a fair chance that the problems outlined above would not

²⁶⁶⁴ Interview J.A.C. de Ruiter, 29/06/00.

²⁶⁶⁵ Interview Hagrup Haukland, 03/05/99.

²⁶⁶⁶ Interview C.L. Brantz, 11/06/99.

have surfaced. The picture, which emerged after the fall of the enclave, was one of sorrow. This does not seem wholly justified. Other than rather vague orders for the setting up of the blocking positions, and misunderstanding in relation to application procedures and possibilities or otherwise of Close Air Support, Karremans appears not to have made all too big mistakes during the attack on the enclaves.

Six months of living and working on top of each other in dire circumstances represents an enormous test of leadership qualities, personal relations and morale. Criticism is always levelled at the commander in such cases. Karremans and Franken, and with them the battalion personnel, made the best of the situation. They also complimented each other to a certain extent; Karremans as the man who analysed and reported matters, and Franken as the decisive man taking care of the day-to-day management. Franken was a practical man and was well regarded for this reason, including Karremans. Franken also made full use of the freedom to act as afforded by Karremans. It is difficult to judge to what extent there was a battle for competence between the two. Franken, and this also applies to Groen to a lesser extent, was not always appreciated by the battalion because of his strictness, but the performance by these two during the fall commanded respect amongst the men, which ultimately turned into recognition. In the case of Karremans there seems to be no question of a comparable reversal in regard for him.

15. Military honours for Karremans and the Forward Air Controllers?

The question whether military honours should be awarded to the battalion was one example where an initially positive regard for the Dutchbat III performance turned into doubt. Immediately after the fall of Srebrenica the question arose whether members of Dutchbat III might possibly be considered for military honours. The Airmobile Brigade and Military History Section debriefers asked during the debriefing in Zagreb whether there were people who should be considered, and if so, whom. The name mentioned most often was Captain Groen, in recognition of the leadership he had shown during the week of the fall.²⁶⁶⁷ This was as far as it went in Zagreb. Nominations for military honours were not submitted to The Hague by the Airmobile Brigade itself.

The question had been pondered earlier, on 13 July 1995, at the Ministry of Defence. But that had been at a time characterized by uncertainty, because the forced departure of the population was still ongoing, and the departure of Dutchbat had not yet been decided. The idea was that a military honour by way of recognition for the battalion would be appropriate when Dutchbat returned unscathed from Srebrenica. This was dependent on a 'positive scenario', which meant that the local population and Dutchbat had to have been released from their plight without too many problems. Minister Voorhoeve wanted to visit the battalion as soon as the situation allowed, and this would be a suitable time to honour Dutchbat in the person of Karremans for their efforts during the previous difficult period, according to him.

A military honour for Karremans?

Consideration was given to a military honour for Karremans because it was not possible to award a medal to a unit as a whole. The honour was therefore not actually intended for the person of the Battalion Commander but should be seen as a symbolic recognition of the entire battalion. The award of a Gold Merit medal (*Eretekens voor Verdienste in Goud*) was considered, a military honour awarded fairly infrequently which expressed a high level of recognition. The award of this medal was also prompted by the fact that the Minister of Defence could grant the military honour himself, avoiding the long process of a Royal Decree, as was necessary for other honours.

The initiative to award a military honour stemmed from Voorhoeve himself. The Head of the Military Honours Section at the ministry, P.V.E. Horbowiec, then studied the criteria for awarding the

²⁶⁶⁷ Interview Christ Klep, 18/02/99.

Gold Merit medal. The order could not be awarded on the basis of the criterion that ‘functional organic activities’ had been carried out in an outstanding manner, because the situation in which the battalion found itself did not feature in any schooling or training scenario and the situation was of such a special nature that it did not fit in with the concept of ‘organic functional tasks’.

Other criteria did apply, however, such as ‘courageous acts in conflict situations in peacetime’ and ‘cases of individual bravery in life-threatening circumstances’. The first criterion seemed to offer few difficulties; Dutchbat on a peace mission signified peacetime. The fact that war conditions prevailed locally, although Dutchbat was not a party in the conflict, did present a problem, however. Another criterion, ‘courageous action’ and ‘individual bravery’ might, in view of the circumstances and the responsibilities on the part of Karremans, apply to him and in that case these would also apply to the men who had to perform their tasks under exceptional circumstances, and had not shirked from personal risks.²⁶⁶⁸ But, as mentioned before, awarding military honours to a unit as a whole was not possible, so the attention turned to the commander.

This firstly required approval on the part of the secretary general of the Ministry of Defence, Barth. If he agreed with the proposal, the administrative machine could be set in action. The secretary general let it be known that he was ‘completely in agreement’ and would give his approval with pleasure, as he thought Karremans deserved ‘the highest praise’ for his actions during the week of the fall.²⁶⁶⁹

The next step was to arrive at a draft recommendation, which would allow the secretary-general, the Chief Cabinet of the Chief of Defence Staff and the Head of the Military Honours Section (together forming the commission authorized to do so) to submit a formal recommendation to the minister. The Commander of the Army, General Couzy, was invited to compile a draft recommendation. Couzy subsequently submitted a recommendation to the minister by 14 July, signed by himself. Couzy cited as grounds that Karremans had led the execution of the mission in an excellent fashion, which had to be carried out under very difficult and life-threatening conditions. The unit had commanded respect by the courage displayed and their resilience, the mutual solidarity and the concern for the population of the enclave. The task had been continued as best as possible during the protracted blockade of the enclave. Despite ‘stubborn resistance’ on the part of the Dutch troops, the offensive campaigns had resulted in the capture of Srebrenica, due to the enemy’s vastly superior numbers’. Karremans and his battalion had then taken care of ‘tens of thousands’ of refugees and shared the scant Dutchbat provisions with them. Karremans had during negotiations tried to ensure maximum safety for the refugees in his care, without losing sight of the safety of his personnel. ‘Through his resolute actions and the moral courage displayed, Lieutenant-Colonel Karremans has endeavoured to serve the Netherlands Armed Forces in an exceptional fashion’, Couzy concluded his recommendation.²⁶⁷⁰

The citation in the certificate was largely borrowed from the recommendation by Couzy and spoke of ‘resolute action’ and ‘moral courage displayed’ through which Karremans had shown himself exceptionally worthy when ‘the resilience, the mutual solidarity and the concern for the Dutch personnel as well as for the population in the Srebrenica enclave shown by the infantry battalion under his command had compelled much respect and awe’. This last sentence served to indicate that the battalion in this way was honoured in the person of its commander.²⁶⁷¹

The ministerial order and the certificate were ready for signing by the Minister on 19 July. Voorhoeve was to confer the military honour in Zagreb on 21 July. As the Netherlands Army technical

²⁶⁶⁸ Sie Onderscheidingen No. DO.055/95/. Note Head of Military Honours Section to the Head of the Ministerial Office, 14/07/95, No. 4496/N.

²⁶⁶⁹ Sie Onderscheidingen Section No. DO.055/95/. Note Head of the Military Honours Section to the Secretary-General and Head of the Defence Staff Office, 14/07/95, No. 4496/N. The Secretary-General gave his approval on 14 July, the Chief Cabinet of the Chief of Defence Staff on 19 July.

²⁶⁷⁰ Sie Onderscheidingen No. DO.055/95/. C-in-C RNLA to minister of Defence, 14/07/95, No. KAB/140795.

²⁶⁷¹ Sie Onderscheidingen No. DO.055/95/. Unsigned order to award the Gold Merit Medal.

office needed additional time to write the document in calligraphy, the fear that the recommendation would meanwhile be leaked was great.²⁶⁷²

But the recommendation was never signed. The idea had always been to retain the order for the time being and to wait for further developments and reports on actions by Dutchbat. Couzy also agreed with this view.²⁶⁷³

After Junior Minister Gmelich Meijling in Zagreb had spoken with the 55 Dutchbat troops kept hostage by the VRS, who had just arrived there, and also with Couzy, he urged Voorhoeve while still in Zagreb not to act prematurely in relation to the recommendation of a military honour for Karremans.²⁶⁷⁴

The message that the recommendation should not be proceeded with arrived on 21 July on the orders of Voorhoeve. The facts had caught up with the earlier favourable judgement on Dutchbat and in the meantime they had acquired a negative tenor to the extent that the earlier grounds for the award of a military honour no longer applied.²⁶⁷⁵

A military honour for the Forward Air Controllers?

This did not put an end to the recommendations for military honours, even though there was an interval lasting some years for other applications. These later included recommendations for bravery medals for some three members of the Corps Commandos. This idea had been suggested to them by the fact that commandos who had been present in Srebrenica had heard that the three British Joint Commission Officers, with whom they had collaborated during the last few days of the fall, had been rewarded with a military honour.

The personnel officer of the Corps Commandos had subsequently approached his commander and the Military Honours Section at the ministry had advised them to submit a sound proposal, together with situational sketches, reports and witness statements. These were produced but the commander of the Corps Commandos sent the proposals directly to the Military Honours Section at the ministry. The Netherlands Army heard about this and demanded that the recommendations be submitted via the hierarchical line, in this case via the Dutch Deputy Commander of the German/Royal Netherlands Army Corps, General G.D.T. Keuning, and from there to the Commander of the Army. The dossier went therefore from the ministry to the Royal Netherlands Army; this was early in 1998. Nothing was done for a long time, apparently because Keuning did not arrive at a decision. Consultation took then place between the Commander of the Land Forces (Lieutenant-General M. Schouten) and Keuning, and also between Schouten and the Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral L. Kroon.

There was considerable procrastination, also because nobody quite knew how to deal with such recommendations: bravery medals had been awarded last during the early sixties in New Guinea. A special Bravery Honours Committee chaired by the Deputy Chief of Operations at the Defence Staff, Brigadier-General Dedden, which included representatives from operational staff in the various services. This committee went to work on the recommendations.

In the meantime, the matter had reached the press; *De Telegraaf* reported on 3 October 2000 that Van Wiggen as Commander of the Corps Commandos had voiced his anger on the lack of a decision in an open letter to his men, as well as in the Corps newsletter *De Groene Baret*. He wrote that commandos had taken the initiative to take on the target guidance of the F-16s under 'enemy fire' when others could no longer do so. They had done more than could be expected from them and it was frustrating to see that recognition at senior level depended on the political sensitivity of the subject of Srebrenica.

²⁶⁷² Sie Onderscheidingen No. DO.055/95/. Note Head of Military Honours Section to the Head of the Technical Office C-in-C RNLA, 19/07/95, No. 4498/N.

²⁶⁷³ Interview A.P.P.M. Van Baal, 01/11/01.

²⁶⁷⁴ Interview J. Veen, 16/01/02.

²⁶⁷⁵ Interview P.V.E. Horbowiec, 26/02/01.

This undermined trust in the senior levels, thought Van Wiggen. He now put his hope in the recently established Committee for Bravery Honours. This committee was supposed to advise the minister in order to arrive at a positive or negative decision. Secretary-general Barth supported this; any special actions had to be assessed.²⁶⁷⁶

Van Wiggen submitted three new recommendations on 10 November 1998. These recommendations were supported by only one limited witness statement, compiled by one of the 322 Squadron RNLAf, who had been involved in the Close Air Support on 11 July. There were no witness statements by persons who could have observed the actions of the commandos from close by; these persons did exist but they were all British JCOs. Van Wiggen tried to trace who the British JCOs in the enclave had been via the British embassy in The Hague, with the aim of contacting them. These efforts came to nothing. Van Wiggen feared that this was because of the political sensitivity of the presence of the British in Srebrenica at the time of the fall. A more plausible explanation was, however, that they were Special Forces personnel, whose names were prohibited from being released for formal reasons.

This obviously did not make the job of the Bravery Honours Committee any easier. The only other thing the committee could bring to bear on the matter was a report on the actions on 11 July, and the incomplete schooling and training by Sergeant-Major A.J.H. Wesselink, the unit supervisor of the Corps Commandos Forward Air Controllers but he was not a witness to the events on 11 July.²⁶⁷⁷

The committee therefore had very little material at their disposal on which to base a decision. Moreover, the committee immediately hit on the problem that one of the Dutchbat Forward Air Controllers, Voskamp, pointed out that it was factually incorrect that the commandos on their own had taken the initiative to guide the F-16s to their targets; the author of the letter had indeed played a role there in his capacity as Windmill 02, albeit at a more modest level than Windmill 03 (this was discussed in chapter 6). If the commandos proved to be eligible for a bravery medal, because they had carried out their task under difficult circumstances, then this also applied to the Forward Air Controller involved, in his opinion.²⁶⁷⁸

The committee subsequently commenced with a number of hearings to check the recommendations. This ultimately led to a decision to award Sergeant 1st Class F.C. Erkelens the Merit Cross (*Kruis van verdienste*). Erkelens, however, declined the honour. He considered that not only himself but all three commandos who had constituted the Tactical Air Control Party should have been offered the award.

16. Conclusions

‘Intelligence services were also surprised by the capture of the enclave’

Western intelligence services were not aware of any VRS preparations for an attack on Srebrenica. The plans for the attack had been made only a few days before and troop movements were observed only on the day prior to the attack. They escaped detection by the intelligence services. The Dutch Military Intelligence Service only hit the nail on the head in a brief analysis immediately after the fall of Srebrenica: the VRS operation at Srebrenica was an opportunistic target of limited scope which was extended when a credible defence did not materialize.²⁶⁷⁹

The attack by the Bosnian Serbs not only arrived totally unexpected, in Western eyes it also signified a new tactic and strategy, irrespective whether it had been preplanned or took place ad hoc. The usual VRS tactics was namely to exert pressure on the edges of the Safe Area, in order to gain possession of the higher areas. Nobody had expected that the entire enclave or the town of Srebrenica would be captured. This was based on the assumption that the VRS did not have the necessary troops

²⁶⁷⁶ Interview P.V.E. Horbowiec, 26/02/01.

²⁶⁷⁷ Sie Onderscheidingen, CDO. Report FAC missions Srebrenica, 23/08/00.

²⁶⁷⁸ Sie Onderscheidingen, No. 63.08.27.253. Letter R. Voskamp to the Bravery Honours Committee, 10/10/00.

²⁶⁷⁹ DCBC, 882. MID briefing for Ministers Voorhoeve and Van Mierlo, 18/07/95.

and too few men to overpower the ABiH in house-to-house and street combat, who outnumbered them. Neither did the VRS allegedly know what to do with the refugees. The purpose of the offensive seemed to be twofold, strategically speaking: to compel the Bosnian Muslims to come to the negotiation table, and to make the map of Bosnia, drawn up by the Contact Group, again the subject of negotiations.²⁶⁸⁰

The possibility that more local factors played a role in the decision to attack seems to have escaped the Western intelligence services. They had insufficient insight into the events and their effect on Bosnian Serb thinking, such as activity outside the Safe Area. The intentions on the part of the Bosnian Serbs in relation to Srebrenica were not known either: in the first instance this was to reduce the size of the Safe Area. This also applied to the VRS decision on 9 July to overrun the entire enclave after all, when the conditions to do so seemed favourable; this was partly due to the scant resistance offered by the ABiH, and possibly also to the lack of a vigorous response on the part of the UN in the form of the deployment of NATO air power.

The possibilities and impossibilities relating to UNPROFOR

The UN units were stationed in the Safe Areas in order to deter an attack. This signified little more than a symbolic presence. UN Undersecretary-General Kofi Annan had already written to the then Force Commander Wahlgren on the establishment of the Safe Areas that the demilitarisation of Srebrenica only meant that UNPROFOR itself took on a 'moral responsibility' for the safety of the Safe Area but that he realized that UNPROFOR did not possess the military resources to guarantee safety. Annan stated that a small number of peacekeepers could not be expected to ward off a large-scale invasion by Bosnian Serbs. UNPROFOR would seek cover when fired at, like everyone else. It was up to the warring factions to treat Srebrenica as a Safe Area.²⁶⁸¹

The capability on the part of UNPROFOR to deter attacks on Safe Areas was totally inadequate. The Secretary-General of the UN considered he needed 35000 men for the six Safe Areas. The Security Council preferred a 'light option' of 7600, and in the end the member states supplied no more than 4000 troops, of which five hundred for the enclave of Srebrenica. It was established earlier that in Srebrenica alone a fully armed 5000-man strong brigade was required for that task. The 4000 men had been made available with a mandate which did not go beyond self-defence, and without the Bosnian Serbs being promised negative sanctions for contravening the Safe Area regime, and the Bosnian Muslims for violating the demilitarisation. It all looked very much like political bluff. When this was no longer effective, the peacekeepers had nothing to back them up. Use of the concept of deterrence²⁶⁸² in the Safe Area Resolution may have been a diplomatic masterstroke but politicians had not given it sufficient clout in a military sense. An author concluded after the event that something terrible had gone wrong with the concept of the Safe Areas. These were ideas full of good intentions, conjured up in air-conditioned conference rooms, which did not pass the test of commanders who behaved like medieval warriors.²⁶⁸³ Deterrence was not a concept which could be implemented using fewer troops than for a defence. The idea of deterrence was far removed from the deterrence doctrine active during the Cold War when the aim was to restrain undesirable conduct on the part of the opponent by threatening negative sanctions.

The central issue was the credibility of negative sanctions, which UNPROFOR lacked. Empty threats had no effect and the possibility to turn the threat into deeds must be real in the eyes of the opponent. This required a clear indication in unambiguous terms what the negative sanction meant. The threat also had to be plausible and feasible, and the military capacity and the will to carry out the

²⁶⁸⁰ Confidential information (25).

²⁶⁸¹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPROFOR. Code Cable Annan to Wahlgren, 23/04/93, No. MSC-676.

²⁶⁸² 'To discourage and turn aside or restrain by fear; to frighten from anything; to refrain or keep back from acting or proceeding by any consideration of danger or trouble' (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

²⁶⁸³ Hans-Ulrich Seidt, 'Lessons Learnt from the Crisis in the Balkans', *European Security*, 5 (Spring 1996) 65-70.

threat had to be present.²⁶⁸⁴ The deterrence was inadequate and was not effective in an environment which was geared to peacekeeping 'where no peace was to keep'. General Rupert Smith saw himself confronted with procedures geared towards dealing with lesser violations when deterring an attack, and these procedures were no longer appropriate in the case of Srebrenica. UNPROFOR had no means at its disposal between protesting to the warring faction in question and actions from the air.²⁶⁸⁵

Akashi deemed after the fall of Srebrenica that the Security Council had to understand that UN resolutions must reflect the reality on the ground. In his opinion, unrealistic expectations had been raised. The Secretary-General had repeatedly brought the shortcomings of the Safe Area regime to the attention of the Security Council, and had warned in reports that the situation was untenable. He had pointed out the lack of military resources, the use of the Safe Areas for military purposes by the Bosnian Government, the provocations and attacks from the Safe Areas and the limited credibility of the deterrence and the consequences of the deployment of air power for the humanitarian component of the mission. Moreover, the Safe Areas had only been intended as a temporary measure. Proposals had been made which should have resulted in the demilitarisation of the Safe Areas, but it had taken a further twelve months after the Gorazde crisis in April 1994 before the Security Council had considered the demilitarisation issue, according to Akashi.²⁶⁸⁶

Close Air Support during 6 – 11 July

NATO was no longer capable of guaranteeing around the clock Close Air Support after the proven capacity on the part of the Bosnian Serb air defence during June 1995. Although the response time for aircraft when flying above the Adriatic was some twenty minutes, once returned to their base in Italy the response time soon rose to two and a half hours. This delay was not really acceptable to troops confronted with a smoking gun, a condition for requesting air power. It was the result of the American dread of again losing aircraft and pilots to the Bosnian Serb air defence.

The risks for the peacekeepers on the ground increased accordingly. The Royal Netherlands Airforce considered the concern for the risks to the aircrew exaggerated; aircrews always ran a risk but it was not excessive here. Although the Air Force Commander tried to seek support from a number of European colleagues, there was no change in the NATO chain of command dominated by Americans: no aircraft for Close Air Support flying over land if they could not be accompanied by aircraft suppressing Air Defence (in military terms: SEAD aircraft). Within this limitation, NATO responded promptly to warnings of possible requests for Close Air Support, but not without making mistakes. For instance, they neglected to put a C-130 flying command post on alert on 11 July, resulting in an additional delay before Close Air Support was provided to Dutchbat.

The procedure for processing a request for Close Air Support was cumbersome and time-consuming. A request went through many channels, there were restrictions and it usually arrived too late. The Bosnian Serbs could also see on their radar screens when NATO planes were in the air. Once the aircraft returned to their base, the VRS simply continued their advance.

UNPF in Zagreb responded tardily, due to caution on the part of Janvier, not least because the decision-making process on 10 July took so much time that the need for Close Air Support lapsed because the VRS in the meantime retreated, while Akashi had given Janvier a mandate in advance to approve Close Air Support.

This was only the first request for Close Air Support which reached Zagreb. Opinion as to how UNPROFOR acted on this point in Sarajevo, through which requests also had to pass, is divided. Initially Sarajevo was reticent when passing on requests to Zagreb, not least for technical reasons; as

²⁶⁸⁴ Graham Evans and Jeffrey Newnham, *The Dictionary of World Politics: A Reference Guide to Concepts, Ideas and Institutions*, New York, no date, pp. 86-88.

²⁶⁸⁵ NIOD, Coll. Smith. BHC Situation Report signed Lt Gen R.A. Smith, 05/04/95.

²⁶⁸⁶ Akashi offered this harsh judgement on 12 July 1995 as a proposal for a letter from the Secretary-General to the Security Council (UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 12/07/95, No. Z-1149).

long as the VRS did not fire at Dutchbat then there was no reason for Close Air Support according to Sarajevo, because the Rules of Engagement and UN Resolution 836 stipulated the condition 'in self defence'.

Sarajevo (in particular general Nicolai) was said to believe that the Bildt mission would prevent the provision of Close Air Support during the initial phase of the VRS attack. The argument went that the bombardments of the Bosnian Serbs might wreck his mission. Bildt himself denied this.

On the other hand, Sarajevo did not have a trace of doubt about the seriousness of the situation, which was shown by the fact that a Blue Sword Request (a request for air power) was completed twice, without an underlying request by Dutchbat, which was unusual on the basis of the procedures which applied at the time.

It is not possible to determine what effect the absence of General Smith had in the UNPROFOR headquarters. It was known generally that Smith did not shrink from using force, but he was not authorized to summon Close Air Support; only Janvier and Akashi in Zagreb were authorized to do so. On the other hand, his deputy, French General Gobilliard, did not hesitate to sign the requests submitted to him either.

Janvier said after the event that if he had known what was about to happen he would certainly have asked Smith to stay in Sarajevo and that Smith would no doubt have complied. Janvier was also convinced that Smith would have returned had he known in advance how things would end. Janvier had tried to speak to him on the telephone but had not managed to do so.²⁶⁸⁷ It has to be said that Janvier was not much at his post either during the initial days of the VRS attack.

We may conclude about the air strikes expected by Dutchbat on 11 July that lack of knowledge of procedures and circumstances caused the numbers of aircraft mentioned and the submission of target lists to lead to the wrong conclusion in Srebrenica (and also at Sector North East in Tuzla) that air strikes were imminent.

The concept for providing Close Air Support had been changed considerably after the shooting down of an American F-16 early in June. This development seemed to have largely passed Tuzla and Srebrenica by, or was not sufficiently made known there. Knowledge of the procedural aspect of the deployment of air power also seemed to be lacking at these headquarters; the procedures and the smoking gun principle which applied (Close Air Support could only be requested if UNPROFOR was attacked) seemed not to be totally clear to all involved. Ultimately this resulted in enormous misunderstandings and errors of judgement, causing Dutchbat in Srebrenica to expect the morning of 11 July to start with a massive bombardment by NATO to eliminate the artillery positions around the enclave.

We have already pointed out the somewhat ambivalent attitude on the part of Karremans in respect of Close Air Support. Initial doubt regarding the expediency also throws a different light on the picture presented later, namely that Close Air Support was continuously requested. Karremans initially held back from requesting Close Air Support or air presence out of fear for reprisals, and preferred all VRS weapons around the enclave to be eliminated by massive air strikes. Sarajevo did not share the fear for reprisals but air strikes were not an UNPF option at the time; Boutros-Ghali himself had to make a decision to deploy these, even though he was willing to delegate the authority. The vulnerability on the part of UNPROFOR for further hostage actions was undiminished. It would also be impossible from a military point of view to eliminate all weapons which threatened the enclave in one go, as Karremans wanted. It points at excessive optimism in the possibilities of air power but Karremans was grasping at straws.

²⁶⁸⁷ *Mission d'Information commune sur les événements de Srebrenica*, Audition de M. Bernard Janvier, 21/06/01.

The role of the ABiH

The statement by Karremans to the city council, the Opština, during the night from 10 to 11 June 1995 in fact signified the end of the resistance which the Bosnian Government army, the ABiH, displayed; Karremans recommended the ABiH retreat to avoid ABiH targets being hit by the bombardments. It should be said that the ABiH resistance could not have made much difference. A counter attack by the ABiH was successful on 10 July only but it did not last long.

The resistance offered by the ABiH was in many eyes, Bosnian as well as the UN, disappointing. The causes must be sought mainly in a low morale, inadequate leadership, lack of communications and inability to properly operate the heavier weapons present in the enclave. Of the approximately 6500 troops in the enclave, no more than 200 to 300 weapons in the four brigades and the independent battalion were present per unit. It is true that orders for a resolute defence had been given, but they were not carried out. The team spirit within the regionally organized 28th Division was poor. The links between the units were inadequate and the communication system between division and brigades soon broke down, causing commanders to decide of their own but what seemed best to them. It was an old problem that the brigade commanders took little notice of divisional orders. Occasional resistance was displayed here and there but it had been badly organized. Often it concerned resistance from ABiH troops who tried to bring their family into safety during the retreat. Once the VRS entered the town of Srebrenica, there was no further organized resistance and the ABiH got ready to leave the enclave during the night of 11 to 12 July.²⁶⁸⁸

It was not only Van Renssen's death, which resulted in an aloof stance in respect of the ABiH. There were many instances when Dutchbat were or felt at risk from the ABiH. The same thing happened to the British Joint Commission Officers (JCOs). The threat seemed to stem in particular from the thought that UNPROFOR should protect the enclave. When the fact that Dutchbat was withdrawing everywhere became evident, it resulted in frustration which in turn was expressed in an attempt to keep Dutchbat in position with the aid of force or by threatening force, or even to exact air power. The situation was not unique to Srebrenica; it also happened in Zepa that ABiH soldiers tried to prevent UNPROFOR troops from leaving an OP.²⁶⁸⁹ Too much trust in UNPROFOR and unfamiliarity with the method and military possibilities on the part of Dutchbat also played a role. This was reinforced when the ABiH expected cooperation with Dutchbat during the defence against the VRS on the basis of promises which Dutchbat had made in this respect on 29 May; promises which due to their interpretation were known to the ABiH but of which the Dutchbat rank and file were unaware. On the other hand, some measure of fear for action by the ABiH was not entirely unjustified. The ABiH General Staff and the 2 Corps of the ABiH in Tuzla issued orders to capture the ordnance and the OPs from Dutchbat.

Ought Dutchbat to have defended the enclave by force of arms?

The intention of Janvier's order to Dutchbat to set up the so-called blocking positions was to set the Bosnian Serbs a limit: once they transgressed, a situation was created in which the UN could reach for air power after a confrontation between the Bosnian Serbs and UNPROFOR. The Bosnian Serbs had not been set an ultimatum and sanctions had deliberately not been linked to a further advance, rendering it into no more than one of the many warnings which UNPROFOR issued to the VRS. Although the idea to set up the blocking positions was simple, it proved not to have been considered carefully in its consequences. There was scope for a different interpretation of the order at the various levels within UNPROFOR, and this also applied to Dutchbat.

The Rules of Engagement for peacekeeping remained in force, unchanged. These rules landed the UN troops in a vulnerable situation because they were of a reactive nature and did not allow for

²⁶⁸⁸ Sefko Hodzic, *Otpjecaceni koverat*, pp. 267-9.

²⁶⁸⁹ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 88040, File 4-2, SRSG Meeting, May-Oct 95. Senior Staff Meeting, 10/07/95.

offensive operations. The rules were not geared to an overt attack on a Safe Area. Moreover, it had not been pointed out to the UNPROFOR units that the implementation of the mandate was secondary to the safety of the troops. Akashi wrote to New York as late as 11 July that the protection of the Dutch troops at the blocking positions and at the OPs took precedence.

The effect which the death of soldier Van Renssen through the fault of the ABiH had on the performance of Dutchbat is difficult to underestimate. OPs in the southern part of the enclave had been able to listen in to what happened over the B company command network. The prospect of undergoing the same fate was not exactly attractive. OP commanders received the freedom to determine for themselves to which side they wanted to flee (ABiH or VRS) if the VRS planned to capture the OPs, after the death of Van Renssen. The company and battalion leadership supported them in their choice of the least dangerous option. This will have partly been prompted by a guilty conscience on the part of the Dutchbat command, following the decision not to allow OP-F to move to VRS lines.

In many cases the OP crews made it easy for the VRS to capture the OP. It was unmistakable for the OP garrison that this was on the cards and the crews were prepared for it. A fight at an OP did not fit in with the security idea for the peacekeepers. From a military point of view it would be a lost cause, because it would not have been difficult for the VRS to eliminate the OPs with the aid of the tanks and artillery available, although on the other hand it would have been an unmistakable trigger for Close Air Support; but that was not a factor either which could have saved the OPs. Neither was the nature of the terrain much of an obstacle for the VRS to circumvent the OPs and to isolate them.

Judgements by the UN and The Hague on 10 and 11 July

Initially the mood within the UN and in The Hague was that Dutchbat had done well in carrying out the assignment at the blocking positions. When in hindsight the action proved to be rather less successful, the earlier positive judgement turned into a negative one. As far as could be established, the machine guns had been used once only directly against the VRS, and the antitank weapons had not been fired at all; the latter could, in fact, not be fully deployed.

From a military point of view it was an impossible task to halt VRS tanks using six white-painted armoured vehicles. It was therefore little more than a symbolic blocking of the advance route in order to compel the Bosnian Serbs to jump one way or the other and so to create the conditions for the deployment of air power. Although the personnel at the blocking positions landed several times into risky situations, it was not the case that the Bosnian Serbs fired deliberately at UNPROFOR. So it did not provide the expected smoking gun which within the rules for self-defence could form an excuse to deploy Close Air Support.

The Hague tried to follow the developments closely but generally lagged behind the rapidly changing developments in the field. The relations between both Dutch staffs, with the Defence Crisis Management Centre (Defence Crisis Management Centre) informing the political leadership and the Royal Netherlands Army Crisis Staff maintaining contact with Dutchbat, were not ideal. The relations were not formally laid down, and much depended on individuals. There were duplications because generally both staffs in The Hague needed to be informed from Sarajevo (and Tuzla). The Hague did apply itself to the policy to be followed by UNPROFOR but these discussions did not affect the actual circumstances in Bosnia.

There was no evidence of any disagreement between the political and military leadership at the time of the fall. Neither were there any direct instructions to Dutchbat or to Dutch staff officers in the UN staffs. The Hague only intervened to try and halt further Close Air Support on 11 July. This resulted in a politically tainted battle of words between the Netherlands and Akashi in particular on the cancellation of a third wave of attacking aircraft. Akashi argued that he had no choice but to grant the request by Voorhoeve. People involved in Zagreb and Sarajevo, however, pointed out that the UN was not preparing any further Close Air Support missions, and that the request by Voorhoeve was a

convenient excuse not to have to admit this. Voorhoeve submitted his request at such a time that it no longer had effect; nevertheless Akashi did, in fact, hide behind it at a later stage.

The decision not to initiate any further action from the air had indeed already been taken. This did not mean that flights by NATO aircraft already present above the enclave were deferred; they remained present because no prohibition on further missions arrived from NATO. The Dutch intervention was in this sense not actually significant. There were reproaches between the UN and NATO during the days after the fall. NATO commanders were of the opinion that too late and too little Close Air Support assistance had been enlisted. Akashi and Janvier on the other hand were of the opinion that Close Air Support had been provided according to the book.

Close Air Support on 11 July, however, arrived too late to produce an effect and call a halt to the VRS advance. The Bosnian Serbs did not intend to capture the entire enclave before 9 July. A decision to do so after all was only made during the evening of 9 July, after the earlier successful completion of operation Kravija '95. This decision was not known at UNPF in Zagreb. Decisions were hampered in this way by the fact that the intentions of the Bosnian Serbs were not clear. An incorrect assessment of the intentions of the Bosnian Serbs, and an overcautious response at all levels within UNPROFOR, as well as little resistance on the side of the ABiH, offered the VRS scope to continue the advance and to ultimately capture the entire enclave.

This ensured that the Bosnian Serb decision was made simultaneously with the UNPF decision to set up blocking positions. Attempts to put an obstacle in the way of the Bosnian Serb advance should therefore have taken place prior to 9 July. The UN was under the impression that the VRS was interested in the southern part of the enclave. This did not place the population centres in the enclave at risk and the purpose of the Safe Area regime was the protection of the population, rather than the territory.

Reactions on the part of the Bosnian Muslims

Numerous conspiracy theories in respect of a wanton sacrifice of the enclave by political machinations circulated in Bosnia but no concrete evidence was found.

Srebrenica only occupied a subservient position in the political and military power game in Bosnia. However, the political and military leaders within and outside the enclave were diametrically opposed in their views after the fall. The belief outside the enclave was that the defence could have stood its ground longer; within the enclave the leadership pointed at the hopeless situation in which they found themselves and which had affected the morale of the population and ABiH. ABiH in the enclave had not really been prepared for the attack. The leaders within the enclave denied that plans had existed for a defence and for the evacuation of the population, as argued outside the enclave. It indicates the different interests which existed to explain what happened after the fall of Srebrenica. Nobody had expected that the Srebrenica tragedy would actually end in mass murder.

Bosnian embitterment on the loss of Srebrenica was great. President Izetbegovic stated during the days after the fall that the confusing explanations by the UN, NATO, European and American politicians signified political approval of the legitimisation of power, the acceptance of genocide as a fait accompli and war criminals as equal partners in negotiations. He pointed an accusing finger at Akashi. The latter's hesitation continued and he ought to resign. Lack of resolve at the UN was the main reason that the tragedy in Bosnia continued, according to Izetbegovic. He could not see any extension of the UNPROFOR mandate on the horizon.²⁶⁹⁰

Comments in the Bosnian press were just as devastating: the backing by international diplomats and the delayed response on the part of NATO had made the fall of Srebrenica possible. The West had the power as well as the aircraft to halt the Bosnian Serb conquests but did not want to do so. 'seldom

²⁶⁹⁰ ABiH Tuzla. Command 2nd Corps to all divisions, 14/07/95, No. 04/01-105-615 with report press conference President Izetbegovic.

had so much misery, suffering and obscure business been recorded in diplomatic annals as at the Srebrenica tragedy. Srebrenica was simply betrayed.' There was a reminder that the Security Council had committed itself to protect the area when declaring Srebrenica a Safe Area. When Mladic's intentions became clear, UNPROFOR and the diplomats had played deaf, dumb and blind at the crucial moment.²⁶⁹¹

A problem for Defence or for the Netherlands?

Anything other than a harsh Bosnian judgement immediately after the fall of Srebrenica could hardly be expected. But critical comments could also be heard towards the UN headquarters in Zagreb. They had been averse to taking a risk. The Zagreb headquarters was a large and unwieldy machine, which had frequently been surprised by events. A bureaucratic aversion to drastic changes was said to prevail there. Akashi tended to always first want to check the information received from the military, and his reports from Zagreb to New York had always been moderate in tone. Moreover, Akashi had been instructed by Boutros-Ghali to safeguard the essence of UN peacekeeping and to remain as neutral as possible.²⁶⁹²

If the world had been determined to save Srebrenica and the UN soldiers then they should have struck hard at the VRS in which case Mladic would not have dreamt of playing a game with the fate of a protected zone and the dignity of the UN, in the opinion of the Bosnian newspaper *Oslobodenje*. The deployment of NATO aircraft had been nothing more than a cosmetic action. The fact that Minister Voorhoeve had admitted that he had tried to halt further air actions following the threat of terrorist action, resulted in a vicious response to him also: 'with a single move from this minister, 40 000 civilians were sacrificed, and the entire region was changed into a collective pull-out with an uncertain fate'.²⁶⁹³

Apart from the comments in the Bosnian press, the former EU negotiator Lord Owen also vented criticism.²⁶⁹⁴ He was of the opinion that the Dutch Government had damaged its own position by remaining silent on the situation in Srebrenica, the violation of the demilitarisation, the ABiH raids and especially by not denouncing the fact that the resupply was being cut off. The Netherlands had always taken a moral tone in foreign policy, and Owen admired this. The Hague had successfully commanded a certain measure of authority by doing so. The Netherlands should in his opinion have interpreted the problems in the enclave and also the actions on the part of the ABiH diplomatically but had not done so. The Netherlands enjoyed sufficient respect internationally that it could have counted on being listened to in international forums. Owen was of the opinion that the Dutch position in the diplomatic force field would have improved considerably if The Hague had taken action along these lines. He believed that if the Dutch Government would have said something along the lines of no good guys, no bad guys, even before the fall of Srebrenica, that this would have had international impact but the Netherlands had not done so. When Karremans uttered these words after his return from the enclave, they merely acted as a boomerang, because it had become clear immediately that the Bosnian Serbs had shown themselves as the indisputable bad guys.

When Owen raised these kind of problems during an assembly of EU Foreign Affairs ministers, he said that Minister Van Mierlo, supported by the German Minister Kinkel, gave him what for. Owen believed this showed a lack of realism in the Dutch foreign policy. As a result he wondered whether there had in fact been a mechanism in existence at government level in the Netherlands to discuss in detail differences of opinion between Foreign Affairs and Defence in relation to the policy to be

²⁶⁹¹ ABiH Tuzla. Command 2nd Corps to all divisions, 14/07/95, No. 04/01-105-615 with comment *Oslobodenje* on press conference President Izetbegovic.

²⁶⁹² Confidential interview (46).

²⁶⁹³ ABiH Tuzla. Command 2nd Corps to all divisions, 14/07/95, No. 04/01-105-615 with comments from *Oslobodenje* on press conference President Izetbegovic.

²⁶⁹⁴ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

followed, in the presence of military and civil servant experts, as was the custom in the United Kingdom.

This criticism voiced by Owen seemed not wholly unjustified. There was some question of consultation with the ministers, the military and civil servants involved in the Prime Minister's Office and there were extensive contacts between the Defence and Foreign Affairs departments but these contacts took place mainly *after* the Bosnian Serbs had started their attack on Srebrenica. Defence was mostly on its own during the period prior to the attack, as was evident from the problems around the resupply of Dutchbat and the relief. It was true that Parliament was informed at an early stage of the problems which Dutchbat faced, but these consultations remained confidential, lest too much would leak out and might therefore result in unrest amongst the Dutchbat backing. It did not result in targeted diplomatic action and pressure on New York, apart from the participation in the Rapid Reaction Force, where Defence again took the lead. Contact between the Force Commander and Chief of Defence Staff could not produce a solution. This does not mean that considerably increased activity, including activity on the part of Foreign Affairs, would have made a lot of difference; the Bosnian Serbs showed themselves intransigent. The relatively scant diplomatic effort on the part of Foreign Affairs nevertheless remains surprising, certainly in the light of the leader role which this department had fulfilled at an earlier stage.

Chapter 8

Plans to re-take Srebrenica

1. Introduction

After the seizure of Srebrenica, the international community, headed by France, turned its attention to finding ways of restoring the enclave to Safe Area status. The driving force behind the plans for a recapture was the French President, Chirac. The political tactics that he represented had already become clear after the hostage crisis: a stronger stance against the Bosnian Serbs. Accordingly, Chirac found it unacceptable to simply tolerate the VRS seizure of Srebrenica, with a possible follow-up in Zepa and Gorazde. In addition, 'srebrenica' was something of a sore point in France, because of the role played by Morillon there in 1993. At that time Morillon had declared publicly in Srebrenica that, henceforth, the population would fall under UN protection.

Chirac started canvassing for a recapture of the Safe Area of Srebrenica. His efforts to rally international support were unsuccessful; not a single country was prepared to give military backing to the French proposal. The UN saw no future in the idea either, but still paid lip service to it. This took place through the adoption of UN Resolution 1004 on 12 July 1995. By this time the Security Council had debated extensively on how the Safe Area would be restored, and whether force could be deployed. As co-sponsor of the resolution, the Netherlands played its own role in attempts to amend the draft text.

However, the decision-making in New York was far removed from the reality of the situation in Bosnia. In this respect, Resolution 1004 can be regarded as a continuation of UN Resolution 836, which designated the Safe Areas in the first place: there was again a yawning divide between political intentions on the one hand and the military means and possibilities to realize them on the other.

Eventually, the resolution did lead to a military plan from UN headquarters and from UNPF in Zagreb, but these were barely more than an effort to keep the Security Council satisfied. Moreover, mindful of the fact that the population of Srebrenica would not be happy about returning voluntarily to their 'open prison', the military commanders in New York and Zagreb paid little serious attention to the political plans.

This chapter will discuss the materialization of the French plans, their reception by the member states, the Security Council discussions on UN Resolution 1004, the visions in The Hague and, finally, the response in Zagreb and Sarajevo to plans to re-take the enclave.

2. The French proposals

On 11 July a Franco-German summit on Defence and Security was held in Strasbourg. The topics for discussion included the fall of Srebrenica. During the summit the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Klaus Kinkel, received a telephone call from his Dutch counterpart Van Mierlo. Van Mierlo said that he called Kinkel because he (Kinkel) was his liaison for the Contact Group.²⁶⁹⁵

No direct testimonies could be obtained from the main French and German players in these talks: Chirac, De Charette, Kohl and Kinkel. But testimonies were recorded from others present at this summit, including Jean-David Levitte, Chirac's political advisor. According to Levitte, Van Mierlo said that the Dutch contingent was coming under heavy pressure from the Bosnian Serbs. Dutchbat had, however, fulfilled its obligations and there was no [*sic*] need for NATO air intervention.

The talks in Strasbourg resumed until, approximately an hour later, Kinkel was again called to the telephone. Van Mierlo now passed on the message that Srebrenica was about to fall and was insistent that Close Air Support should no longer be provided as it entailed the risk of collateral damage

²⁶⁹⁵ Interview H.A.F.M.O. van Mierlo, 19/05/00.

to Dutchbat and the local population. The French General Jean-Claude Mallet, who was also present, said that in his second call, Van Mierlo appealed to Kinkel to waive intervention and to leave matters to the commanders on the ground.²⁶⁹⁶

Levitte further said that when Chirac heard that Srebrenica was on the brink of collapse and that NATO could no longer deploy its air power, 'Le Président de la République a littéralement explosé'. Chirac adjourned the meeting and turned his attention to the French and German military experts to find out about plans to avert the fall of Srebrenica or to re-take it. After an hour, Chirac and Kohl reached a four-point agreement:

1. They would condemn the attack;
2. The Safe Area must be restored;
3. The Security Council must be convened;
4. France and Germany would announce their willingness to support Dutchbat and efforts to restore the enclave to UN control.

At the end of the summit, Chirac informed the press of this four-point agreement. Chirac announced that contact had been established with the troops on the ground and the relevant Dutch politicians, and that an emergency session of the Security Council had been called 'à la demande des Hollandais'.²⁶⁹⁷

Chirac did not want the Security Council to acquiesce in the fall of Srebrenica; otherwise the same fate would await Zepa, Gorazde and the Bihac. He wanted it to make a fast decision. If not, he threatened to withdraw France from UNPROFOR.

Whereas Chirac was thinking of military action and was prepared to commit French troops, Kohl was thinking primarily of humanitarian aid.²⁶⁹⁸ According to EU negotiator Carl Bildt, Kohl would not, however, have had any objections to military action.²⁶⁹⁹ German diplomatic sources say that Chirac had urgently asked Kohl to militarily support the French plans to retake Srebrenica. The Germans were under the impression that Chirac saw this as a serious option. Kohl discussed it with Minister Kinkel, Minister of Defence Volker Rühle and his political advisor Steiner. Everyone agreed that it was a splendid initiative, but this did not yet mean that Bonn would participate in it. Subsequently, Kohl responded with caution; he supported Chirac's idea for a recapture, but refused to allow military participation on the part of Germany.²⁷⁰⁰ The Dutch Ambassador in Bonn also reported that Kohl ruled out stepping up the German contribution to UNPROFOR.²⁷⁰¹

Earlier in the afternoon of 11 July, also in Strasbourg, the Bosnian Foreign Minister, Sacirbey, had campaigned in the European Parliament for a rescue of Srebrenica, even though he seemed aware at the time that the enclave no longer actually existed.²⁷⁰² On the same day Sacirbey also broached the subject with Bildt in Strasbourg. Bildt reportedly told him that Srebrenica would not be liberated, and also that Zepa would not be defended. According to Sacirbey, this disclosure meant that Mladic had 'implicitly or explicitly' been given the green light to carry out these attacks – hence, strategically, the decision on Srebrenica had already been taken.²⁷⁰³ Bildt has a totally different recollection of this meeting. In his memoirs Bildt wrote: 'surprisingly, I was more upset by what had happened than he seemed to be. His calm reactions and controlled arguments still seem to me to be a mysterious piece of the Srebrenica puzzle'. In Bildt's version, Sacirbey said that Srebrenica had always been a problem for his government and that Sarajevo knew that a peace deal would involve the loss of the enclave. He

²⁶⁹⁶ *Mission d'Information commune sur les événements de Srebrenica*, Audition de M. Jean-David Levitte, 30/01/01 et Jean-Claude Mallet, 05/04/01.

²⁶⁹⁷ *Mission d'Information commune sur les événements de Srebrenica*, Audition de M. Jean-David Levitte, 30/01/01.

²⁶⁹⁸ *De Volkskrant*, 12/07/95.

²⁶⁹⁹ Bildt, *Peace Journey*, p. 57-58; interview Bildt, 13/12/00.

²⁷⁰⁰ Confidential interview (53).

²⁷⁰¹ ABZ, DPV/ARA/01812. Code Smit 217, 13/07/95.

²⁷⁰² *Dani*, Special issue of the Srebrenica Dossier, Sarajevo, September 1998.

²⁷⁰³ Sejo Omeragić, 'Kad god otvore nase grobnice, mi budemo krivi', in: *Ljiljan*, 10-17/07/00.

added that, from this perspective, 'what had happened made things easier'. According to Bildt, Sacirbey then pressed for humanitarian aid and not for a recapture.²⁷⁰⁴

After the Franco-German summit Bildt accompanied President Chirac on the flight from Strasbourg to Paris. At that moment there was still no military plan for a recapture. Bildt says that General Quesnot, as Chirac's military advisor, was the first to raise the subject en route. The Dutch Ambassador to Paris, Wijnaendts, was also under the impression that the idea to retake the enclave originated with Quesnot, who reportedly said to Chirac: 'Give me two parachute regiments. I'll jump and retake Srebrenica'. Wijnaendts seemed to be well-informed about this; later, the French General Germanos also said that Quesnot had helped instigate the plan by proposing to save Srebrenica with a parachute contingent which he would lead personally.

However, according to Bildt, no-one took this plan seriously apart from Chirac. In any case, said Bildt, Chirac was a person who could wax enthusiastically for ages about something and then change his mind or simply forget it.

Nonetheless, there is no doubt, in Bildt's view, that Chirac was genuinely furious. He was showing increasing frustration with the situation in Bosnia and wanted fast, powerful and resolute action. A Bosnian-Serbian attack on a Safe Area could not and would not be tolerated. Spurred on by Quesnot, Chirac appealed to Bildt to urge UNPROFOR to launch an attack to retake Srebrenica at the earliest opportunity.

During the flight, Bildt put Chirac's idea for recapturing the enclave into perspective. He pointed out that the area was under Bosnian-Serb control and that the only available troops were the Scandinavian battalion (Norbat) in Tuzla and Dutchbat. As far as he knew, the Governments of Norway, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands had not been consulted. Furthermore, Dutchbat was demoralized and penned in at Potocari. This battalion did not have the capacity to fight its way through to Srebrenica. The Rapid Reaction Force was not yet operational and was hundreds of miles away in Bosnian terrain. It would take weeks to transfer the unit to Srebrenica. Still on the flight to Paris, Bildt reminded Chirac that the Bosnian Government had not asked for a recapture but for humanitarian aid.

As it happened, on 12 July the rest of the Bosnian Government changed its stance on this issue: from that date onwards it no longer supported plans for a regulated evacuation of the population, but precisely Chirac's idea for a recapture.

Bildt said that he had urged Chirac to desist from promises that could not be kept. According to Bildt, Chirac and he were largely agreed that, basically, a recapture was not a realistic option which should take priority. Besides the political tragedy, a humanitarian tragedy threatened which must be averted with the utmost urgency. Bildt said that Chirac and he had looked for alternatives but had found none. They did not develop any ideas to involve the US politically from the start. The French did want US military support in the form of transport and fighter helicopters, but Bildt was of the opinion that the US would prefer a free hand in new air actions against the Bosnian Serbs.²⁷⁰⁵

During a meeting in the 'bunker' (the Defence Crisis Management Control Centre) under the Ministry of Defence on the evening of 11 July the Ministerial Council heard that Chirac and Kohl had advocated the restoration of the Safe Area of Srebrenica at a press conference. The Ministerial Council immediately judged that, given the underlying developments, little credibility could be attached to these statements.²⁷⁰⁶ Before the French had even mooted their controversial proposal, the possibility of retaking the enclave by military force had been explored at the Ministry of Defence. Chief of Defence Staff, Van den Breemen, instructed Vice-Chief of Operations Hilderink to find out approximately how

²⁷⁰⁴ Bildt, *Peace Journey*, p. 57 - 59.

²⁷⁰⁵ Bildt, *Peace Journey*, p. 57-59; interview Bildt, 13/12/00; telephone call with H. Wijnaendts, 25/04/00; *Mission 'd' Information commune sur les événements de Srebrenica*, Audition du Général Germanos, 12/02/01. For the change in the stance of the Bosnian Government see: Draft Diary Van den Breemen, 12 July 1995. Van den Breemen received Sacirbey's message for Voorhoeve (DCBC, 714).

²⁷⁰⁶ Summary of the meeting of the Ministerial Council of 11/07/95, objectivized for the purposes of the NIOD investigation 11/07/95.

many troops would be required. Hilderink worked this out together with the Army Crisis Staff on the basis of the original plan for the Safe Areas and the NATO evacuation plan. Thus, a reasonable estimate could be compiled of the size and type of units that would be needed. The conclusion was that it was a noble idea to retake the enclave, but the troops were simply unavailable. Van den Breemen further concluded that an accelerated build-up of the Rapid Reaction Force afforded no possibilities: by the time the troops could be deployed all the Displaced Persons would have left the enclave.

The response to the French idea of recapture was that it was unrealistic and should be seen as a political stunt by Chirac. The British and the Americans were asked for their vision via accredited attachés in The Hague; their response was no different from that of The Hague.²⁷⁰⁷ Van den Breemen called a helicopter operation with six hundred men a ‘total non-option’, which could, moreover, endanger the lives of the Dutch troops still in the enclave.²⁷⁰⁸ On 12 July Van Mierlo announced in Parliament that the French proposal to retake Srebrenica was not a policy principle for either the Dutch Government, or the governments of other countries.²⁷⁰⁹

On the very eve of the fall, Janvier too had philosophized on the question of what was to be done with the enclave. He considered military solutions untenable as the Bosnian Serbs would threaten reprisals. There was no way that Srebrenica could be reached by land, because it would mean travelling sixty kilometres through Republika Srpska. This would have required an armoured division, similar to the one envisaged in the NATO withdrawal plan.²⁷¹⁰

The French President and his government nonetheless stuck to their proposal. After the meeting of the French Cabinet on 12 July, a communiqué was issued in which France demanded that the Security Council use all possible means to facilitate the departure of the Bosnian Serbs and the return of the population. The French Government also informed The Hague that it was prepared to contribute to this aim ‘avec tous les moyens disponibles à toute opération qui serait décidée’.²⁷¹¹ ‘La France est prête à répondre “présente” dans un cadre international’ was the message from Paris. Chirac did not want a solo operation by the French,²⁷¹² but he could find few supporters: the UK was hesitant. The French Chief of Defence Staff, Lanxade, asked his American counterpart, Joint Chiefs-of-Staff Chairman General Shalikashvili whether American helicopters could be made available to fly in a French unit of between six and eight hundred troops. Shalikashvili hedged, saying that such decisions rested with Congress. The French also inquired through informal channels if the Dutch company of marines, which was assigned to the Rapid Reaction Force, was available for a French operation.²⁷¹³ It appears that ‘Tous les moyens disponibles’ were somewhat lean on the French side.

The US Ambassador to Paris, Mrs Pamela Harriman, approached Ambassador Wijnaendts on 12 July about the French initiatives. She hinted that the French had told the Americans that they were counting on logistical support if a decision were taken to recapture Srebrenica, but that the Americans were demurring in the French plans. One interesting aspect of this meeting was that Harriman said that the American standpoint would be determined by the wishes of the Dutch. Wijnaendts derived the impression that the Americans, in turn, intended to shelter behind a Dutch rejection of Chirac’s ‘robust option’. It is for this reason that Wijnaendts had no wish to continue the dialogue with Harriman. J.M.M.A graaf de Marchant et d’Ansembourg, Chief of the European Department, supported his decision and Minister Van Mierlo was duly informed.²⁷¹⁴

2707 Interview C.G.J. Hilderink 11/08/00.

2708 DCBC, 714. Draft Diary Van den Breemen, 12/07/95.

2709 ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278. General meeting Def/FA, 12/07/95.

2710 NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury. SRSG’s meeting 11/07/95.

2711 ABZ, DAV 994.241. Fax Emb Paris to MinFA, 12/07/95.

2712 *Les Echos*, 12/07/95.

2713 DCBC, 728, Code Wijnaendts 218, 12/07/95.

2714 ABZ, DDI-DAV/999.241/DAV/MS/Yugoslavia/NATO/Coordination/ July 1995-August 1996. Memorandum Chief DEU to M via DGPZ and S, 12/07/95, No. DEU-563/95.

On the evening of 13 July – after the completion of the deportation of the population – Chirac called President Clinton. He told him that American transport and fighter helicopters were needed. According to Chirac, the fall of Srebrenica and possibly Zepa was tantamount to ‘un échec majeur’ for the UN, NATO and Democracy. Now that the men were segregated from the women, a violation of international law was on the horizon and the civilized world should oppose such ‘fascism’. This called for ‘une action militaire ferme et limitée’ to restore the situation in the eastern enclaves. Clinton replied that he respected the French resolve, but that his military experts were sceptical about a recapture, also because it was a highly risky operation.

The US negotiator Holbrooke says that Chirac’s proposed intervention had no chance of success. His ideas had already been raised through formal French channels, and had met with fervent opposition from the Pentagon, the British, and also Chirac’s own generals.²⁷¹⁵

The press was also sending out sceptical signals regarding the French plans. Akashi categorically rejected military intervention and said that no attempts would be undertaken to re-establish a Safe Area around Srebrenica. Akashi actually spoke out of turn because the Security Council had not yet issued any statements on the matter. Among the parliamentary spokespersons in the Netherlands, Van Traa (PvdA, (Labour)) was the only one who wanted to demand the restoration of Srebrenica, but he realized that there were insufficient military resources to achieve this. Van Traa therefore gave priority to winning international support to facilitate the departure of the Displaced Persons.

The French idea met with still more rejections. Bildt announced in public that he could not see how a military operation could bring about a recapture; NATO Secretary-General Claes described Srebrenica as ‘irrevocably lost’; and there were also doubts from the British corner. The Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, said that the British Government was in favour of the restoration of the Safe Area, but that it must be achieved by negotiation. The *Financial Times* saw the French plan as a ploy which would enable the French Government to plead innocence in subsequent catastrophes expected around Zepa and Gorazde. It also took the view that the Americans would only, in theory, leave the option open, having stated that they would support any joint plan of the European member states; this was easily said given the unbridgeable gap between the French and the British. The *Financial Times* maintained that Chirac’s ideas were largely politically motivated and drew attention to the fact that he had made these statements shortly after being catcalled in the European Parliament when he announced France’s intention to resume nuclear testing. Besides, Chirac could use this as an opportunity to make out that France was the only country that was prepared to stick its neck out and thus pave the way for his retreat.²⁷¹⁶ In his memoirs the British Prime-Minister John Major spoke of ‘fairly hair-raising plans’.²⁷¹⁷

Meantime, after talks with the US negotiator Holbrooke, the Spanish Presidency of the European Union reported that Holbrooke was convinced that the French were not really serious about retaking Srebrenica and were merely playing a political game. According to the EU President, the Americans only agreed half-heartedly to support the French, while sheltering behind the Dutch, who were in the best position to assess the situation. The US Ambassador in The Hague, Terry Dornbush, also mentioned that Holbrooke had suggested a swap: the eastern enclaves, including Srebrenica, would be maintained in exchange for lifting or suspending the sanctions against the (Bosnian) Serbs. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Minister Voorhoeve had – rightly – dismissed this proposal as it could have led to hostage-taking and paralyzed the Rapid Reaction Force.²⁷¹⁸

²⁷¹⁵ *Mission ‘d’Information commune sur les événements de Srebrenica*, Audition de M. Jean-David Levitte, 30/01/01; Holbrooke, *To End a War*, p. 70.

²⁷¹⁶ ANP, 120042 and 121416 July 95; *Parool*, NRC/*Handelsblad*, 13/07/95; *Financial Times*, 14/07/95 and 19/07/95.

²⁷¹⁷ Major, *The Autobiography*, p. 545.

²⁷¹⁸ ABZ, DDI-DAV/999.241/DAV/MS/Yugoslavia/NATO/Coordination/ July 1995-August 1996. Fax J.M. Vos, DGPZ to Minister Van Mierlo, 13/07/95, Fax No. 356.4540.

3. UN Resolution 1004: formulation and consequences

Judging from the discussions in the *Comité Politique* of the European Union (consultation between top officials from the member states), the seriousness of the situation had not yet penetrated on 10 July. An attempt by the Spanish Presidency to have the EU Ambassador in Belgrade carry out a so-called *démarche* at the government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia came to nothing. During the discussions, it emerged that Akashi had been optimistic about a positive conclusion to the VRS attack on Srebrenica, but his optimism was not shared by the Netherlands. The French and German representatives expressed no views at the EU meeting, but the British representative, Pauline Neville-Jones, did. She maintained that the action by the Bosnian Serbs would not usher in the seizure of the enclave because it was not to their military advantage. She saw it more as provocation in the light of Bildt's negotiations.²⁷¹⁹

On 10 July the Security Council discussed the situation in Srebrenica informally. The Council could only agree on issuing a 'statement of concern' to the press, the weakest instrument at its disposal. France would have liked a stronger response in the form of an official statement by the President of the Security Council, but the Americans and the Russians were unable to agree on the wording: the Russians wanted a reference to the demilitarization agreement of 1993, the Americans did not. Only after the fall of Srebrenica did the Security Council take a stronger line.²⁷²⁰

The UN Secretary-General, Boutros-Ghali, did not actively concern himself with the problems in Srebrenica in the days after the fall. He was in Athens from 10 to 12 July en route to Africa, and devoted no attention to the situation in the enclave in speeches on 11 July. When questioned about this afterwards by the press, he merely replied that attempts would be made to restore the Safe Area of Srebrenica.²⁷²¹ In New York Undersecretary-General Annan was acting as his deputy. Annan sensed that a harder line was in the offing; his assessment was that the Security Council countries would want to send out 'robust signals', though he also admitted that he was aware of the non-viability of the Safe Areas and the limited resources at UNPROFOR's disposal.²⁷²²

Akashi wanted to press for a UN resolution or a 'Presidential Statement' by the Security Council President, believing that this would give moral support to the negotiations with the Bosnian Serbs. Akashi also asked that the UN and NATO immediately start consultations and that precautionary measures be taken in case the Bosnian Serbs would not cooperate. If this indeed proved to be the case, then Akashi believed that a withdrawal from Bosnia was imminent.²⁷²³

Players on the international stage sent out mixed signals. The President of the Muslim-Croat Federation in Bosnia, Kresimir Zubak, did not ask Boutros-Ghali to retake the enclave, but '[to] exert all the necessary pressure against the Serbian aggressor, using all means at your disposal'.²⁷²⁴ President Izetbegovic, on the other hand, in a statement issued on 12 July (which deviated from his standpoint of the previous day in which he said that priority rested with the evacuation of the Displaced Persons) demanded that the UN and NATO restore the status of Safe Area by force. If these institutions could not or would not do this, then Izetbegovic demanded that this be publicly announced.²⁷²⁵ On the same day, Minister Sacirbey adopted a more moderate tone when he spoke with NATO Secretary-General Claes about retaking Srebrenica; he still gave priority to humanitarian aid.²⁷²⁶ In a letter to the President of the Security Council, Morocco, as the spokesperson for the Organization of the Islamic

²⁷¹⁹ DCBC, 720, Code Bot 349, 12/07/95.

²⁷²⁰ Bildt, *Peace Journey*, p. 59.

²⁷²¹ ABZ, DPV/ARA/00797. Code Wagenmakers 133, 14/07/95

²⁷²² Confidential information (45).

²⁷²³ DCBC, 1188, Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1139.

²⁷²⁴ United Nations, General Assembly/Security Council, A/50/284, S/1995/572, 13/07/95. The letter was dated 12/07/95.

²⁷²⁵ ABZ, PVVN. Security Council 3553rd meeting (S/PV.3553) of 12/07/95.

²⁷²⁶ DCBC, 778. Code Feith NATO 1049, 13/07/95.

Conference Contact Group on Bosnia, demanded a withdrawal of the 'serbian forces', but also called for 'all the necessary measures, including the use of air power' to restore the status of Safe Area.²⁷²⁷

In the afternoon of 11 July the Director of UN Political Affairs of the Dutch Foreign Ministry was also busy persuading the Security Council to address the matter. In a fax to Vos, the Director General of Political Affairs present at the Ministry of Defence, a proposal was put forward to convene the Security Council without delay in order to discuss whether steps were needed to restore the Safe Area in the interests of the population, UNPROFOR and the personnel of NGOs.²⁷²⁸

France, the UK and the USA, as permanent members of the Security Council, had already held preliminary talks at the American mission to the UN. The Dutch UN representative Biegman was invited to attend.

The French Permanent Representative at the UN, Jean Bernard Merimée, had, on the basis of the bilateral contact between Chirac and Kohl in Strasbourg, and after consulting the British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind, been instructed by his government to reach a resolution calling for the immediate withdrawal of the Bosnian Serbs, the restoration of the Safe Area to give fresh impetus to the Safe-Area regime, and the return of UN troops to Srebrenica (which were, incidentally, already present in the form of Dutchbat). The British representative Sir David Hannay had received similar instructions from his own government.

These three countries were agreed that the trampling underfoot of Srebrenica must be condemned, and warranted a robust response from the Security Council. The French representative stated that Paris was prepared to deploy the parts of the Rapid Reaction Force that were already stationed in Bosnia in order to reinforce the UN presence in Srebrenica, primarily in the form of armed helicopters. This prompted the United States to ask whether they would then be asked to provide military support. According to Biegman, both his French and his British counterparts said that this would not be requested. Biegman personally stressed the 'exceptionally high risks' to the Dutch troops if a military operation were set in motion. He pointed out that this would not only spell danger for the Dutchbat hostages; in addition, the battalion that had withdrawn to the compound in Potocari would be vastly outnumbered and it had no fuel or ammunition.²⁷²⁹

These discussions were followed by a meeting of the Contact Group, to which Biegman was also invited. The participants set out the instructions they had received from their governments. The Russians were not against a condemnation of the Bosnian-Serb aggression, but they wanted to see it placed in the context of the Bosnian-Muslim violation of the demilitarization of the enclave. The British also wanted to use the demilitarization agreement of April 1993 as a departure point for a condemnation of the situation in Srebrenica. At the Contact Group meeting Biegman also explained the Dutch Government's concern for the safety of the Dutch troops.

The Contact Group decided that a 'drafting group' would immediately start work on a draft text for a Security Council resolution. The French ideas (which were in tune with those of the British) would serve as a basis: condemnation of the Bosnian-Serb aggression; a call for the immediate withdrawal of the VRS; the restoration of the Safe Area; the return of the UN troops; and – a new addition at this stage – the necessity for the demilitarization of the enclave.

The Dutch demand for this draft text was that the parties respect the safety and freedom of movement of the UNPROFOR personnel, that the hostages be freed, and that the UNHCR and aid organizations be granted unimpeded access to the enclave. The result was a draft text which, in Biegman's opinion, reflected the Dutch concerns.²⁷³⁰ Biegman said that the 'Dutch bottom line was safe withdrawal of their troops, but he acquiesced in the French-British approach'.²⁷³¹ At the request

²⁷²⁷ United Nations, Security Council, S/1995/563, 12/07/95.

²⁷²⁸ DCBC, 661. Fax DPV sent to Deputy DGPA 11/07/95 15:51.

²⁷²⁹ ABZ, DPV 452342. Code Biegman 607, 12/07/95.

²⁷³⁰ ABZ, DPV 452342. Code Biegman 607, 12/07/95.

²⁷³¹ Confidential Information (46).

of the Dutch, the preamble to the resolution also expressed concern for the plight of the Displaced Persons who had gathered in Potocari.

All resources available or all necessary resources?

The draft text also stated that the Secretary-General would be asked to ‘to use all resources available’ to bring about the restoration of the Safe Area. The Russians had serious qualms about this phrase, claiming that it implied that if the Bosnian Serbs failed to respect the resolution, then force could be deployed; for, the draft text referred to Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which sanctioned the use of force. The Russians would not allow this reference to go farther than the safety of UNPROFOR; they were supported by China. Conversely, the permanent members from the West wanted no truck with the Russian ideas to include a call for a ceasefire in Bosnia, because this would be tantamount to giving in to the wishes of the Bosnian Serbs.

Biegman was prepared to go along with this draft, also in view of the willingness of the United States, France and the UK to take the Dutch wishes into account and to allow the Netherlands to co-sponsor the resolution.²⁷³²

However, the vexing question was still that intensifying the pressure on the Bosnian Serbs, as conveyed by the spirit of this resolution, was more likely to lessen than augment the chance of a swift release of the Dutchbat soldiers. This had not escaped the notice of the Foreign Ministry in The Hague; this is why it was reluctant to agree to the draft text. The Netherlands realized that the phrase ‘use all resources available’, in combination with a reference to Chapter VII of the UN Charter, opened up the possibility of restoring the Safe Area by force. This would be at variance with the Dutch Government’s aim of persuading the Bosnian Serbs to release the Dutchbat hostages. The Foreign Ministry did not therefore share the French wish for robust action. Accordingly, instructions were drawn up for Biegman to try to change the disputed phrase, but these were never sent because the Foreign Ministry realized that such an amendment would be impossible without the backing of the French and the British representatives.

That was the end of the line as the Netherlands was concerned. Biegman received no support for scrapping the phrase and the Netherlands withdrew as co-sponsor of the resolution.²⁷³³ Neither Biegman, nor the Director-General of Political Affairs, Vos, relished the idea of a Dutch intervention. This was also due to tactical motives: the draft resolution must not be amended as a result of a Dutch initiative. Other countries would have to be prepared to take the lead, so that the Netherlands would not be the requesting party.²⁷³⁴ Otherwise, the Dutch might be left to carry the can when it wanted to get Dutchbat and the Displaced Persons out of the enclave. It could be blamed for wrecking the Safe Area concept by giving up Srebrenica, precisely when the Security Council was demanding a return to the *status quo ante*. According to Vos, the UN should carry the can along with the other countries which were not prepared to release sufficient resources to make the Safe Areas truly safe.²⁷³⁵

The draft resolution was also presented to Akashi in Zagreb. His comments were expressed by Undersecretary-General Kofi Annan at a meeting of the Contact Group, which took place prior to the Security Council session where the draft text of Resolution 1004 would be adopted. The Netherlands was again invited to attend.

At this meeting Annan said that Akashi had cautioned against unrealistic expectations.²⁷³⁶ Akashi had indeed told Annan that he had serious objections to the text: ‘The resolution again raises unrealistic expectations and its failure to take into account reality on the ground will inevitably lead to

²⁷³² ABZ, DPV 452342. Code Biegman 607, 12/07/95.

²⁷³³ ABZ, DPV 452342. Fax DGPZ to Minister Van Mierlo, 12/07/95, Fax No. 356.4540.

²⁷³⁴ ABZ, DPV 452342. Original FA message from Min. of FA to New York PV, 12/07/95, no number. See also annotations on the document.

²⁷³⁵ ABZ, DPV 452342. Fax DGPA to Minister Van Mierlo, 12/07/95, Fax No. 356.4540.

²⁷³⁶ ABZ, DPV/ARA, 00797. Code Biegman 612, 12/07/95.

further disillusionment and disappointment among the international community and the media.' In his view, the main concern should be the humanitarian consequences which, according to him, were scarcely addressed in the draft text. Akashi said that the draft resolution would not help to win the cooperation of the Bosnian Serbs in the efforts to improve the humanitarian situation – cooperation that he believed essential. Akashi had further understood from UNHCR sources that the majority of the population did not want to stay in the enclave; after all, most of them were Displaced Persons from elsewhere. According to Akashi, an estimated 27,000 people were still in Potocari without enough food for 24 hours. Admittedly, there were sufficient food supplies in Tuzla and Belgrade, but the question was how to get them to Srebrenica without freedom of movement. Moreover, if the Bosnian Serbs cut off the water supply, then the 7,000 litres that Dutchbat could generate on a daily basis would be 'woefully insufficient'. Worse still, Dutchbat did not even have fuel for the water-treatment installation.²⁷³⁷

Annan heeded Akashi's warnings and, in turn, told the Contact Group that a restoration of the Safe Area was beyond the capacity of UNPROFOR. It would only lead to disillusionment. Annan also reported back to Akashi that the text had been preceded by negotiations on whether to choose 'all resources available' or 'all necessary means'. This was largely a question of semantics whereby the latter seemed more bellicose. Though the sponsors believed that the resolution had to imply condemnation of the actions of the Bosnian Serbs, they realized that only the less bellicose formulation of 'all resources available' would be feasible. Akashi even had doubts about this wording, but the sponsors stuck to 'all resources available'. The three sponsors solved their problems with the – in their view – already over-cautious wording by pointing out that the exact wording was not, in itself, all that important. For example, the French representative Merimée said that the choice of words was not intended as a declaration of war or a specific choice between options. It was not down to the Security Council to give a detailed specification of how to realize the objective. The French were only prepared to make troops available under the condition that the military and civil authorities of the UN deemed an operation useful and viable.²⁷³⁸

Similarly, the British representative Hannay did not see the phrase as an instruction to deploy force. He too was of the opinion that it was the Secretary-General's job to consider how he could best achieve the desired result. Biegman responded by proposing that if the draft text was not intended as an instruction to use force, then the wording should be changed and a more modest objective be set. At the end of the day, it was Dutchbat who would first be confronted with the consequences of the resolution. Biegman tried a different approach by suggesting that the Secretary-General be instructed 'to exercise his best efforts'. However, the compilers of the draft text, France, the USA and the UK, closed ranks and refused to countenance any amendments. They would clarify the intentions of the resolution when they brought out their vote.²⁷³⁹

London did, however, believe that the Bosnian Serbs could not be forcibly expelled from Srebrenica; this had to be achieved through negotiations between UNPROFOR and Pale. This is why Hannay did not want the Rapid Reaction Force mentioned in the resolution. Otherwise, London would no longer push for demilitarization of the Safe Area. London did, however, want the resolution to include a reference to the demilitarization agreement of 18 April 1993. A return of UNPROFOR to the enclave was, according to London, possible and even desirable if it was demilitarized. Evacuation of the Displaced Persons was an irrefutable necessity, but the UN had to steer clear of situations in which it would be assisting ethnic cleansing. The British therefore wanted to try to retain the Safe Area by reducing the population: the original population, estimated at 20%, would be allowed to stay while the Displaced Persons were evacuated to Tuzla.²⁷⁴⁰

2737 DCBC, 751. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 12/07/95, No. Z-1141. Sent by fax COS UNPF-HQ to MOD NL, 13/07/95.

2738 ABZ, DDI DAV 999.241. Code Biegman 611, 12/07/95.

2739 ABZ, DPV/ARA, 00797. Code Biegman 612, 12/07/95.

2740 ABZ, DPV 452342. Code Biegman 612, 12/07/95.

Entreaties for humanitarian treatment of Displaced Persons were, incidentally, not only directed at the Bosnian Serbs: the UNHCR had wanted to evacuate all the Displaced Persons but had met with resistance from the Bosnian Government. Minister Hasan Muratovic had announced that this was unacceptable to the Bosnian Government;²⁷⁴¹ it would mean that it had acquiesced in the fall of the enclave. The temporary Bosnian *chargé d'affaires* at the UN, Misic, said that the UN should not miss the chance to vindicate itself. UNPROFOR should abandon its neutrality. He also repeated President Izetbegovic's demands, made on the same day, that the UN and NATO forcibly recapture Srebrenica or publicly announce that they were unprepared to do so.²⁷⁴²

On 12 July the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1004. The most important operative paragraph of the resolution read: 'Requests the Secretary-General to use all resources available to him to restore the status as defined by the Agreement of 18 April 1993 of the Safe Area of Srebrenica in accordance with the mandate of UNPROFOR, and calls on the parties to cooperate to that end'.²⁷⁴³

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Kornblum summarized the situation as follows for Jacobovits, the Dutch Ambassador to the United States: Chirac was pushing for the deployment of the Rapid Reaction Force to retake Srebrenica. The British were against it. The Americans were prepared to support the French position but had no intention of committing materiel support.²⁷⁴⁴

Minister Van Mierlo had decided that the first priority was to evacuate Dutchbat from the enclave, and that a French proposal to retake it must therefore be resisted.²⁷⁴⁵ The Ministerial Council was likewise against military intervention upon French initiative as it could endanger the lives of troops held hostage in Bratunac. On 14 July Van Mierlo communicated to the French Government that the Netherlands could not agree to a French operation, as long as Dutch troops remained in Srebrenica. The French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hervé de Charette, then assured Van Mierlo that no action would be undertaken without prior consultation with the Dutch Government.²⁷⁴⁶

The meaning of the resolution

At the meeting of the Contact Group in London on 12 July Bildt described the UN resolution as 'absurd'.²⁷⁴⁷ He took the view that it was wrong to make rhetorical statements if there was no military back-up.²⁷⁴⁸ Essentially, Bildt took the same line as Akashi: it would only raise unrealizable expectations. In London Bildt dismissed the French statements as unrealistic. He was supported by the British. The Contact Group did agree that force was the only way to turn the situation around. The German and American representatives in the Contact Group, Steiner and Holbrooke, did want to take tough action, but force was an unrealistic option given the repercussions that it could trigger elsewhere in Bosnia.²⁷⁴⁹

According to Bildt, Holbrooke was dubious as to whether UN Resolution 1004 had any meaning at all. No-one was prepared to use arms to re-take Srebrenica; in his view, the enclave should be considered lost. Holbrooke also seemed afraid that the Europeans would press for the activation of the NATO withdrawal plan, which would entail the involvement of US ground forces. This tallies, according to Bildt, with the telephone call between Chirac and Clinton, in which Chirac had said that if the United States was not prepared to offer any support at all in the form of military resources, then the

2741 ABZ, DPV 452342. Code Biegman 612, 12/07/95.

2742 ABZ, DAV 999.241. Code Biegman 611, 12/07/95.

2743 United Nations. S/RES/1004 (1995) 12/07/95.

2744 ABZ, DAV 999.241. Code Jacobovits 445, 12/07/95.

2745 Telephone call with H. Wijnaendts, 25/04/00.

2746 Summary of the meeting of the Ministerial Council of 12-14/07/95, objectivized for the purposes of the NIOD 'srebrenica' investigation.

2747 Bildt, *Peace Journey*, p. 59.

2748 Confidential interview (53).

2749 DCBC, 757. Code Loudon 270, 13/07/95.

whole UN operation would be jeopardized.²⁷⁵⁰ In the meantime, the British Foreign Secretary, Rifkind, was coming under pressure from parliamentarians who were demanding the withdrawal of British troops to avoid being drawn into a Balkan war. UN troops must not become a belligerent party. Rifkind said that, though London had supported Resolution 1004, the restoration of the status of Safe Area must nonetheless be achieved by negotiation.²⁷⁵¹ In a statement on 12 July the White House spokesman also said that, given the shortage of military resources at UNPROFOR, he could not believe that a military operation was on the cards; in his opinion, all the efforts would have to take place in the diplomatic domain.²⁷⁵²

The question is whether the Bosnian Serbs were receptive to a resolution in any shape or form. They had turned their back on the UN some time ago and asserted that the Security Council was their enemy. The statement issued by Akashi after the adoption of UN Resolution 1004, in which he demanded immediate UNHCR access to the enclave, had no effect.²⁷⁵³ The same fate awaited a similar statement by the President of the Security Council.²⁷⁵⁴ The Bosnian Serbs had already said on several occasions that they would not be bound by resolutions. They simply became more hardened in their attitude. Besides, President Chirac's statements had already set the anti-Bosnian-Serb tone before the adoption of UN Resolution 1004.²⁷⁵⁵

In the highest echelons of the UN the adoption of UN Resolution 1004 also led to heated discussions on how fast the Secretary-General should respond to the Security Council's request to use 'all resources available' to realize the restoration of the Safe Area. On the one hand, they feared a knee-jerk response from Boutros-Ghali, who was travelling at the time; on the other, the Security Council needed quick assurance that the Secretary-General was actually coming into action. The subscribers to the latter view included Kofi Annan and Undersecretary-General Marrack Goulding.

On 13 July, during a telephone call from Kigali, Boutros-Ghali consented to a proposal to send Stoltenberg to Bosnia to start negotiations with both parties. Boutros-Ghali insisted on informing the Security Council of this in writing.²⁷⁵⁶ As the second Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Stoltenberg was authorized to negotiate on the restoration of the Safe Area of Srebrenica. If this proved non-negotiable, then he was to push for the continuation of a UN presence. The words 'force' and 'military resources' did not appear in the instructions. In his letter to the Security Council Boutros-Ghali also said that he was 'urgently' exploring the possibilities for the restoration of the Safe Area of Srebrenica 'using all resources available', but that he first wanted to ascertain through diplomatic channels if the objective of UN Resolution 1004 could be achieved.²⁷⁵⁷

According to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, the French position was still – even after the adoption of UN Resolution 1004 – that France was ready to contribute all available resources to any operation that the Security Council might decide upon in order to expel the Bosnian Serbs from Srebrenica.²⁷⁵⁸ At the same time, however, the French Government informed Annan that they would not urge a military operation, even though Chirac's statements suggested otherwise. Boutros-Ghali could therefore be persuaded not to inform the Security Council in writing that military options were being fleshed out.²⁷⁵⁹

²⁷⁵⁰ Bildt, *Peace Journey*, p. 59.

²⁷⁵¹ *Daily Telegraph* and *NRC Handelsblad*, 13/07/95.

²⁷⁵² CRST. White House Briefing, sent by Outgoing Cryptofax Gharekhan to Akashi, 12/07/95, No. 2287.

²⁷⁵³ NIOD, Coll. Clingendael. UNPF-HQ, Statement by Mr. Yasushi Akashi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, 13/07/95.

²⁷⁵⁴ ABZ, DDI-DAV/999.241/DAV/MS/Yugoslavia/NATO/Coordination/ July 1995-August 1996. S/PRST/1995/32, 14/07/95, sent by fax PVVN to M-Secretariat, 14/07/95, No. NYV-4410.

²⁷⁵⁵ CRST. White House Briefing, sent by Outgoing Cryptofax Gharekhan to Akashi, 12/07/95, No. 2287.

²⁷⁵⁶ Confidential interview (63).

²⁷⁵⁷ NIOD, Coll. Ashton, Only Cable Annan to Akashi, 13/07/95, no. 2318; ABZ, PVNY. Letter Boutros Boutros-Ghali to Gerardo Martínez Blanco, President of the Security Council, 13/07/95.

²⁷⁵⁸ *Les Echos*, 13/07/95.

²⁷⁵⁹ Confidential interview (63).

4. Military plans for retaking Srebrenica after the UN resolution

The adoption of UN Resolution 1004 raised a few eyebrows in Zagreb: there was a risk that the troop-contributing nations could line up against one another, now that Chirac had sent out critical signals in the direction of the UN and NATO. Russia and Canada criticized Chirac's position; the UK and the USA criticized the French proposal for recapture; and the Dutch and the French were embroiled in a row after comments by the French Foreign Minister, Hervé de Charette, that Dutchbat had not put up much of a fight and had assisted in ethnic cleansing (see Chapter 7). Chirac was now out on a limb without the resources to go his own way. This was the conclusion at UNPF headquarters in Zagreb.²⁷⁶⁰ Janvier did not take the French ideas of a recapture seriously either, because he knew they were unattainable in military terms.²⁷⁶¹ Hence, very few words were wasted on the subject at the meeting between Akashi's and Janvier's staff. If it did ever crop up, then it was mainly in the form of intimations by the staff members on what they had heard about it. The announcement that Chirac had called for an intervention did not prompt any discussion.²⁷⁶²

The military advisor of the UN Secretary-General, Van Kappen, had already pointed out at the meeting with the troop-contributing nations on 11 July that at least one armoured division would be needed for the restoration of the Safe Area. The Rapid Reaction Force was not yet ready for such missions and would not come under UNPROFOR command until 15 July.²⁷⁶³ Van Kappen interpreted the resolution as 'political bargaining'; it was unrealizable and had only political meaning. It was simply political wordplay which could not be taken seriously from a military perspective. Initially, Van Kappen did not even want to review the options. It was only when Kofi Annan asked him to do so, because the UN ultimately owed the French a proper answer, that he applied himself to the task, much against his better judgement.

With a view to Chirac's remarks, Boutros-Ghali had instructed Annan to ascertain the military requirements for restoring the Safe Area by force. Assuming that Akashi was already overburdened, Annan assigned this task to Van Kappen.²⁷⁶⁴ Van Kappen considered the plan politically as well as militarily unrealizable, given that UNPROFOR's mandate would have to be amended accordingly. This could lead to war with the Bosnian Serbs.²⁷⁶⁵ Van Kappen had already publicly questioned the aims of any such military operation, also because it would not be in the interests of the Displaced Persons.²⁷⁶⁶

Annan's request made Van Kappen feel compelled to present a plan to the staff in Zagreb. Zagreb understood very little of this, and was even more unable to comprehend that New York was taking this sort of thing seriously. It led to a lot of friction in which terms such as 'adventurism and amateurism' were bandied about. Eventually, New York received a message from Deputy Force Commander Ashton in which he said that he refused to look seriously at these kinds of 'idiotic propositions'. Van Kappen then made clear that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations thought more or less the same, but that their position would be stronger, in the event of rejection, if they could say that a recapture plan had been presented to Zagreb, and that Zagreb was of exactly the same opinion. Some attention was consequently paid to the plan. This then triggered new friction because the staff in Zagreb had other things on their mind at that moment; Janvier's response was the same. What mattered to New York, however, were arguments to reject the plan; the issue was politically-sensitive because it concerned a proposal from the highest political level in France. Additionally, they

²⁷⁶⁰ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury, SRSG's briefing 14 and 15/07/95.

²⁷⁶¹ Interview Tony Banbury, 11/05/00.

²⁷⁶² NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury, SRSG's briefing 12/07/95.

²⁷⁶³ ABZ, DPV/ARA/02110. Code Biegman 606, 11/07/95.

²⁷⁶⁴ Confidential information (47).

²⁷⁶⁵ Interview F.H. van Kappen 21/06/00.

²⁷⁶⁶ *Le Monde*, 14/07/95, *Het Parool*, 13/07/95.

had to steal a march on the French ambassador to the UN; he must not be able to say that the French were willing but could rally no support.²⁷⁶⁷

On 13 July Van Kappen sent his 'Preliminary Military Analysis of the Retaking of Srebrenica' to Zagreb.²⁷⁶⁸ He also informed the Dutch Chief of Defence Staff of his analysis. Political implications and the effects on the future of the mission were left out of consideration. Nevertheless, Van Kappen wanted clarity about the political aim of an operation with regard to Srebrenica: 'The securing of a piece of ground in the middle of the Balkans has no military and precious little political value'. Van Kappen pointed out that it was unclear if the aim of the operation was the return to Srebrenica of the Displaced Persons from Central Bosnia – assuming this was desirable – or simply the restoration of the credibility of the international community.

At all events, Van Kappen felt that the UN should realize that a recapture would involve three separate military plans: first, the seizure of a land corridor leading to the enclave, and the terrain of the former Safe Area; second, an operation to guarantee supplies for an indefinite period; and third, an air campaign to eliminate the VRS air defences, also on the other side of the Drina in Serbia. This kind of air campaign required NATO approval. What all of this boiled down to was that a full division would be required to retake Srebrenica. This could then be reduced to a brigade and a mechanized division to keep a land corridor open: a total of 35,000 troops, which could be cut down to 15,000. According to Van Kappen, the Rapid Reaction Force was not suitable for a mission such as opening a land corridor. In view of the risks, NATO units were the only option, which would mean that NATO would want to take over Command and Control in Bosnia. There were only a few months left before winter set in; this period would be taken up by political and financial discussions. And by that time, he added, it might also be necessary to include Zepa and Gorazde in the plans.²⁷⁶⁹

Deputy Force Commander Ashton presented Van Kappen's analysis to the Rapid Reaction Force Planning Team in Zagreb. The team endorsed Van Kappen's findings; a recapture would require an operation that was far beyond the capabilities of UNPROFOR and would lead to war with the VRS. Only NATO had the required capability, and this meant that UNPROFOR would have to hand over the operational command to NATO. The team saw a recapture of Srebrenica as a potential nightmare and a 'high-risk low-return option'. A firm defence of Gorazde seemed to make more sense and to be capable of delivering more results.²⁷⁷⁰

Ashton informed Kofi Annan that he supported Van Kappen's military analysis, though he did not believe that Srebrenica could be defended with a single brigade. The securing of a sixty-kilometre-long corridor to Tuzla might also require more troops than Van Kappen had estimated. In addition, such a large force would not have the advantage of strategic surprise. Ashton added that the position of the Security Council had always been that UNPROFOR should protect the civilians and not the terrain. A departure from this principle would call for more troops and new Rules of Engagement. The elimination of the VRS air-defence system could lead to all-out war. It would unite the Serbs and harden the Bosnian Government in its war aims. However, the cardinal question was what the political aim of such an operation would be; after 13 July there were no more civilians in the enclave and those now staying in Tuzla had no wish to return. The majority of the population of Srebrenica already consisted of Displaced Persons and they would be better protected in Central Bosnia.

The British ambassador in Paris learned from the French Ministry of Defence that the French operational staff were considering two options: dispatching a helicopter unit with troops from, amongst others, the Rapid Reaction Force, and equipped with an anti-tank capacity, or sending the entire (or

²⁷⁶⁷ Interview F.H. van Kappen 21/06/00.

²⁷⁶⁸ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File Srebrenica 3300-SRE Vol. I, 1 Jul - 16 Nov 95. Fax Maj Gen Van Kappen to Lt Gen B. Janvier, 13/07/95. Deputy Force Commander Ashton sent the fax on to Sarajevo (Fax DFC/34, 151052B Jul 95).

²⁷⁶⁹ DCBC, 761. Outgoing Facsimile Van Kappen to CDS Netherlands, 13/07/95.

²⁷⁷⁰ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Memo 'Military Analysis on Retaking Srebrenica', no date.

parts of the) Rapid Reaction Force across land, but this was considered infeasible by the French General Staff.

When the American, British and French Chiefs of Defence Staff met on 16 July at the initiative of the French, the French Government had already recognized that plans for retaking Srebrenica were unrealistic. The British did not give the plans serious consideration because they were beset by too many practical complications. The operation was too risky and was out of step with the peacekeeping mandate. The UK had neither artillery nor tanks available for it.²⁷⁷¹

The British Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, was somewhat denigrating of the French ideas: 'President Chirac has so far given us a lot of fine words but there are no proposals. President Chirac could today be commanding his own French soldiers to march on Srebrenica and Zepa to rescue them. He will not be doing so, for the very good reason that French soldiers, like other UNPROFOR soldiers, do not have tanks, heavy artillery, or the means to get to Zepa and Srebrenica.'²⁷⁷² At the morning briefing of 12 July in Zagreb the Public Information Officer had already criticized Chirac's knowledge of geography. Janvier also continued to oppose the French plans.²⁷⁷³

Hence, Chirac's ideas received a cool reception from political and military quarters. General Shalikhvili's comment to the NIOD on a recapture of Srebrenica was: 'How are you going to do this? The French honour was soiled, what the hell?'²⁷⁷⁴ General Smith's response to the French plans was: 'With what?' In his opinion, the troop-contributing nations would never have consented.²⁷⁷⁵

Senior French military figures confirmed that Chirac's principle aim was to display decisiveness, but that he was not really intending to take action.²⁷⁷⁶ There was no clearly defined French proposition or plan. All that was suggested was the dispatch of three battalions to Srebrenica by air. It was an unrealistic plan with no firm political foundation. The deployment of three battalions with large helicopters would have required US cooperation and taken several days, if not a week, of preparations.

In that case it would mean the deployment of a brigade, 'militairement une opération lourde'. The French Permanent Representative, Blot, offered this at the NATO Council meeting of 12 July, but senior French Defence officials said that it was unrealizable. Here too, it became evident that the plan was a political ruse; the French Defence Staff had not been consulted.²⁷⁷⁷ On the same day the French Permanent Representative at the UN assured his Security Council counterparts that Paris would abide by the judgement of the UN headquarters in Zagreb as to whether the plan was militarily feasible.²⁷⁷⁸

A French Defence official said that there was no real plan to retake Srebrenica with a unit of 600-900 French special troops. There were only emergency plans for Srebrenica within the framework of NATO Extraction Plan 40104, but on 11 and 12 July Paris had not considered implementing this plan.²⁷⁷⁹

Sarajevo also doubted whether a recapture would serve any purpose. The planners in Sarajevo knew nothing of the details of the plans formulated by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).²⁷⁸⁰ UNPROFOR in Sarajevo was wondering whether it was the intention to return the Displaced Persons to the same wretched predicament as before. Chief of Staff Nicolai rated the chances at zero that the Displaced Persons would want this after everything that had happened. Afterwards, a corridor would need to be kept open. Sarajevo felt that there was some kind of hidden

²⁷⁷¹ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

²⁷⁷² Edited Transcript of Interview with the Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, on the 'Today Programme', 15/07/95.

²⁷⁷³ Interview Barry Ashton, 30/05/00.

²⁷⁷⁴ Interview John Shalikhvilli, 07/06/00.

²⁷⁷⁵ Interview Rupert Smith, 12/01/00.

²⁷⁷⁶ Confidential interview (4).

²⁷⁷⁷ Confidential interview (1). This concerned an informal meeting of the NATO Council where the representatives spoke off the record.

²⁷⁷⁸ Interview Lord Owen 27/06/01.

²⁷⁷⁹ Interview Michel Guesdon, 07/06/00. Guesdon worked at BHC in Sarajevo in 1994 and then, until 1999, at the Balkans Department of the Ministère de Défense in Paris.

²⁷⁸⁰ Interview Rick Hatton, 16/11/99.

agenda behind this plan.²⁷⁸¹ Admiral Leighton-Smith, Commander in Chief of the Allied NATO Forces in Southern Europe, said that a plan for the recapture of Srebrenica was never discussed with him.²⁷⁸² Similarly, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations attached little value to the idea, because UNPROFOR did not have the military capacity to implement it. New York also saw it as a purely political gesture.²⁷⁸³ At a press conference on 13 July Minister Voorhoeve said that a retake of Srebrenica would be senseless from a military perspective. Commodore Hilderink, Vice-Chief of Operations at the Defence Staff, added that the enclave was a military farce that could only be recaptured at a high price and would then be hard to defend.²⁷⁸⁴

On 16 July Janvier informed Annan that he agreed with Van Kappen's assessment that a recapture of Srebrenica would call for a 'major operation'. Janvier said that this was beyond the capacity of UNPROFOR, all the more so given that any such operation would have to take place within sight of a hostile population and would in all probability lead to open war with the Bosnian Serbs and possibly even Yugoslavia, because NATO would have to attack the integrated air defence system.²⁷⁸⁵ This was the last word that was spoken on the French ideas to retake Srebrenica. The Bosnian population and the international community were one illusion poorer thanks to all the political rhetoric in the international arena.

5. Conclusion

In effect, the ideas on recapturing Srebrenica were no more than French rhetoric, designed to portray France as resolute and go-ahead. Neither the other states nor the UN felt much for the idea of plunging into an uncertain political and military adventure. The Bosnian Serbs were equally unimpressed by such plans. They labelled them as senseless; in their eyes Srebrenica now belonged to Republika Srpska.²⁷⁸⁶

Moreover, the implementation of UN Resolution 1004 the UN would not go any farther than negotiations to restore the status of Safe Area. The military experts at UN headquarters in New York, and in Zagreb and Sarajevo, also gave little credence to the plans for a recapture: they were divorced from the military reality, and the UN commanders questioned whether there would be any point in sending the people back to a situation which had proven more or less untenable.

Nonetheless, the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille on 14 July prompted a new wave of rhetoric from Paris. President Chirac expressed his frustration that the member states were not prepared to support the French call for an intervention in Srebrenica. Contacts with the USA and the UK had been to no avail and the French stood alone – according to Chirac – but they had no mandate or means to recapture Srebrenica themselves. Chirac called upon the great democracies to reconsider a recapture and to enforce respect for human rights and international law. He could not imagine that the UN was in Bosnia only to observe, and if so, then it would be better if UNPROFOR were withdrawn.

The French Minister of Defence, Charles Millon, announced that Paris would give its member states 48 hours to decide whether or not they were prepared to undertake military action in order to halt the VRS attacks on the enclaves. He stressed that if no answer came from the main powers then 'we will have to draw the consequences' but did not say what these would be exactly.²⁷⁸⁷ This marked the end of the French rhetoric. According to Prime-Minister Kok, the French utterances gave rise to the suggestion that the Dutch had somewhat dismissed Srebrenica while France was now rolling up its

²⁷⁸¹ Interview C.H. Nicolai, 11/06/99.

²⁷⁸² Interview Leighton-Smith, 06/06/00.

²⁷⁸³ Interview Manfred Eisele, 14/10/99.

²⁷⁸⁴ ABZ, DDI-DAV/999.241/DAV/MS/Yugoslavia/NATO/Coordination/ July 1995-August 1996. Memorandum DVL/BZ, 14/07/95, No. 619/95. The text was drawn up by the European Secretariat.

²⁷⁸⁵ DCBC, 2751. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 16/07/95, No. Z-1177.

²⁷⁸⁶ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87299, File 3061/3, Jul-Nov 95. Fax The Office of the Commander HQ UNPROFOR to HQ UNPF Zagreb, attn: SRSG, FC, DFC, COS, 132316B Jul 95.

²⁷⁸⁷ *Associated Press*, 14/07/95; 08:40 ET.

sleeves, even though they knew it would not come to action. Kok saw these two elements as more logically linked than they appeared: the French threats of a recapture made the Netherlands, as the other party, come across as just a little weaker.²⁷⁸⁸

UN Resolution 1004 illustrated that, in this case, political intentions did not chime with military possibilities. There were insufficient military resources to lend weight to the political initiatives of the French. Apart from Chirac, no-one seemed prepared to seriously consider a plan for recapture, for political reasons amongst others. Hence, Chirac also created the impression that he was not really intending to resort to action and that his initiative was meant primarily as a show of political decisiveness.

All the same, the French stuck to their plan in public and were prepared to make French troops available for its implementation. The actual number of troops was left in the dark, but it would certainly not have been enough to tip the balance needed for such an operation. A purely French operation was not only politically undesirable but impossible as well. The support of US transport helicopters was, at the very least, necessary to get the troops into Srebrenica, but the Americans kept their distance.

In short, the restoration of the Safe Area of Srebrenica would only be achieved at the negotiating table, and not exacted by UNPROFOR by military means.

The Netherlands played its own role in shaping UN Resolution 1004, but dropped out when the text implied the use of force to retake the enclave. This would not have been in the interests of Dutchbat, which was still located in Srebrenica. The battalion was still entirely at the mercy of the Bosnian Serbs to allow it to depart.

²⁷⁸⁸ Interview W. Kok, 30/05/00.

Chapter 9

The departure of Dutchbat from Srebrenica

1. Plans for the departure of Dutchbat

After the enclave fell it took another ten days before Dutchbat could leave Srebrenica. The activities of the battalion during these days are addressed later in Part IV. This chapter will deal only with discussions conducted in UNPROFOR, NATO and The Hague on the actual departure. It will trace the thoughts about this departure, how they evolved under the pressure of circumstances, and the influence that was, or was not, exerted by the Netherlands.

On 10 July, the day before the actual fall of the enclave, a meeting took place between, amongst others, Prime Minister Kok, Minister Van Mierlo, Minister Voorhoeve and Chief of Defence Staff, Van den Breemen. The subject under discussion was the situation in Srebrenica and the prospects for the Dutch presence there. It was said at this meeting that, though the Bosnian Serbs had said they would not impede the departure of Dutchbat, this was not a path that could be trodden, as it would constitute serious problems for the remaining civilians. In any case, it was highly unlikely that the Bosnian Muslims would allow Dutchbat to just up and leave.²⁷⁸⁹ The meeting broke up without arriving at a concrete decision, but it did expose the differences in the positions of Defence and Foreign Affairs: whereas the former was concerned mainly about its own personnel, the latter was worried about the effect a Dutchbat withdrawal would have on the international position of the Netherlands.²⁷⁹⁰ (See Chapter 7, paragraph 2.)

Oddly enough, on the following day, 11 July, the visions of Ministers Voorhoeve and Van Mierlo appeared to intersect. Foreign Affairs was now urging that Dutchbat leave Srebrenica as soon as possible. This can be construed from a message sent by Van Mierlo to the British Government. At 18.45 hours on 11 July, Van Mierlo informed the British Government that Srebrenica had fallen, that Dutchbat and the ABiH had been unable to halt the Bosnian-Serb offensive, and that Dutchbat was heading for the north of the enclave accompanied by seven thousand Displaced Persons. Van Mierlo was worried that these Displaced Persons would hamper a Dutchbat withdrawal, if the Bosnian Serbs refused to allow them to leave the enclave.²⁷⁹¹ Earlier in the day, Voorhoeve's priorities actually appeared to shift from withdrawing the battalion to providing humanitarian aid for the Displaced Persons (see below).

Consultations in Zagreb on the departure of Dutchbat

The developments in Srebrenica prompted deep concern at UN headquarters in Zagreb. The VRS attack on a Safe Area signalled a major change in the Bosnian Serb strategy. The need for military preparations to deal with possible new developments around the three eastern enclaves was discussed: the authorization to order air strikes would again have to be delegated to Zagreb. Boutros-Ghali was warned that UNPROFOR might have to withdraw from all the eastern Safe Areas.

However, on 11 July, most of Zagreb's attention was directed at the situation in Srebrenica. On the day of the fall the standpoint of Force Commander Janvier more or less echoed that of the Dutch Government. Immediately after the fall, at 17.45 hours, Janvier analysed the situation in Srebrenica with Deputy Force Commander Ashton and Chief-of-Staff Kolsteren and assessed the options. Janvier wanted to ascertain whether plans could be drawn up to get Dutchbat out of Srebrenica because, under

²⁷⁸⁹ ABZ, DDI-DAV, 999.241/DAV/MS/Yugoslavia/NATO/Coordination. Memorandum DAV to Archive, 'Nederlandse presentie in Srebrenica/Torentjesoverleg 10 juli', 12/07/95 No. DAV/MS-51/95, Top Secret.

²⁷⁹⁰ Interview K.J.R. Klompenhouwer, 15/09/01.

²⁷⁹¹ Confidential information (29).

the present circumstances, they were virtually hostages in the hands of the Bosnian Serbs. Dutchbat therefore had to get out of the enclave as soon as possible. This did not, according to Janvier, include the equipment nor *'bien sur'* the displaced civilians.

Janvier maintained that negotiations with the Bosnian Serbs were the only way of achieving anything in Srebrenica. As the UN personnel had priority in this, Janvier instructed Gobilliard to broker an immediate ceasefire between the parties on humanitarian grounds.²⁷⁹² At 18.30 hours Janvier instructed General Gobilliard, as acting Commander of UNPROFOR, to approach the Bosnian-Serb regime in Pale on the matter.

Immediately afterwards, Janvier and Akashi spoke to each other. At that moment the headquarters in Zagreb were also under fire. Janvier said that no conclusions could yet be drawn from the military situation in Srebrenica. In the meantime, it was known that the ABiH had disappeared from the enclave, and that some ABiH soldiers were heading for Zepa. Akashi said that Voorhoeve had asked him how an evacuation of Dutchbat should be carried out, if the contingency were to arise. At this moment, Voorhoeve had already distanced himself from the idea that Dutchbat should be evacuated at the earliest opportunity (see below). However, evacuation plans for Dutchbat still needed to be drawn up in Zagreb so that they would be ready, if needed. Akashi was thinking, first of all, of the deployment of the Rapid Reaction Force, or an *ad hoc* NATO coalition of different countries. But, to Janvier, force was 'out of the question'. He argued that it would be impossible to open a corridor between Tuzla and Srebrenica. The problem was, however, that the Rapid Reaction Force could not be deployed because it was not yet operational. Hence there was also no possibility of an air lift, which would entail the deployment of helicopters within the framework of the Rapid Reaction Force to get Dutchbat out of the enclave.

The only option would be an 'emergency extraction' by helicopter, and this would require talks with NATO Admiral Smith on the NATO Quick Response Options (see below). Janvier's proposal that Dutchbat leave behind its equipment was not acceptable to Akashi; Dutchbat should at least take along the weapons. Janvier too would have preferred to see Dutchbat leave with weapons and all, but feared that Mladic would demand these as war reparations.

Akashi saw no other alternative than to negotiate with the Bosnian Serbs on a Dutchbat withdrawal. One option was to depart to Serbia, but Akashi found that the first necessary step in the negotiations was to secure a concentration of Dutchbat; the crews of the OPs which were still manned had to go to Potocari. The UNHCR would then have to negotiate the departure of the population. The third step was that Zagreb would ask New York for guidelines. Akashi also said that NATO should speed up the timetable for pulling out UNPROFOR, and that the Security Council should make a statement on its further obligations to the Safe Area of Srebrenica. The dominant view in Zagreb was that such an announcement was necessary.

It also became clear that not only negotiations with the Bosnian Serbs were necessary, but also with the Bosnian Muslims. Janvier and Akashi ascertained that these were needed in order to get any kind of help into Srebrenica. Gobilliard would approach the Bosnian Government in Sarajevo on this matter.²⁷⁹³

On the evening of 11 July, the Bosnian Serbs announced through Vice-President Nikola Koljevic that the Dutchbat soldiers in Bratunac were safe. He did add that their further safety depended on a guarantee that there would be no more air support. Koljevic said that the Close Air Support on that day had 'complicated' matters. He suggested that Janvier and Mladic work out an arrangement as soon as possible for the release of the Dutchbat soldiers.

²⁷⁹² UNNY, DPKD, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1136. According to Ashton, Janvier suggested that Nicolai should contact Tolimir; Akashi reported, however, that the contact actually took place between Janvier and Gobilliard.

²⁷⁹³ Interview Major-General Barry Ashton (retd), 30/05/00; NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury, SRSG's meeting 11/07/95.

There were plenty of initiatives for contact at high level: the acting Civil Affairs Coordinator left Sarajevo for the UNHCR office in Pale to maintain contact with the representatives of Republika Srpska. The UNHCR quarter-masters left by helicopter for Tuzla.²⁷⁹⁴ But none of the contacts that were established were in the enclave itself, because Mladic refused admission to UN officials. He was apparently dictating who could enter the enclave. From Pale, Karadzic's spokesman, Jovan Zametica announced that all UN personnel had to leave the enclave.²⁷⁹⁵

Can NATO assist in the Dutchbat withdrawal?

The analysis in Zagreb was that withdrawal was more urgent for Dutchbat than for any of the units in the eastern enclaves. General Janvier contacted NATO Admiral Leighton-Smith on activating the Quick Response Options (the quickly deployable NATO reserves) specifically to assist with the evacuation of Dutchbat. This offered a means of pre-empting the larger, more general withdrawal plan for UNPROFOR, Oplan 40104, which was still awaiting approval. NATO had looked for openings in this plan whereby it could also deploy smaller units at short notice and with fewer military and political risks. These became the Quick Response Options. Two alternatives were formulated: the dispatch of a battalion within 48 hours to secure a limited objective, such as taking out an observation post; or the deployment of a unit the size of a brigade within seven days to, for instance, rescue a company that was hemmed in.²⁷⁹⁶ Janvier had already asked Smith on 11 July to raise the alertness of the respective NATO units.²⁷⁹⁷

Though UNPROFOR had a 'Hasty Withdrawal Plan', it could not be executed without NATO help.²⁷⁹⁸ As it happens, neither this 'Hasty Withdrawal Plan' nor the withdrawal plan of Sector North East contained much in the way of concrete arrangements. The plan of Sector North East went no farther than to say that Dutchbat should secure a route from the enclave and make for Simin Han (in the Muslim-Croat Federation), where a Dutchbat company was already stationed. The plan did not say how this was to be achieved.²⁷⁹⁹

NATO Admiral Smith was prepared for the eventuality of pulling out UN troops from the Safe Areas. Deputy Force Commander Ashton spoke with him in Naples on 9 July about activating the Quick Response Options in order to withdraw Dutchbat from Srebrenica with the aid of Special Forces.²⁸⁰⁰ Smith then drafted a plan for the withdrawal. It would have to be executed by an American Marine Expeditionary Unit, stationed in the Adriatic Sea (see Chapter 1), and reinforced with fourteen heavy US transport helicopters from elsewhere plus four Cobra, six Gazelle and six Lynx helicopters from the UK and France, all of them armed, which were already in Bosnia in connection with the Rapid Reaction Force. The response time of the units was cut to sixty hours.

Moreover, measures were drawn up, which pre-empted the NATO withdrawal plan (Oplan 40104), to have parts of the NATO headquarters of the Rapid Reaction Corps in Zagreb operational within four days and to send communication equipment on ahead. Measures for speeding up troop availability were also considered, including an Activation Order for the Dutch-British marine unit, the UK/NL Amphibious Force. Admiral Smith also asked his superior, SACEUR General Joulwan, for guidelines on how to treat the Displaced Persons and Dutchbat. He also asked whether he should

²⁷⁹⁴ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87717, File 7-8-1, Srebrenica 11/07-31/07/95. Fax UNHCR Pale to UNHCR Zagreb, 11/07/95, Note John Ryan to Akashi, Zagreb, Moussali, HC Zagreb, Corwin, BHC, 11/07/95; UNNY, DPKD, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1136; interview Barry Ashton, 30/05/00.

²⁷⁹⁵ Interview David Last, 05/07/00.

²⁷⁹⁶ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 28/06/95, No. MSC-2118.

²⁷⁹⁷ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury, SRSG's meeting 11/07/95; interview Barry Ashton, 30/05/00.

²⁷⁹⁸ DCBC, 814. Fax MILAD RUN to DV and DCBC, 161610 LT Apr 96, with OPLAN 31/94, 04/12/94.

²⁷⁹⁹ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 247, File 1/6, Rapid Reaction Force (RRFOS). HQ Sector NE Operation Plan 007 - Withdrawal Plan, 20/02/95, No. HQ NE 3010.3.

²⁸⁰⁰ Interview Barry Ashton, 30/05/00.

prepare himself for a similar situation in the other eastern enclaves of Zepa and Gorazde.²⁸⁰¹ Smith assured Colonel J. Beks, the Dutch liaison officer for AFSOUTH (the southern NATO command in Naples) that he could count on full support in relation to Dutchbat.²⁸⁰²

In Naples thoughts were focusing on an emergency evacuation of Dutchbat, both via the route to Serbia and by air. An air evacuation required sixty hours of preparation, a land evacuation required twenty. NATO Admiral Smith's preference was to make this a NATO-led operation, assigned specifically to the Commander of Strike Force South in the Mediterranean.²⁸⁰³

The last option would be executed by flying a night reconnaissance mission and a Landing Zone Team to Srebrenica. An air operation would not be easy as two-thirds of the helicopter capacity had no night-vision capacity.²⁸⁰⁴ Later, Admiral Smith said that immediately after the fall there would have been scarcely any possibilities of getting the battalion out of Srebrenica. The NATO withdrawal plan had not yet been formalized. This was not the main obstacle in his opinion; the real problem was that the operation could not be carried out without risks of casualties. In addition, there was a deep fear that the people still in Potocari would resort to civil disobedience.²⁸⁰⁵

The fact that US assistance might be needed to get Dutchbat out of Srebrenica was causing the Clinton administration great concern. The prospect of the deployment of US ground troops was suddenly very close. The question in Washington was whether the Netherlands would call on NATO to help evacuate the Dutch troops. On 11 July a White House spokesman refused to answer the question whether a Dutch request for assistance fell within the framework of the NATO withdrawal plan for UNPROFOR. According to the author David Rohde, the US Ambassador in The Hague, Dornbush, was instructed to convince the policymakers in The Hague that Dutchbat should stay in Potocari and should not be allowed to leave before the Displaced Persons.²⁸⁰⁶ Voorhoeve and Dornbush did speak to each other after the fall of Srebrenica, but there are no indications that Dornbush communicated any such message. This may be explained by the fact that, at that moment, the UN and Voorhoeve had both reached the conclusion that Dutchbat had to stay put.²⁸⁰⁷

Voorhoeve had already approached NATO Secretary-General Claes around noon on 11 July. He informed Claes of his contact with Akashi and told him that he had talked about the possibility of evacuating Dutchbat in the event of a Bosnian-Serb attack. Voorhoeve asked Claes to consider in the meantime a possible UN request to NATO for an evacuation of Dutchbat. Voorhoeve stressed that this was not an actual request for an evacuation, but merely a warning.²⁸⁰⁸

Claes passed on Voorhoeve's message during the lunch of the Permanent Representatives at NATO and opened it to discussion.²⁸⁰⁹ Acting Permanent Representative Feith had, however, received no instructions as yet from The Hague on the matter. Feith said that he partook in the discussion to the best of his ability and only later conferred with Ministers Van Mierlo and Voorhoeve. At the meeting Feith had pressed for the deployment of the Rapid Reaction Force or NATO forces to evacuate Dutchbat from the enclave. He believed that this was in line with Dutch policy. However, he received no support within NATO.²⁸¹⁰ The French Permanent Representative at NATO, Blot, wondered whether, under the circumstances, it would not be better to nip any UN request to NATO in the bud.

²⁸⁰¹ DCBC, 747, Fax NLLO AFSOUTH Naples to OCHKKlu and DCBC, 12/07/95 20.10 LT.

²⁸⁰² DCBC, 750. Fax NLLO AFSOUTH Naples to OCHKKlu and DCBC, 13/07/95.

²⁸⁰³ DCBC, 762. (RNIAP) Deny Flight INTSUM/009/Jul/95, 131330Z Jul 95.

²⁸⁰⁴ Confidential interview (54).

²⁸⁰⁵ Interview Leighton-Smith, 06/06/00.

²⁸⁰⁶ Rohde, *Endgame*, p. 177.

²⁸⁰⁷ ABZ, DAV 999.241. Fax DGPZ to Minister Van Mierlo, 12/07/95, No. 356.4540. Voorhoeve and Dornbush did, however, discuss the idea aired by the US negotiator Richard Holbrooke i.e. to maintain the eastern enclaves in return for a suspension of sanctions. According to FA, Voorhoeve had – rightly – rejected this because it would only create hostages and paralyze the Rapid Reaction Force.

²⁸⁰⁸ Diary Voorhoeve, p. 103.

²⁸⁰⁹ SMG 1004/48. Code Feith Navo 1036, 11/07/95.

²⁸¹⁰ Interview P.C. Feith, 24/08/00.

Claes had already made it clear that any such request could be a source of embarrassment to NATO as the withdrawal plan would need to be activated and it had not yet been officially approved.²⁸¹¹

An emergency evacuation of Dutchbat was also discussed in the North Atlantic Council on 12 and 13 July. SACEUR General Joulwan explained to the Council that, after receiving political approval, the first unit of the Quick Response Option could be on the spot within sixty hours. But the main strength could only be operational after a period of between ten and fourteen days. However, before proceeding with action, the North Atlantic Council had to decide on the Rules of Engagement for any such operation and on action against the integrated air-defence system. Joulwan estimated that these preliminaries would considerably reduce the speed of response, because an attack against the Bosnian-Serb air-defence system, in particular, would not be any easy political decision.²⁸¹²

On 13 July the Permanent Representatives at NATO brainstormed on the feasibility of an emergency evacuation. According to Feith, the planning would have to focus not only on the evacuation of the units, but the civilians as well; there were, incidentally, no civilians left to evacuate when he spoke. At this meeting the question was also raised as to how the safety of Dutchbat could be guaranteed before the US Marines could be on the spot. The obvious reaction of the Bosnian Serbs would be to take hostages. Another option was the deployment of the Rapid Reaction Force. Paris would agree to this when it was linked to the certainty of US participation. This led to the idea of transferring the Rapid Reaction Force from the UN to NATO, as part of a NATO-led operation. How the UN would respond to this was not addressed. The possibility of using the UK/NL Amphibious Force arose when the representatives were studying NATO's Quick Response Options. This British-Dutch marine unit could be one of the first on the spot, but it would still take ten days. If the unit had to be flown to the enclave, NATO would again be faced with the problem of neutralizing the Bosnian-Serb Air Defence.²⁸¹³

In the North Atlantic Council of 14 July, Feith also stressed that Dutchbat was still under UN command, and that a decision on withdrawal was the duty of the UN. One condition for the departure of Dutchbat was that the wounded in Potocari would be taken along and that the VRS would provide guarantees for the prisoners in the football stadium in Bratunac. (Their fate is discussed further in Part IV.)²⁸¹⁴

2. No withdrawal, stay put

No further work needed to be done on a withdrawal plan in Brussels, because The Hague realized fairly soon that the humanitarian situation had priority and that the continued presence of Dutchbat was therefore desirable.²⁸¹⁵ Nicolai had also emphasized this from Sarajevo, when Voorhoeve had mooted the plan to bring Dutchbat to safety in a telephone call with him on 11 July. Nicolai advised Voorhoeve to instruct Dutchbat to give maximum assistance to the Displaced Persons. Voorhoeve consented, and told Nicolai to inform Karremans of his decision. This took place immediately.²⁸¹⁶

Voorhoeve later returned to this telephone call with Nicolai in the White Paper of Defence accompanying the debriefing report to Parliament. He feared that this telephone conversation could lead to a wrong conclusion, namely, that The Hague was primarily interested in getting Dutchbat to a place of safety. During the discussion with Nicolai, which took place at 16.30 hours, there was, according to Voorhoeve, no longer an emergency situation *with regard to Dutchbat*. The enclave had fallen and the battalion could concentrate on humanitarian tasks before leaving.²⁸¹⁷

²⁸¹¹ SMG 1004/48. Code Feith Navo 1036, 11/07/95.

²⁸¹² DCBC, 729. Code Feith Navo 1039, 12/07/95, Confi.

²⁸¹³ DCBC, 778. Code Feith Navo 1049, 13/07/95.

²⁸¹⁴ DCBC, 1565. Code Feith 1058, 14/07/95.

²⁸¹⁵ Interview P.C. Feith, 24/08/00.

²⁸¹⁶ Debriefing report, § 5.14.

²⁸¹⁷ TK, 1995-1996, 22 181, No. 128 (30/10/95).

On the afternoon of 11 July Voorhoeve appeared to have already dropped the idea of getting Dutchbat out of the enclave as soon as possible. This can also be deduced from a discussion with Sacirbey, the Bosnian Minister of Foreign Affairs, which took place some time in the same afternoon. Voorhoeve had assured Sacirbey that the Dutch troops would stay in Srebrenica until all the civilians had been evacuated. Sacirbey then demanded that the entire population, including the soldiers, be protected and evacuated. Voorhoeve agreed.²⁸¹⁸

Meanwhile, in Sarajevo, the French Sector Commander General Gobilliard, who was Deputy Commander in the absence of General Smith, received instructions between 17.30 and 19.30 hours on 11 July to keep the air power in reserve in case the VRS resorted to action against Dutchbat. Gobilliard also ordered the remaining OPs to 'regroup' as far as possible in Potocari and to think about a plan for getting Dutchbat out of Srebrenica. Apart from this, Gobilliard did not play an important role. He was only present at UNPROFOR headquarters in the evenings, accompanied by a Canadian officer who acted as interpreter. Gobilliard spoke no English at all, a serious handicap in such a hectic situation, except in the contact with Janvier. So, no-one exactly looked forward to his arrival at headquarters.²⁸¹⁹

At around ten o'clock on the evening of 11 July, Akashi reported to New York that he intended to instruct Dutchbat to stay in the enclave until negotiations had been conducted on the departure of the population. Until then, a 'substantial presence' was needed in the enclave, and Dutchbat had to remain armed. Akashi wanted to offset this against what he thought was still the wish of the Dutch Government, namely, to pull out the Dutch troops as soon as possible. Only when a satisfactory agreement had been reached on the departure of the Displaced Persons, would Akashi be prepared to negotiate on a withdrawal of Dutchbat.²⁸²⁰ By now, the UN staff in Zagreb had also decided that a continued UN presence was important for providing humanitarian aid. The conclusion was that as soon as this necessity no longer existed, there would no longer be a case for a UN presence and Dutchbat would leave the enclave.²⁸²¹ But there was also a hidden agenda: Akashi had his own reasons for keeping Dutchbat in Srebrenica for the time being. He was afraid that a departure might induce the troop-contributing nations to want to withdraw their own units from Zepa and Gorazde.²⁸²²

On the morning of 12 July Voorhoeve received the Permanent Parliamentary Committee for Defence in the Defence Crisis Management Centre (the bunker) and told it what had happened. Voorhoeve also said that they could thank Providence on bended knee that dozens of the Dutch contingent had not been killed. He saw the disrespect for the blue helmets as a clear sign of a change in the offence strategy of the Bosnian Serbs. The VRS had threatened to kill the UN forces and to fire on the enclave with mortars if Karremans did not cooperate, but Voorhoeve understood that no shots had ever been actually fired at them.²⁸²³

On the same day a joint meeting took place with the Permanent Parliamentary Committees for Foreign and Affairs and Defence. At that moment there was still no real government consensus on a Dutchbat pull-out: Van Mierlo said that the Dutch aim to accord priority to getting the troops to safety had met with understanding and support from his foreign colleagues.²⁸²⁴ Nonetheless, Voorhoeve intimated at this meeting that the Dutch could only leave if the Displaced Persons could leave as well. He had already stated at a press conference on the previous day that the mission of the Dutch troops in Potocari was first and foremost to save lives.

²⁸¹⁸ *Nezavisni magazin DANI*, Special edition Srebrenica Dossier, 09/98. Esad Hecimovic, 'Chronology of the events of 11 July 1995'. The source of this information appears to be the Minister for UN Affairs, Hasan Muratovic.

²⁸¹⁹ Interview J.A.C. de Ruiter, 29/06/00.

²⁸²⁰ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1139.

²⁸²¹ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87299, File 3066, Jul-Dec 95. 'Continued UN Presence in Srebrenica/Other Safe Areas', undated [11/07/95].

²⁸²² UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 11/07/95, No. Z-1139.

²⁸²³ Interview J.J.C Voorhoeve, 15/04/97.

²⁸²⁴ ABZ, DDI-DAV/DPV/PZ/VN/VR/Peace operations/1995, part 05. Memo 'overleg Tweede Kamer 12/07/95 Srebrenica'.

Parliament thought differently. Both VVD and D66 thought it unrealistic to link the withdrawal of Dutchbat to the departure of the Displaced Persons. VVD spokesman Blaauw said that 20,000 Displaced Persons could not be linked with four hundred Dutchbat soldiers. Blaauw had told the press prior to the meeting that the UNHCR was responsible for the protection of the Displaced Persons. Blaauw did not repeat this at the meeting and went no farther than to say that the battalion was in an impossible situation as far as helping the Displaced Persons was concerned. D66 spokesman Hoekema stated that the first priority should be a free and dignified departure of the Dutch troops. He thought it unlikely that Dutchbat would be able to get guarantees for the safety of the Displaced Persons. Conversely, spokespersons for the other parties did want to link the departure of Dutchbat with such guarantees. Van Traa (PvdA) wanted negotiations on a departure of Dutchbat, which would include the Displaced Persons, though he did realize that little value could be attached to any assurances by the Bosnian Serbs. The opposition, represented by De Hoop Scheffer (CDA), also wanted this link, but without burdening the negotiations with the political preferences of the Dutch. De Hoop Scheffer said that Voorhoeve was handling it well, and that in times of crisis it was imperative for the government to get maximum backing from Parliament.²⁸²⁵ Parliament as a whole did support the aim to get Dutchbat out of Bosnia without delay.²⁸²⁶

On 12 July, it was clear to the Ministerial Council that the negotiations between Mladic and Karremans on the previous evening (see Part IV) had been fruitless. Karremans had indicated that political and psychological support was needed from above. The Security Council had met informally and expressed its intention to bring the Bosnian Serbs to a negotiating position. The Russian Federation urged the Bosnian Serbs to that end. Through these channels, the conditions would have to be formulated for a safe departure of Dutchbat and the Displaced Persons. The Dutch would not leave Potocari until the Displaced Persons were allowed to leave as well. Any other scenario was unthinkable to the Dutch Government.²⁸²⁷

Prime Minister Kok announced in public that a solution must be found not only for the blue helmets but also for the population.²⁸²⁸ Kok declined to elaborate when asked whether the Dutch troops should be rescued by force.²⁸²⁹ In any case, the threat to Dutchbat was no longer so urgent: Voorhoeve had informed the British Government that he could see no role for the Rapid Reaction Force. Van Mierlo also told the British that the risk to the Dutch troops was no longer imminent.²⁸³⁰

As Van Mierlo told Parliament, it was doubtful whether there was understanding and support for getting Dutchbat to safety. According to the German political advisor Steiner, the Contact Group had agreed that the Dutch priorities, namely the safety of Dutchbat and the Displaced Persons, were totally justified. At the same time, the Contact Group hoped that a certain Dutch presence in Srebrenica could be maintained.²⁸³¹ Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Kornblum also said that the Americans would like to see some continued military presence in the eastern enclaves, including Srebrenica; they hoped to realize this through diplomatic and military pressure. Should a rescue operation still be necessary for Dutchbat, then the Netherlands could count on the United States, though circumstances would determine whether this was actually forthcoming.²⁸³² Moreover, the United States only wanted this to take place under the auspices of NATO.²⁸³³ The British also declared

²⁸²⁵ 'Meningverschil over beschermen bevolking' [Difference of opinion about the protection of the population], *NRC Handelsblad*, 12/07/95.

²⁸²⁶ NAA 222914. *NOS Journaal*, 12/07/95, 20.00 hrs.

²⁸²⁷ Summary of the meeting of the Ministerial Council of 12/07/95 objectivized for the purposes of the NIOD investigation.

²⁸²⁸ 'Een ramp van grote omvang heeft zich voltrokken' [A disaster on a massive scale has taken place], *NRC Handelsblad*, 12/07/95.

²⁸²⁹ 'Tragedie in Srebrenica' [Tragedy in Srebrenica], *Algemeen Dagblad*, 12/07/95.

²⁸³⁰ Confidential Information (29).

²⁸³¹ ABZ, DPV/ARA/01812. Code Smit 217, 18/07/95.

²⁸³² ABZ, DPV/ARA/02110. Code Jacobovits 445, 12/07/95.

²⁸³³ Conversation with H.G.B. van den Breemen, 29/09/99.

their willingness to help in Srebrenica, if necessary.²⁸³⁴ The Canadian Ambassador to the UN, however, refused to make any Canadian helicopters available for the evacuation of Dutchbat.²⁸³⁵ Be that as it may, such declarations of support should be interpreted more as political courtesies than as military options that could be executed at short notice. No-one specified the actual nature of this assistance.

The visit of Van den Breemen and Van Baal to Zagreb on 11 July

On the evening of 11 July Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen and the Deputy Commander of the Royal Netherlands Army Van Baal visited Janvier in Zagreb, where despair was running high. At that moment all the attention converged on the humanitarian consequences of the fall of Srebrenica.²⁸³⁶

Van den Breemen conveyed the wish of the Dutch Government to withdraw Dutchbat as soon as possible, and specifically within several days. In the meantime the priority in The Hague had shifted towards the protection of the Displaced Persons. Under the pressure of circumstances Janvier's vision had also changed: he now believed that Dutchbat should stay put in order to provide humanitarian assistance. Janvier also told Van den Breemen that the use of force to remove Dutchbat was impossible. 'He understood perfectly my point of view,' said Janvier.²⁸³⁷ Van den Breemen and Van Baal did indeed become convinced that the Displaced Persons could not be abandoned to fate. In the evening Van Baal subsequently reported to the Defence Crisis Management Centre that leaving the Displaced Persons behind without protection was not an option. According to him, a clandestine departure from Srebrenica was out of the question. He said that Janvier was also of the opinion that Dutchbat could not be removed from the enclave by force.²⁸³⁸

Janvier repeated his standpoint that Dutchbat should stay in Srebrenica for the time being to General Smith, who had now returned to his post: 'Withdrawal of the Battalion will be carried out only after the issue of the refugees is solved.'²⁸³⁹ UNHCR representative A.W. Bijleveld had already pointed out to Akashi and Janvier on the day of the fall that problems could arise around the withdrawal of the troops and that it was therefore better for Dutchbat to stay in the enclave where it could keep an eye on the places where the Displaced Persons might be rounded up on transport convoys and where the VRS might try to segregate the men from the women.²⁸⁴⁰

The day after the consultations with Janvier, Van den Breemen, who had now returned to The Hague, briefed General Nicolai in Sarajevo on the meeting. Van den Breemen said that he was worried about the plight of the Displaced Persons, but even more about the fate of the civilian personnel in the service of Dutchbat, because the Netherlands was responsible for them. Both generals also discussed the conditions that needed to be in place for the evacuation of Dutchbat itself. Van den Breemen took the view that the staff in Sarajevo must try somehow to become a partner in the talks with Mladic and take over the negotiations from Karremans. Everyone in Sarajevo was convinced that, after the fall, Karremans was not in a position to pressurize Mladic. Nothing came of their attempts and Karremans had to go it alone. Only a few days later did Smith actually negotiate the withdrawal of Dutchbat with Mladic.

²⁸³⁴ Diary Voorhoeve, p. 103.

²⁸³⁵ Conversation with H.G.B. van den Breemen, 29/09/99.

²⁸³⁶ Interview A.P.P.M. van Baal, 01/11/01.

²⁸³⁷ NIOD Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury, SRSG's briefing 12/07/95. The notes in Banbury's diary were almost identical to those in the diary of David Last, (interview 05/09/00).

²⁸³⁸ DCBC, 712. Handwritten memo to SCOCIS from Gen. Van Baal 22.49lt. 11/07/95.

²⁸³⁹ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Letter Janvier to Comd UNPROFOR, SRSG, DFC, COS, 'Guidance to Commander UNPROFOR', 14/07/95.

²⁸⁴⁰ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury. SRSG's meeting 11/07/95.

Should Dutchbat take along their equipment?

Nicolai was given a free hand by the Netherlands to negotiate agreements ensuring that Dutchbat returned home safe and sound. Van den Breemen and Nicolai did discuss possible conditions that should be linked to this. Nicolai intimated that UNPROFOR was concerned about UN equipment ending up in VRS hands and then being misused. At all costs, the VRS must be prevented from impounding even more equipment; furthermore it had to return all equipment it had already stolen from Dutchbat. In practical terms the problem was that if the VRS started driving around with blue berets and helmets in UN vehicles, then it would no longer be clear who the enemy was. UNPROFOR had already run into problems on several occasions because of equipment taken by the VRS, and this could create dangerous situations. UNPROFOR was therefore adamant that Dutchbat take along their equipment. The Hague found this less important and Van den Breemen did not make an issue of it either. After Van den Breemen heard from Nicolai that the UN would do so, he left the matter in his hands.²⁸⁴¹

UNPROFOR's concerns that UN equipment would fall into VRS hands are also reflected in a letter sent by General Janvier to General Mladic on 7 July, in which he demanded the return of UN equipment. By now, the VRS had a whole arsenal of UN materiel: 19 French, 6 Ukrainian, 4 British and 8 Canadian combat vehicles and a smaller number of trucks. In the second half of July the VRS had used these vehicles five times in combat. At that time Janvier also stressed that this was creating a great deal of confusion, which was jeopardizing the lives of his men.²⁸⁴² But the Bosnian Serbs refused to return the stolen materiel until the ABiH stopped using weapons and vehicles which they too had stolen from the UN.²⁸⁴³

General Smith also impressed on Janvier that it was important for Dutchbat to leave with their weapons and equipment. If not, then the stage was set for the future. Moreover, if Dutchbat remained hostage in Srebrenica, UNPROFOR's hands would be tied and the only option would be 'to lie back'. Smith further emphasized that Karremans must not be left to solve this problem on his own as: 'he is talking from the jail'. If the Bosnian Serbs refused to do business with UN headquarters in Sarajevo and Zagreb, then EU negotiator Bildt and the relevant governments (the Netherlands and also the UK because of the British JCOs) would have to be asked to apply pressure. Meanwhile, Karremans had received instructions from Sarajevo to hold his ground and not to negotiate any VRS demands, except the relinquishment of the weapons and equipment. Smith felt that this was negotiable.²⁸⁴⁴

Voorhoeve accorded less importance to the equipment; he saw this as placing materiel above people, and this was not open to discussion. His attention was becoming more focused on the people than the weapons. According to Vice-Chief of Operations Hilderink he said, 'People first, materiel second'. This prompted some discussion in the Defence Crisis Management Centre as to whether a distinction should not be made between weaponry and other types of materiel. The heavier equipment, especially the APCs, should be taken along or else disabled, to prevent it from falling into the wrong hands. Voorhoeve went along with this. In view of the circumstances, the Ministry of Defence considered the rest of the equipment unimportant.

However, Foreign Affairs argued that all the materiel should be taken along.²⁸⁴⁵ It deemed it desirable that Dutchbat leave with the weapons and that Karremans should endeavour to bring this about. Chief of Defence Staff, Van den Breemen, requested support from the Military Advisor to the UN Secretary General, General Van Kappen, and Permanent Representative Biegan to realize this. It

²⁸⁴¹ Interview C.H. Nicolai, 09/07/99.

²⁸⁴² NIOD, Coll. De Ruiters. Letter Janvier to Mladic, 07/07/95, sent by fax at the FC's Office to UNPROFOR Comd for Gen Mladic, 08/07/95, Conf.; NIOD, Coll. De Ruiters. 'Update on major equipments held by BSA at 4 Jul 95'.

²⁸⁴³ NIOD, Coll. De Ruiters. Interoffice Memorandum MA to SC, DSC, DCOS, SOO, SLO, SMIO, PIO, 13/07/95, UN Conf.

²⁸⁴⁴ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87299, File 3061/3, Jul-Nov 95. Fax The Office of the Commander HQ UNPROFOR to HQ UNPF Zagreb, attn SRS, FC, DFC, COS, 132316B Jul 95.

²⁸⁴⁵ Interview G.C.J. Hilderink, 11/08/00.

should be noted, for the sake of clarity, that Foreign Affairs did add that, in any case, a decision on a withdrawal from Srebrenica lay with General Smith.²⁸⁴⁶

This standpoint was also expressed by the Dutch representative at NATO. Dutchbat was 'under the strict instructions' of Smith. It was up to him to decide when Dutchbat could pull out of Srebrenica and to say where it had to go. However, this would only be possible after guarantees had been obtained for the safety of the wounded who would still be in Potocari after the population had been evacuated and for the men in the football stadium in Bratunac, whose plight was still largely unknown. A further demand by the Dutch NATO representative was that Dutchbat take its weapons and equipment when it left.²⁸⁴⁷

UN headquarters in New York also maintained that Dutchbat must take along the weapons. New York was trying to get Milosevic and Pale to consent to this through the Russian UN ambassador and its own channels to Stoltenberg. These messages came from Van Kappen, the Military Advisor to the Secretary-General. The Defence Crisis Management Centre passed them on to Nicolai and Vos, Director-General of Political Affairs at the Foreign Ministry.²⁸⁴⁸

3. The hard truth: Mladic dictates whether and how Dutchbat withdraws

In the meantime, it was the Bosnian Serbs who were dictating whether Dutchbat would withdraw and whether it would take along the materiel. The political authorities in the Republika Srpska were making arrangements for the departure of Dutchbat. The task of sorting out the Dutchbat evacuation was assigned to Miroslav Deronjic, who was appointed Civil Commissioner for Srebrenica by Karadzic on 11 July. Deronjic stressed, in line with Karadzic's instructions, that this departure was a civilian and not a military matter. But Deronjic was not representing Mladic, who ultimately decided what happened and paid little heed to the political considerations of Pale.

Deronjic says that Karremans did not exactly help the Dutchbat withdrawal. He thought that Karremans was afraid of offending Mladic and agreed to everything he said, even if it was against the interests of Dutchbat. Deronjic was under the impression that Karremans was definitely scared of Mladic.

The question is whether Deronjic had his own reasons for saying this. Mladic took a critical view of everything that Deronjic did and, in any case, the military authorities had the last word after a state of war had been declared in the region on 14 July. According to Deronjic, Mladic was constantly meddling in the question of the Dutchbat equipment; he was probably hoping to lay his hands on some, though he did not force Dutchbat to surrender it. Deronjic said that eventually Karadzic had to intervene to ensure that Dutchbat could take the equipment out of the enclave.

Karremans had also given Deronjic a list of the vehicles and equipment which the VRS had stolen from Dutchbat and asked him to negotiate their return. However, Deronjic was of the opinion that it was impossible to exact compliance from the VRS at that moment. He suggested to Karremans that, as a compromise, both should sign the list and submit it to the political leaders of Republika Srpska. This would then increase the chance that the equipment would be returned in the course of time. This was the last contact between Deronjic and Karremans.²⁸⁴⁹

Meanwhile, UNPROFOR representatives were exploring all sorts of avenues in order to negotiate with the VRS on the Dutchbat withdrawal. Nicolai was also assigned a role in this process. In Sarajevo on 12 July Nicolai had suggested to VRS General Gvero that they meet to discuss the

²⁸⁴⁶ ABZ, DDI-DAV/999.241/DAV/MS/Yugoslavia/NATO/Coordination/July 1995-August 1996. Memorandum DAV to DGPA, 14/07/95, No. DAV-95/818.

²⁸⁴⁷ DCBC, 1565. Code Feith NATO 1058, 14/07/95

²⁸⁴⁸ DCBC, 714. Draft Diary Van den Breemen, 13/07/95; NIOD, Coll. Van den Breemen Henk van [den] Breemen, 'Hollands Dagboek' [Dutch Diary], NRC *Handelsblad*, 22/07/95 with personal additions.

²⁸⁴⁹ Interview Miroslav Deronjic, 03/11/99.

conditions of a Dutchbat withdrawal. Nicolai had added that the battalion could only leave when the Displaced Persons were no longer in need of support.

Gvero was not amenable to this idea and would only consent to a meeting between Karremans and Mladic. If Nicolai felt that a meeting between him and Gvero was especially important, then he should submit a written request for one. Gvero added that a withdrawal of Dutchbat would not run into any problems. It could take place in safety to a location 'in the interest of their Mission'.²⁸⁵⁰

The inability to get negotiators into the enclave formed a huge problem in the attempts to get Dutchbat out. The Dutch Government also exerted indirect pressure to achieve access for negotiators. In the morning of 12 July Voorhoeve informed the British Government that General Smith had been asked to support Karremans in the negotiations with Mladic. Voorhoeve hoped that this might lead to a departure of Dutchbat and the Displaced Persons. He did, however, anticipate ethical dilemmas if the plight of the Displaced Persons were to deteriorate further.²⁸⁵¹ All efforts were in vain: the Bosnian Serbs refused to budge and Karremans had to go it alone.

In the morning of 13 July it was patently obvious that Mladic would not receive a UN delegation from Zagreb, and would only do business with Karremans. UNPROFOR resigned itself to this situation, as otherwise the trip to Srebrenica would have had to be made without the permission of the Bosnian Serbs with all the attendant risks. Nicolai conveyed this message to Van den Breemen. They agreed that Nicolai would give Karremans all possible support.

In addition, The Hague wanted to know who exactly would issue the order for the Dutchbat withdrawal. The absence of tight orchestration by the UN was also playing a role in the line of thought of Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen. His concerns were further reinforced by the fact that no UN officials from Zagreb or Sarajevo were being admitted to the talks with Mladic. Van den Breemen felt that Smith, and not Karremans, should have negotiated with Mladic. In his analysis operational matters were a task for the UN, but logistical matters, including arrangements to withdraw a unit from an operational zone, could fall under national issues, which meant that the Netherlands could have a say.

Van den Breemen discussed this with Colonel De Jonge in Zagreb. After internal consultations in the Defence Crisis Management Centre between Van den Breemen, Deputy Chief of Operations Hilderink and the Director of General Policy Issues De Winter the standpoint was still that Dutchbat should provide the Displaced Persons with humanitarian assistance for as long as possible. However, any VRS threats to the safety of Dutchbat personnel would tip the balance. At Nicolai's request, Van den Breemen rang John Almstrom, Akashi's Senior Political Officer, and urged that the problem of the Dutchbat withdrawal – preferably along with the weaponry – be solved at the highest level. Van den Breemen realized, however, that Mladic would probably impound them. The safety of Dutchbat, therefore, continued to be the top priority of the senior military personnel in the Netherlands.²⁸⁵²

Almstrom played a role in the 'srebrenica Crisis Action Team' set up in Zagreb on 12 July. With the support of the International Red Cross this team tried to get the American Ken Biser, the Civil Affairs Officer of Sector North East in Tuzla, to Srebrenica, but the Bosnian Serbs refused to allow it.

As it happened, the UN Chief Political Officer in Sarajevo, Philip Corwin, was actually granted permission by the Bosnian Serbs to go to Srebrenica, but for other reasons. Probably, Almstrom did not want Corwin to go because of the problems that had arisen with the Bosnian Government on the reception of Displaced Persons in Tuzla.²⁸⁵³

²⁸⁵⁰ SMG, 1004. Telephone conversation with General Nicolai – General Gvero, 12/07/95, 14.45 hours.

²⁸⁵¹ Confidential information (29).

²⁸⁵² DCBC, 714. Draft Diary Van den Breemen, 13/07/95; NIOD, Coll. Van den Breemen. Henk van [den] Breemen, 'Hollands Dagboek' [Dutch Diary], *NRC Handelsblad*, 22/07/95 with personal additions.

²⁸⁵³ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury, SRSG's briefing 14/07/95.

4. The Hague, Zagreb and New York deliberate on the departure of Dutchbat

After the Bosnian Serbs had deported the last of the Displaced Persons from Srebrenica on 13 July and no more Bosnian Muslims were left in the enclave, the problem remained that several thousand men had been taken to Bratunac. This also had an influence on the Dutchbat withdrawal, because The Hague did not think it tactful to allow Dutchbat to leave while the men in nearby Bratunac were left to an unknown fate. From New York Biegman pointed out that 'at my suggestion' Kofi Annan, on 13 July, had actively addressed the problem of the deportees and taken up contact with President Sommaruga of the International Red Cross and Ogata, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Shortly afterwards, the Defence Staff phoned Biegman out of bed to pass on the concern in the Defence Crisis Management Centre about the plight of the men who had been transported to Bratunac. The Defence Staff suggested sending UNMOs to the location.²⁸⁵⁴ Biegman too believed that it would be 'painful' if Dutchbat were to withdraw before an international presence had been arranged in Bratunac. Biegman stressed that Annan had already asked the Russians to put pressure on Pale. According to him, Annan had also asked UNPROFOR to strenuously push for a presence with the Bosnian Serbs, but he did not want to tie Karremans' hands by imposing conditions for the Dutchbat withdrawal, as this might inspire 'obstinacy' on the part of the Bosnian Serbs.²⁸⁵⁵

At Foreign Affairs the Director of the Department of Atlantic Security, Majoor, took the view that Dutchbat should not stay too long in the enclave but not too short either. Dutchbat would have left too soon if it later transpired that something had happened to the men in the football stadium at Bratunac. According to Majoor, Mladic had 'agreed' to the return of these men to Potocari. Biegman and Majoor felt that Dutchbat could not make a dignified exit before this group had left for Tuzla or Kladanj or was placed under the supervision of UN organizations or the International Red Cross.

Majoor was also asking himself whether the original local population – not the eighty percent of Displaced Persons who were located in Srebrenica – would actually want to leave Potocari. There was still no information in this respect. If Mladic wanted to leave this group in Srebrenica, then this was another reason for a longer Dutchbat presence. On the other hand, if Mladic were to forcibly clear the area, 'Dutchbat would have to sound the alarm and remain neutral'. Majoor believed that, if this happened, then diplomatic pressure would be stepped up.²⁸⁵⁶

Meantime, these thoughts had been overtaken by circumstances: there were no more Bosnian Muslims in Potocari, nor were there members of the original population or Displaced Persons. All the diplomatic pressure had been fruitless; Mladic had certainly resorted to forcible clearance. Dutchbat later faced heavy criticism for remaining neutral in this operation (see Part IV), but on 14 July the outside world was still unaware that there were no more Muslim men in Bratunac.

On 14 July the UNPF headquarters decided in Zagreb that the moment had not yet come for a Dutchbat withdrawal.²⁸⁵⁷ In the interim, the staff did weigh up the pros and cons of a longer stay by Dutchbat in Potocari. The possibility of helping the remaining Displaced Persons in the region had to be weighed against the operational advantages of a withdrawal. A withdrawal would mean that the battalion could no longer be taken hostage by the Bosnian Serbs and hence that UN operations elsewhere in Bosnia would no longer be at risk of obstruction. Meanwhile, the UNMOs and UN Civil Police would have to stay behind; Zagreb did not know that the UN Civil Police had left the enclave shortly before it fell.²⁸⁵⁸

²⁸⁵⁴ DCBC, 714. Draft Diary Van den Breemen, 14/07/95.

²⁸⁵⁵ DCBC, 807. Code Biegman 619, 13/07/95.

²⁸⁵⁶ ABZ, DDI-DAV/999.241/DAV/MS/Yugoslavia/NATO/Coordination/July 1995-August 1996. Memorandum DAV to DGPZ, 14/07/95, No. DAV-95/818.

²⁸⁵⁷ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 88040, File 4-2, SRSG Meeting, May-Oct 95. Senior Staff Meeting, 14/07/95.

²⁸⁵⁸ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87299, File 3061/3, Jul - Nov 95. Interoffice Memorandum Chief G3 Policy/Plans to FC, 14/07/95.

The proposal that Dutchbat be allowed to leave under these circumstances did not meet with strong resistance in Zagreb. Given the large number of missing persons at that moment, and the possible presence of several thousand men in Bratunac, Almstrom judged in Zagreb that the UNHCR, the International Red Cross and UNMOs should, at any rate, be able to stay in Srebrenica. They should provide the Displaced Persons with aid. Their presence was also needed because of UN Resolution 1004 (see previous chapter), which called for the restoration of the Safe Area. Otherwise, with the departure of Dutchbat, the UN would have no foot at all in the enclave.²⁸⁵⁹

Leaving the UNMOs in Srebrenica was also an option that Prime Minister Kok discussed with the British Prime Minister John Major. Kok wanted Major to lend his support. Major agreed wholeheartedly with the idea; this way they could keep an eye on how the Bosnian Serbs treated the people they had rounded up. Major made no comment on a Dutchbat withdrawal or the possible restoration of the Safe Area.²⁸⁶⁰ London supported the proposal and Kofi Annan would welcome it as well.²⁸⁶¹

New York began to take tighter control of the arrangements for the departure of Dutchbat. Kofi Annan asked Moussali, the Head of Civil Affairs in Zagreb, if Milosevic could play a part in securing a Dutchbat withdrawal with equipment and all. The answer came from Akashi: as long as Srebrenica could not be accessed for humanitarian purposes, the Dutch withdrawal should not be accelerated. Akashi believed that it would be a bad business to allow Dutchbat to leave under the prevailing circumstances when the plight of the civilians was still so precarious. He had consulted Janvier and General Smith, and it had been decided that Dutchbat would stay put for the time being. Eventually Dutchbat would be able to make a dignified departure along with their weaponry and equipment as far as this was possible. Boutros-Ghali duly appointed Stoltenberg as negotiator. Janvier wanted Stoltenberg's mission to Belgrade to give priority to the withdrawal of Dutchbat.²⁸⁶² Before starting his mission Stoltenberg met Akashi and again stressed that one aim of the negotiations had to be an 'honourable withdrawal of the Dutch Contingent, with their arms and vehicles'.²⁸⁶³

On 15 July, the date of Stoltenberg's first negotiations in Belgrade, the Dutch Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence were again united in their approach: Dutchbat had to stay. Van Mierlo conveyed to Van den Breemen his deep concern that the Netherlands would be accused of leaving before there was certainty about fate of the men in Bratunac. Van den Breemen said that Voorhoeve shared this concern and he informed Nicolai of the anxiety of both Ministers. Van den Breemen did, however, tell Van Mierlo that, in his opinion, Karremans was not in a position to do much about the plight of the men in Bratunac. He saw high-level diplomatic consultations as the only hope. Van Mierlo decided to call EU negotiator Bildt, who was also at the negotiating table in Belgrade. Bildt told him that the Bosnian Serbs saw the men as prisoners of war and that they apparently wanted to exchange them. This meant that the International Red Cross would have to be granted access to Bratunac. Van den Breemen also informed Nicolai of the ministers' concern about the matter.²⁸⁶⁴

5. Is a withdrawal in sight after all? The birth of the Smith-Mladic Agreement

The negotiations between Stoltenberg, Bildt and Milosevic, in themselves, brought a breakthrough. Smith and Mladic also participated in the negotiations. Smith had been called to these negotiations at the initiative of the French General De Lapresle, who was attached to the Bildt mission. At Bildt's

²⁸⁵⁹ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File Sreb 3300-SRE Vol. I, 15 Jul – 16 Nov 95. Note Deputy Force Commander's Office to DFC, 14/07/95.

²⁸⁶⁰ AZ 95moo5637. Ambassador Sir David Miers to W.J.P. Geerts, Advisor to Min van AZ 19/07/95.

²⁸⁶¹ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

²⁸⁶² NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury; SRSB briefing 14/07/95. CRS. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 13/07/95, No. 2318.

²⁸⁶³ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Cryptofax Stoltenberg to the Secretary-General, 15/07/95.

²⁸⁶⁴ DCBC, 714. Draft Diary Van den Breemen, 15/07/95.

request, Milosevic summoned Mladic to Belgrade, but this was not allowed to be made public. The desire for Smith's presence stemmed partly from the wish to get him and Mladic back on speaking terms.²⁸⁶⁵ Dutchbat could leave with their equipment, via Bratunac, and Karremans would present the VRS and UNPROFOR with a list of his transport vehicles. Generals Mladic and Smith would have to supervise the Dutchbat withdrawal. At this meeting the Dutchbat withdrawal was planned for 21 July, or shortly afterwards.²⁸⁶⁶ The real breakthrough came when agreement was reached in Belgrade that there were no more impediments to a departure of the Dutchbat soldiers held in Bratunac, along with their personal possessions and weapons. This could, in theory, take place on the same day (15 July) but it was actually planned for 21 July.

After this agreement had been reached, Smith's Military Assistant, Baxter, drew up a draft agreement along the same lines for Smith and Mladic, who were also present in Belgrade. This stated that Smith and Mladic would confirm the agreements on 19 July and fill in the last details. On 19 July the Dutch departure would be formalized by Smith and Mladic in Sarajevo. It was agreed there that the actual withdrawal would take place on 21 July, which Belgrade had stipulated as the earliest possible date.

The negotiations in Belgrade taught Smith that Milosevic could influence Mladic, but that he could not force him into concessions which Mladic was not prepared to make. Mladic was only too willing to argue and disagree with Milosevic. Neither Pale nor the Bosnian Serbs politicians were involved in bringing about the meeting in Belgrade.²⁸⁶⁷

Late in the evening of 15 July The Hague heard the outcome of the Belgrade consultations from Nicolai. The good news was that Dutchbat could leave with their vehicles, equipment and weapons; the bad news was that it would take a week before the departure could actually start. The Hague understood that a decision had been taken at the meeting that the wounded could be evacuated and that the International Red Cross would be allowed access to the prisoners. Nicolai stressed that it was imperative to keep the agreement between Smith and Mladic secret as the arrangements for the withdrawal were still to be sorted out.²⁸⁶⁸

While the meetings were underway in Belgrade, the UN representatives still had no inkling of the true situation around Srebrenica. It was not yet known that mass murders had taken place; the column of men that was on its way from Srebrenica to Tuzla had not yet arrived in the territory of the Muslim-Croat Federation. Baxter had, however, noticed that Mladic seemed extremely uncomfortable, saying that he had lost control and mistakes had been made. Mladic then virtually agreed to allow the NGOs and the International Red Cross access to Srebrenica.²⁸⁶⁹

Apparently, Dutchbat was not immediately informed of the outcome of the negotiations in Belgrade. On 16 July the battalion was still in the dark about their departure. The reason for the delay was that the agreement between Smith and Mladic would not be formalized until 19 July. It was clear that the battalion could not pull out before the wounded who were still waiting for transport in Potocari and Bratunac had left.²⁸⁷⁰ Karremans had, however, heard from local military and civil representatives of Republika Srpska that Smith and Mladic would be meeting again. He also knew that discussions on missing Dutchbat equipment had been held with the Foreign Ministry of Republika Srpska, but that Karadzic was not expected to answer before 21 or 22 July.²⁸⁷¹

²⁸⁶⁵ NIOD, Coll. Banbury. Diary Banbury. SRSG's briefing 14/07/95; interview Jim Baxter, 16/10/00.

²⁸⁶⁶ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 17/07/95, No. Z-1175.

²⁸⁶⁷ SMG 1006. Agreement between General Smith and General Mladic, 19/07/95.

²⁸⁶⁸ DCBC, 714. Draft Diary Van den Breemen, 15/07/95.

²⁸⁶⁹ Interview J. Baxter, 16/10/00.

²⁸⁷⁰ SMG 1003. Capsat Eus and Leo to Capt. Voerman, 16/07/95.

²⁸⁷¹ NIOD, Coll. Karremans. C-1(NL)UN Infbat to COS BHC Sarajevo, RNLA Crisis Staff, The Hague, 18/07/95, No. TK95120. See also ICTY (IT-98-33) OTP Ex. 371/a, Command of the 1st Bratunac Light Infantry Brigade Intelligence Unit (Capt. Momir Nikolic) to General Staff VRS, Intelligence Sector. Command of the Drina Corps, Intelligence Department, 18/07/95, No. 08-34/95.

6. The arrangements for the withdrawal and the route

Early in the evening of 13 July Karremans had received guidelines from Sarajevo for the negotiations with Mladic on a Dutchbat withdrawal. All the Displaced Persons, apart from the wounded, had already left the enclave. The guidelines were drawn up by Colonel De Ruiter. There were two versions: one in Dutch and one in English. Both faxes had the same number, and the same date and time. The existence of the Dutch fax prompted journalist Frank Westerman to infer later that this was a piece of private communication between The Hague and Sarajevo. This will be further addressed at the end of this chapter.

The orders from Sarajevo were that Dutchbat was to leave the enclave with all its combat vehicles, weapons and communication equipment. The blue helmets, berets and shrapnel-proof vests had priority, but the other UN equipment and infrastructure and the personal equipment could be relinquished. Dutchbat had to take along the local UN personnel, and take particular care for the British military personnel. Karremans also heard that Nicolai had been appointed authorized negotiator on behalf of both UNPROFOR and the Dutch Government. If the negotiations with Mladic reached a deadlock, then Karremans was to inform Nicolai immediately.²⁸⁷² The instructions also included suggestions for the withdrawal route.

As soon as he received the UNPROFOR guidelines Karremans informed Mladic in writing of his instructions. He also passed on the routes stipulated by Sarajevo. Karremans stretched the UNPROFOR instructions slightly by saying that he had to take along the personnel of *Médecins Sans Frontières* in addition to the local UN staff and all the wheeled vehicles, computers, personal possessions and clothing.²⁸⁷³ Mladic answered the following day that he would study Karremans' letter and arrange things with him *in situ*. He asked Karremans to be patient.²⁸⁷⁴

Sarajevo favoured the route via Kladanj to Busovaca, where the Dutch-Belgian transport battalion was stationed. The route via Zvornik to Zagreb was the second choice because of the limited reception facilities in Zagreb.²⁸⁷⁵ Karremans could not agree with the first priority because, in his opinion, the route via Kladanj was not the more logical of the two options. In his book he does not mince words on this choice: 'Who on earth thought that one up? (...) How can they even consider it? Don't they keep up to date with the messages and maps at the higher level? Kladanj is closed, isn't it?' Karremans saw only one realistic option: to head for Zagreb via Zvornik, or else for Belgrade.²⁸⁷⁶

Karremans had a point. The route via Kladanj was not in use, and it was impossible for road traffic to pass the confrontation line there. Convoys of Displaced Persons and a convoy of wounded had left for Kladanj in vain. In any case, fighting was still going on along this route. The Bosnian Serbs also refused to allow the International Red Cross to use this route for the transportation of the wounded from Potocari on 17 July. In his book Karremans also refers to a discussion he had with Couzy on 13 July in which he asked for further guidelines – which he never received. In a conversation with Colonel Dedden, Chief of the Army Crisis Staff, Karremans learned the following day that attention was being paid to a departure via Zagreb as well as via Busovaca; a departure via Belgrade was not feasible. The Dutch-Belgian transport battalion was ready for the reception; the idea was to stay there for two days.²⁸⁷⁷

According to Brantz in Tuzla, the arrangements for the Dutchbat withdrawal were also causing considerable irritation and frustration between The Hague, Potocari, Tuzla and the Dutch officers in

²⁸⁷² SMG 1004. Outgoing fax HQ UNPROFOR Sarajevo from COS to Dutchbat, 131800B Jul 1995, Fax No. 266/95. See *ibidem* for the English version.

²⁸⁷³ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Letter CO-1(NL)UN Infbn to General Mladic 13/07/95, No. TK95115.

²⁸⁷⁴ SMG, 1004. Letter Lt.-Gen. Ratko Mladic to Lt.-Col. Karremans, 14/07/95, No. 06/17-460. Karremans sent the letter on to Nicolai, Brantz and Janvier.

²⁸⁷⁵ SMG 1004. Outgoing fax HQ UNPROFOR Sarajevo from COS to Dutchbat, 131800B Jul 1995, Fax No. 266/95. See *ibidem* for the English version. NIOD Coll. Brantz.

²⁸⁷⁶ Karremans, *Srebrenica, Who Cares?*, p. 224.

²⁸⁷⁷ Karremans, *Srebrenica, Who Cares?*, p. 226-7. With addition by Karremans 25/11/00.

the UN chain of command. Potocari and Tuzla were not asked for their opinion: The Hague and Sarajevo had jointly decided that the route via Kladanj to Busovaca was preferable to Zvornik-Belgrade-Zagreb. Brantz said that the contingent Commander of the Dutch troops in Bosnia, Colonel Verschraegen, had advised The Hague along the same lines. This way they could make use of the reception and care facilities in Busovaca.

Like Karremans, Brantz was surprised by the choice of route, given previous experience and the recurrent skirmishes. Additionally, it meant crossing more territory of Republika Srpska than a route that went via Zvornik. Brantz also took up contact with the Defence Crisis Management Centre and the Army Crisis Staff: 'Had they lost their minds, I asked, barely able to conceal my irritation.' Dutchbat had to leave the territory of Republika Srpska as soon as possible and this meant, according to Brantz, that it should take the route via Zvornik. What is more, a service support area needed to be set up as close as possible to Potocari in order to provide Dutchbat with help, to transfer vehicles and materiel, to get the personnel onto buses, and to mount the APCs on trailers.²⁸⁷⁸

Karremans and Nicolai heard from the Army Crisis Staff that the higher echelons in the UN were sticking to the plan for a departure to Busovaca. According to Karremans, he asked the contingent Commander Verschraegen, the Army Crisis Staff and the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo three times to relocate Dutchbat to Zagreb and not to Busovaca. He could not understand why no-one listened to him. Eventually, he sought contact with Brantz who told him that the decision to go to Busovaca was taken mainly on the basis of personnel considerations.²⁸⁷⁹

According to Van Baal, Deputy Commander of the Army, the main advantage of Busovaca was that the Dutch would then be in control; in these more remote surroundings the Ministry of Defence would be in a better position to shield Dutchbat from curious outsiders than in Zagreb. Actually, to Dutchbat one of the attractions of Zagreb was its airport, which would expedite the journey home. Van Baal, in particular, had pushed for Busovaca, and for the organization of a short debriefing there in relative peace and quiet. The chaotic arrival of the 55 previous Dutchbat hostages at Soesterberg airport had strengthened his convictions.²⁸⁸⁰

On 18 July, the logistics staff at UN headquarters in Zagreb was still to express a preference for a departure to central Bosnia. Contrary to the situation in the Netherlands, this was based on economic rather than personnel considerations: central Bosnia was the simplest and cheapest option, especially if the Dutchbat equipment was to be made ready for a new deployment in Bosnia. A second option was a withdrawal via Ljubovija (situated opposite Bratunac on the Serb side of the Drina) to Camp Pleso near Zagreb. The vehicles could be brought from Serbia to Zagreb by road or rail, but this would take more time to plan. A timescale of fourteen days was even quoted.²⁸⁸¹ For a long time Zagreb stuck to a withdrawal of the personnel to Busovaca and the materiel to Zenica. This may have been partly motivated by the thought that the equipment would have to be left behind in the event of a withdrawal via Serbia.

On 20 July the buses and helicopters had already been requested to take Dutchbat from Busovaca to Split, where it could be flown back to the Netherlands. It was certain at that time that there would be no opportunity for a debriefing in Split. If this was still to take place in the mission region then it would have to be in Zagreb.²⁸⁸²

The Commander of Sector North East, Brigadier General Haukland, was not involved in the arrangements for the Dutchbat departure. He had not even been informed of it. Be that as it may, Haukland was acquainted with the instructions that Dutchbat had received. He said to Minister Pronk, who was on a working visit to Tuzla, that Sarajevo's instruction to Karremans that he must not leave

²⁸⁷⁸ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Diary Brantz, (version August 2000).

²⁸⁷⁹ Karremans, *Srebrenica, Who Cares?*, p. 234-5.

²⁸⁸⁰ Interview A.P.P.M. van Baal, 01/11/01.

²⁸⁸¹ DAB. Interoffice Memorandum, Maj. Porter, JLOC Plans to Wing Comd Bernard, DCJLOC, 18/07/95;

SMG/1004/75. Fax sent from AMA COS UNPF-HQ to DCBC, RNLA Crisis Staff, COS UNPROFOR, 181700B Jul 95.

²⁸⁸² DCBC, 2823. Fax 1(NL) UN Cie Logbase Split to OCKlu, 20/07/95.

before all the enclave residents were able to depart was not particularly clear. Haukland complained that orders were no longer going through Sector North East and that no-one had told him that Dutchbat was no longer under his command; obviously, Sarajevo had not taken the trouble to inform him. It was a common complaint at Tuzla that Sarajevo broke the lines of command. At one point Haukland had called the Chief of Operations in Sarajevo to tell him that he had lost contact with Dutchbat. The answer was that the battalion was already on its way to Zagreb.²⁸⁸³

Apparently, the decision on the route was clinched during the meeting with, amongst others, General Smith in Belgrade on 15 July. It was then that Mladic agreed to a withdrawal of Dutchbat – with local UN personnel – via Belgrade on 21 July. Mladic also agreed that a convoy could supply Dutchbat prior to the departure. Mladic made a ‘gentleman’s agreement’ with Smith that he would do his best to get back as much as possible of the Dutchbat equipment that had been stolen by the VRS; nothing, however, came of this.²⁸⁸⁴ The materiel looted by the VRS was never returned.

Mladic did nonetheless honour the agreement on the arrival of the convoy. This convoy, carrying plentiful supplies of fuel for the return trip, had already been requested by UNPROFOR in Pale on 18 July.²⁸⁸⁵ Mladic also stuck to the agreement on the transport of the equipment: Dutchbat was allowed to take all of it.

On 20 July there was momentary panic, when Colonel P. Kracmar, the representative of the Force Commander in Belgrade, came with the disheartening news that the headquarters in Zagreb had failed to notice that Serbia was a sovereign state and had to be asked formally for permission before Dutchbat could cross its territory. Kracmar pointed this out to Janvier after a meeting with Colonel Vuksic, the representative of the General Staff of the VJ. This permission had not yet been requested and the necessary procedures could mean a two-day delay in the timetable for the Dutchbat withdrawal. To make matters worse, separate permission was needed for the APLs.

There were, moreover, restrictions for crossing Serb territory, because small pockets of armed Bosnian Muslims were still active in the area along the Drina. These had come from the column that was trying to reach Tuzla. In addition, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia could not guarantee safe passage for the local UN personnel. As long as no permission came from the Yugoslav authorities, the Dutchbat convoys would be stopped at the border. Though arrangements had been agreed with Mladic on the Bosnian-Serb side, he had no jurisdiction in Yugoslavia.²⁸⁸⁶ After Belgrade, Dutchbat would travel on to Zagreb. What happened to the battalion thereafter will be discussed in detail in Part IV.

In the long run the alarming news from Belgrade did not cause a delay. Neither did the position adopted by the international community at the London Conference of 21 July (a joint stance should be taken to prevent a further Bosnian-Serb advance) throw a spanner in the works. Minister Voorhoeve was momentarily afraid that this standpoint could tempt the Bosnian Serbs still to take Dutchbat hostage in order to stave off any air strikes.²⁸⁸⁷

This was not the case. General Mladic ordered the Drina corps and the Bratunac Brigade to do everything possible to ensure that Dutchbat could leave with dignity. The Commander of the Bratunac Brigade, in particular, had to make sure that his staff behaved correctly and he was ordered to escort convoys from and to Potocari. No-one other than Mladic himself was permitted to make arrangements with Dutchbat on a departure or a longer stay. Mladic would be in charge of the Dutchbat escort on 21 July.²⁸⁸⁸

²⁸⁸³ ABZ, DPV/ARA/01654. Memorandum DMP/NH to R, 31/07/95, No. NH-618/95 with summary of trip R to Tuzla and Sarajevo, 14-18 July 1995; interview Hagrup Haukland, 03/05/99.

²⁸⁸⁴ NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. ‘Meeting Gen. Smith/Gen. Mladic - 19 Jul 95’, drafted by Lt-Col. J.R.J. Baxter, 19/07/95.

²⁸⁸⁵ NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. HQ UNPROFOR G3 Convoy Ops to UNMO Pale, 181000B Jul 95, No. 20-096/07.

²⁸⁸⁶ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87290 SRFC Belgrade, 13 March - 10 Oct 95. Fax SRFC-B to Lt-Gen. B. Janvier, 201640B Jul 95. UNPROFOR New York Box 87290 SRFC Belgrade, 13 March - 10 Oct 95.

²⁸⁸⁷ E-mail Bert Kreemers to NIOD, 23/01/02.

²⁸⁸⁸ ICTY, (IT-98-33) D 83/a, Army of the Republic of Srpska General Staff to Drina Corps, 1st Bratunac Light Infantry Brigade (for attention of the commanders), 20/07/95, No. 06/18-279.

On 21 July Dutchbat was able to leave the enclave and make its way to Zagreb. It was not Smith and Mladic who supervised the withdrawal – as had been agreed – because Smith had already left for the London conference. Nicolai did the honours. For Mladic, the departure of Dutchbat was the only occasion upon which he returned to Srebrenica.

According to Sergeant J. Zwiers, the actual departure from Bratunac was well organized by the VRS: ‘I’m sorry to say it, but the Serbs had organized it perfectly. The Royal Netherlands Marechaussee couldn’t have done any better.’ The conduct of the VRS was exemplary; only some of the locals made throat-slitting gestures.²⁸⁸⁹

7. Consultations between Mladic and Nicolai on the Dutchbat equipment

Before the withdrawal, Nicolai and Mladic met in Bratunac. Mladic repeatedly made insinuations about the role that Milosevic and the Chief of Staff of the Federal Yugoslav Armed Forces Perisic had played in the Smith-Mladic agreement on the departure. A representative of Milosevic also stressed the role played by Perisic. This must have been behind the scenes because Perisic was not involved in the negotiations in Belgrade on 15 July. At the meeting Nicolai asked how much of the stolen equipment had been returned. Mladic said he did not know, and that he should ask Karremans. When Karremans arrived in Bratunac, and was asked by Nicolai if all his materiel had been returned, Karremans initially said that it had. However, he forgot the equipment that the VRS had taken when they seized the OPs.

Nicolai then asked Mladic about the state of affairs regarding the equipment the VRS had captured from Dutchbat. At this Mladic became furious and said that UNPROFOR should not think that they set the conditions; he was in charge. Given the damage that the VRS had suffered from the NATO bombings, there could be no question of returning equipment. If Nicolai wished to re-open negotiations on Dutchbat equipment, the existing agreement on Dutchbat would come adrift and the talks would have to start all over again. Mladic said that he had agreed with Janvier that the question of equipment would be addressed later. The Dutch should be glad to be leaving the enclave with the equipment that they had. Nicolai thought that Mladic was bluffing about this agreement with Janvier. When he returned to Sarajevo, Nicolai reported this to Smith; but he knew nothing of an agreement either.

At that moment, however, Nicolai did not pursue the issue further in Bratunac; it was half-past ten and the column was due to move at noon. He did not want to overplay his hand; the UN personnel had to be brought to a place of safety first. They could talk about the rest of the APCs at a later date. Shortly before the withdrawal, Mladic even asked Nicolai for a couple of Dutchbat’s medical evacuation vehicles as they would no longer be required and he (Mladic) was badly in need of them. Nicolai did not know whether Mladic was being impertinent or deliberately irksome, but he replied that there was no question of Dutchbat handing over any materiel to him.²⁸⁹⁰

An inventory taken after the departure of Dutchbat revealed that a considerable amount of equipment had been lost or had fallen into the hands of the VRS. Lost materiel could, in principle, be claimed from the UN. The list was extensive: radio and crypto equipment of the Forward Air Controllers had been destroyed upon the orders of the Air Operations Coordination Centre in Sarajevo. The other coding equipment had also been destroyed, though there was no guarantee that this had been successful in all cases. In accordance with the Geneva Convention medical supplies were not destroyed. Fourteen different tracked vehicles could not be taken along. This constituted a loss of NLG16,457,000. Among the wheeled vehicles eighteen Mercedes jeeps were lost and four trucks valued at NLG 1,880,000. Six TOW mounts, six mortars, twelve .50 and twenty three .30 machine guns and 152 rifles which Dutchbat could not take along or had gone missing earlier amounted to a loss of

²⁸⁸⁹ Interview J. Zwiers, 28/04/99.

²⁸⁹⁰ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Meeting between Gen. Nicolai and Gen. Mladic at Bratunac on 21/07/95; interview C.H. Nicolai, 09/07/99.

NLG 190,000.- for the rifles and NLG1,740,280.- for the rest. Optical equipment such as thermal-imaging/weapon sights and binoculars accounted for a loss of NLG 1,969,000. The five thermal-imaging sights actually cost over half a million guilders. Remarkably, 152 pairs of binoculars were also missing. General equipment, including aggregates, a water-treatment plant, field kitchens, tents and field mattresses, worth a total of NLG. 3,746,260, remained behind in Srebrenica. Similarly, communication equipment, satellite dishes and 102 radios of various types constituted a large loss amounting to NLG 5,004,700. In August 1995 a provisional estimate arrived at a grand total of NLG 31,182,362.²⁸⁹¹

8. The Dutchbat withdrawal as a public issue

The Dutchbat withdrawal from Srebrenica later received negative coverage in the Dutch media. The Netherlands had been supposedly very eager to get Dutchbat out; too much attention had been paid to taking along the equipment and not enough to the Displaced Persons. The reports also said that instructions for a withdrawal were drawn up in the Defence Crisis Management Centre (DCBC) in The Hague and that UNPROFOR was merely an intermediary. Earlier comments by the Foreign Ministry suggested that a rift had developed between the government departments that were most concerned with the issue.

At the end of August 1995 the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence were publicly hurling reproaches at each another about the Dutchbat withdrawal. This was to some extent due to the fact that Defence was directly responsible for the personnel, while Foreign Affairs was not, and was more concerned about the international position of the Netherlands and how it was perceived. Later, diplomats expressed doubts about the haste with which the Defence Staff wanted to pull out the blue helmets from Srebrenica. UN Ambassador Biegman said: 'It doesn't make much of an impression if you go to protect an area and your first priority is to get your people out.' The Dutch Ambassador in Belgrade is also reported to have urged that Dutchbat be kept as long as possible in Srebrenica until the International Red Cross had received permission to visit the enclave. It actually did so on 17 July but, by then, the Displaced Persons had already been deported. The diplomats were embarrassed by the conduct of the Ministry of Defence and felt that they were constantly engaged in damage limitation. At the same time, Defence was becoming increasingly irritated by Biegman's criticism: 'It's very easy to make such judgements from your armchair,' was the riposte of a Defence spokesman.²⁸⁹²

Minister Van Mierlo's response to Biegman was not exactly positive either. He said in Parliament that public officials would be well-advised to exercise caution when expressing their opinions in public, especially on matters in which they were involved in their official capacity, and this was 'certainly so' in Biegman's case. Clearly, Van Mierlo did not share Biegman's view.²⁸⁹³ In July 2000 Biegman said that he could not remember the Dutch putting pressure on New York to engineer a speedy withdrawal of Dutchbat, even though the previous passage suggests that Van Mierlo did continue to place the emphasis on this in general terms after the fall. Biegman believed that a foremost concern at The Hague was how the Netherlands would appear in the international community.²⁸⁹⁴

In an analysis of the deployment of Dutchbat in Srebrenica, dating from October 1995, Foreign Affairs presented a picture in which Defence was 'understandably' concentrating on getting the Dutch

²⁸⁹¹ SMG/1005/31. Internal memo RNLA Crisis Staff from H-DMKL-OPLOG/H G4 KL-CRST to i.a. wnd C KL-CRST and D-DMKL, 10/08/95, No. G4/95081/05; SMG/1004/77. 1 (NL/BE) UNPROFOR LOG/TBAT to G6 Crisis Staff, 181040B July 95. In February 1997 another 150 cases of Dutchbat ammunition and fifty cases of TOW missiles were found in Srebrenica. It looked as if these had been left behind after the hasty departure from the compound. There were fears that if this came to light, it would lead to negative publicity for the Netherlands Army. (MID Coll Pennin. Note HBV MID/KL to HAMID/KL, 05/02/97, No. St-28-02.97, Confi.)

²⁸⁹² 'Defensie "verbijstert" diplomaten' [Defence "confounds" diplomats], *Utrechts Nieuwsblad*, 29/08/95.

²⁸⁹³ TK, 1994-1995, 22 1818, No. 119.

²⁸⁹⁴ Interview N. Biegman, 03/07/00.

troops to safety and whereby Foreign Affairs had raised – ‘in good consultation’ – other factors that should play a role in the decision on a withdrawal. Examples that were cited included the fate of the men in Bratunac, the Displaced Persons and the wounded in Potocari, the local personnel, and the Dutch materiel. These considerations were then integrated in the government policy, according to Majoor, Chief of the Directorate of Atlantic Security.²⁸⁹⁵

Wijnaendts, the Dutch Ambassador in Paris, said that he had received information direct from Majoor at the Defence Crisis Management Centre on the state of affairs and it was clear to him that The Hague was concerned about the return of Dutchbat and that this took first priority. According to Wijnaendts, Van Mierlo had also more or less said this.²⁸⁹⁶ The impression emerging from this chapter is that after the fall, the return of Dutchbat was, in fact, still the main priority, figuring largely at staff level at Defence and at political level at Foreign Affairs.

The implicit separation of responsibilities between Foreign Affairs and Defence did not actually go as far as this. As reported by *NRC Handelsblad* on 30 October, staff members at the Dutch Embassy in Belgrade had argued for a later departure of Dutchbat from the enclave, until the International Red Cross had gained access to the deported Muslim males. This was a rumour that had circulated earlier, but the Dutch Embassy in Belgrade had made no such proposals. There was, in any case, no reason to do so as it had been agreed in the negotiations in Belgrade on 15 July that the International Red Cross would indeed be granted access to Srebrenica. This was again confirmed in the formalization of the agreement between Smith and Mladic on 19 July, which dated to before the Dutchbat withdrawal.²⁸⁹⁷

Judging from the standpoint adopted by the government directly after the fall, there is little evidence of a rift between the Defence Ministry and the Foreign Ministry. This standpoint was that Dutchbat did not take priority over the population. However, political correctness could have played a role in this. Leonard Ornstein reported in *Vrij Nederland* that dissension had arisen in the Ministerial Council on the question of whether priority should be accorded to the safe transfer of the Dutch troops or to the protection of the civilian population; this is not confirmed by the minutes of the Ministerial Council,²⁸⁹⁸ but these do not give a literal account of the discussions that took place. According to a Foreign Affairs Public Relations official present during the council meeting, Defence initially gave priority to its own personnel. Prime minister Kok also seemed inclined to support that vision, with Pronk supported by one or two ministers, thought differently. Van Mierlo, while sometimes on other occasions supporting Voorhoeve and giving priority to Dutchbat, took up a middle position.²⁸⁹⁹

Pronk, who was Minister of Development Cooperation at the time, described the discussions in the Ministerial Council of 11 July as ‘probing’. The discussions were subtle but, according to him, the outcome was unanimous: solidarity with the Displaced Persons and negotiations on a pull-out of Dutchbat. Pronk said that this outcome was not raised again during the later discussions on 12 and 13 July.²⁹⁰⁰ Be that as it may, it appears that in the days before and after the fall of the enclave there were differences in emphasis between the approach of Foreign Affairs and Defence.

In 1997 Westerman and Rijs published a book which contained the Sarajevo guidelines for the negotiations on the Dutchbat withdrawal. By way of elucidation the authors say: ‘Drawn up under the Ministry of Defence in The Hague on 13 July 1995, the instructions were sent from the UNPROFOR command in Sarajevo to Colonel Karremans via the Dutch General Nicolai.’ It has already been shown that this is incorrect: the instructions were drawn up in Sarajevo. But this still begs the question of how far Sarajevo anticipated the wishes of The Hague.

²⁸⁹⁵ DBZ, DDI-DAV/999.241/DAV/MS/Yugoslavia/NATO/Coordination/July 1995-August 1996. Memorandum DAV to S via DGPZ, 16/10/95, No. DAV 95/1123.

²⁸⁹⁶ Interview H. Wijnaendts, 08/06/00.

²⁸⁹⁷ DCBC, 1280. Letter PDV to Editor-in-Chief *NRC Handelsblad*, 01/11/95, No. V95020569.

²⁸⁹⁸ *Vrij Nederland*, 09/09/95. The article refers to the Ministerial Council of 11/07/95.

²⁸⁹⁹ Interview D. Hiensch, 13/07/00.

²⁹⁰⁰ Correspondence J. Pronk with NIOD, 29/05/01.

As evidence, Westerman and Rijs quoted a phrase from the letter which Karremans sent to Mladic. Karremans wrote: ‘At 20.00 hrs, I did receive a message from the authorities of the Netherlands thru HQ UNPROFOR in Sarajevo concerning the evacuation of Dutchbat.’ This statement raised a lot of dust, partly because a connection was laid between the text of these guidelines and the unfortunate testimony of Karremans at the Yugoslav Tribunal, where he came across as being more concerned about the Dutchbat equipment than the Muslim males. According to Westerman and Rijs, Voorhoeve appeared ‘amazed’ at this and omitted to mention that Karremans had followed guidelines that he himself had issued. Although the book devotes only a few sentences to this matter, they were considerably blown up because the publishers, Atlas, highlighted them in their press release under the headline: ‘Dutchbat had to save equipment instead of Muslims. Voorhoeve gave orders to Karremans.’²⁹⁰¹ The latter allegation was, in any case, incorrect: the instructions did not come from The Hague via Sarajevo but from Sarajevo direct.

In January 1997 General Couzy, now retired, rekindled the debate when he responded to Westerman’s challenge in the TV programme *Middageditje*: ‘Let’s be honest: these instructions were drawn up in The Hague’ by saying that The Hague had indeed instructed Karremans to the effect of ‘Get back as quickly as possible with the sick and the local UN personnel’. And that was, according to Couzy, exactly what Karremans had done. At that moment Karremans was no longer responsible for the Displaced Persons. Couzy did not believe that the command structure of the UN had been undermined, because Nicolai had issued the instructions as a UN official. ‘But,’ he added, ‘the instructions which he issued were suspiciously similar to those that had been drawn up in The Hague.’ Further questions posed to the Deputy Director of Information, Kreemers by Van Baal, who was then the Deputy Commander of the Army (as shown in Chapter 6, Couzy himself was not always directly involved in this), revealed that Sarajevo had only taken account of the Dutch wish to have Dutchbat leave for Busovaca instead of Zagreb because of the shortage of reception facilities there. Only this wish was included in the UN guidelines that Sarajevo issued to Dutchbat on 13 July. Nicolai also stated that the guidelines were drawn up under his responsibility as UNPROFOR Chief-of-Staff, and that he had informed The Hague of their content.²⁹⁰²

Nicolai told the NIOD that Couzy’s memory was not entirely accurate. According to Nicolai, the instructions had been written by Colonel De Ruiter in Sarajevo, and hence under his (Nicolai’s) responsibility. Nicolai had informed De Ruiter of the contents in advance. As they concerned Dutch troops, there was no point in drawing them up again in English (which did, in fact, happen). Afterwards a copy was faxed to The Hague and was almost certainly brought to Couzy’s attention, but the instructions were definitely drawn up in Sarajevo. Had they been compiled in The Hague, this would have hit a sensitive chord in the UN, though Nicolai did not personally find this much of an argument. At the end of the day, the Dutchbat mission to help the Displaced Persons was not an issue; on 13 July there were no longer any Displaced Persons in the compound. However, the plight of the men in Bratunac was still uncertain: Nicolai admitted that the instructions only addressed the question of how to get the troops back in one piece. He saw this as a government matter. From this angle, the issuing of guidelines by The Hague would make sense, but, he emphasized, this was not what happened.²⁹⁰³

²⁹⁰¹ Westerman & Rijs, *Srebrenica: Het zwartste scenario*, p. 182, 225 and 248-9. Press release Uitgeverij Atlas Amsterdam, 15/01/97. Frank Westerman had already come up with a remarkable theory in *NRC Handelsblad*, this time with Harm van den Berg, on the Dutchbat departure: ‘To appease him [Mladic] and especially to get out of Srebrenica, The Hague suggested that the Dutch be marched out before the Ukrainians arrived.’ Aside from the question of whether the UN would have accepted a period without a UN presence in Srebrenica, whether the Ukraine would have accepted that Dutchbat did not transfer the duties and facilities and, most importantly, whether the population would have allowed a pull-out, there is no evidence that this proposal was ever mooted in The Hague. (‘Het demasqué van Dutchbat’ [The unmasking of Dutchbat], *NRC Handelsblad*, 26/08/95.)

²⁹⁰² BSG. *Middageditje*, 21/0197. Memo from PDV to the Minister, 21/01/97, No. V97000071.

²⁹⁰³ Interview C.H. Nicolai, 09/07/99.

De Ruiter also confirmed that the instructions were sent from Sarajevo and that he had only had contact about them with Van den Breemen and Deputy Chief of Operations Hilderink. Minister Voorhoeve had not interfered. The initiative for the contact came from Sarajevo. The Dutch had expressed their concern for the UN personnel, the wounded and the British JCOs and the route was discussed whereby the preference had fallen on Busovaca.

De Ruiter denied that Sarajevo had acted as a *poste restant* for the Dutch; this was also clear from the differences of opinion regarding the Dutchbat equipment. The issue was discussed verbally and there was no question of instructions from The Hague. To avoid language problems and to ensure optimal clarity De Ruiter had written the fax in Dutch and signed it, because there were no reasons to wait for Nicolai. They had already discussed the contents in detail. Once the instructions had been properly fleshed out the Displaced Persons were already gone.

According to De Ruiter, the first contact on this matter was not with The Hague, but with the Contingent Commander, Colonel Verschraegen, in Sarajevo. Verschraegen had said that the preference was to transfer Dutchbat to Busovaca and that De Ruiter should prepare himself accordingly. Verschraegen had had earlier contact with the Netherlands on the matter, partly because the headquarters in Sarajevo had been taken over in connection with the problems surrounding Zepa and the reception of the Displaced Persons. The transportation of the units from the operational zone was a national matter and the responsibility of the contingent commander. This was precisely the reason why Verschraegen had been sent to Bosnia.²⁹⁰⁴

9. Conclusion

Before the fall of the enclave and immediately thereafter, considerable attention was paid to the possibilities of a Dutchbat withdrawal. This was not only true of The Hague. Both the acting UNPROFOR Commander in Sarajevo, Gobilliard, and Force Commander Janvier were considering the options. It was obvious from the start that this question had to be settled through negotiations with the Bosnian Serbs. The implementation of the NATO withdrawal plan was not a ready solution. Not only would it take days for the required troops to come into action, there were also some political and military-technical hurdles that needed to be cleared before the plans could be realized. Practically speaking, NATO intervention was a non-starter.

Initially, Karremans was alone in the task of negotiating with the VRS in the person of Mladic, because the Bosnian Serbs categorically refused to admit a negotiator from Zagreb or Sarajevo and UNPROFOR did not wish to force the issue. Karremans and Mladic did not, however, negotiate on a departure of Dutchbat. Instructions from Sarajevo on the departure led only to a written exchange of standpoints between the two men. On 15 July, at the instigation of the UN in New York, negotiations took place at the highest political level in Belgrade on the withdrawal of Dutchbat. These eventually delivered results.

There are no grounds to support the claim that the guidelines for Karremans' negotiations with Mladic were dictated by The Hague. The actual negotiations on the Dutchbat withdrawal were conducted in Belgrade and The Hague was not involved. The only point that The Hague pressed was a transfer to Busovaca instead of Zagreb, but this encountered serious and – under the circumstances – practical objections from Karremans. It later came to light that there were also objections to a reception in Zagreb because it was in the media spotlight.

Similarly, there is no hard evidence to suggest that the Dutch were inordinately concerned about the return of the Dutchbat equipment. This wish did exist, but a safe return of the Dutchbat soldiers was deemed more important. It was UNPROFOR that made a point of taking along the

²⁹⁰⁴ Interview J.A.C. de Ruiter, 29/06/00; NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. Letter Col J.A.C. de Ruiter to Cdre. Hilderink (personal copy to C-in-C RNLA, 23/01/97.

equipment. The reason why the Netherlands did not get back all the equipment confiscated by the VRS was because Mladic failed to honour his part of the bargain reached in Belgrade.

The Hague was involved to some extent in the departure of Dutchbat. This was not exceptional for a troop-contributing nation. It was no different in the case of the withdrawal of Dutchbat I and II, because administrative rather than operational arrangements were involved. The situation of Dutchbat III was certainly exceptional and could not have been foreseen.

A complicating factor that soon emerged with regard to the Dutchbat departure was the fate of the population. However, the decision-makers still gave priority to getting Dutchbat out of Srebrenica as quickly as possible. This was partly motivated by a need to prevent the Bosnian Serbs from taking the battalion hostage; this would have been extremely unfortunate if the VRS started advancing on Zepa and Gorazde. Akashi had to concede his point that governments of the troops in Zepa and Gorazde might also want to pull out if Dutchbat did not stay. Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen together with the Deputy Commander of the Army Van Baal did convey to Force Commander Janvier that the Dutch wanted Dutchbat to leave at the earliest opportunity, but by then Akashi and Janvier had reached the conclusion that there was no other alternative than to instruct Dutchbat to stay in the enclave. All they could then do was to show understanding for the situation. By then Voorhoeve had realized, like Foreign Affairs, that the Netherlands would cut a poor figure if the battalion were perceived as having abandoned the population.

Hence, the departure of Dutchbat quickly became subordinate to the humanitarian mission. The circumstances forced Akashi, Janvier, Voorhoeve, the Defence Staff and also the MPs to change their standpoint: they laid a link between the Dutchbat departure and the Displaced Persons. On 10 July Voorhoeve had pushed for the departure of the battalion and Van Mierlo had emphasized that it could not simply get up and leave; after the fall of the enclave their standpoints on this matter seemed to cross. The official government position was still that though care for the population was desirable, Dutchbat was soon no longer able to provide it: after 13 July, there were no more Displaced Persons in the compound. There were certainly indications that the Muslim males had been deported to Bratunac, but as this was out of Dutchbat's reach, attention turned quickly to organizing the departure of the battalion. The agreement reached by Smith and Mladic on 15 July formed a key stimulus here.

The Ministerial Council was concerned about the consequences of the fall, and feared ethnic cleansing, mass murder and gender-based segregation. These concerns were not made public and resulted only in politically correct statements on the importance of Dutchbat's humanitarian mission and solidarity with the population. The only concrete response from the Government was a call for an emergency session of the Security Council and diplomatic efforts on Dutchbat's behalf; it undertook no political initiatives on the international stage. On the other hand, the UN, the USA and several European nations were only too aware of the meaning of ethnic cleansing. Though it came as no surprise to them that it had taken place, they were shocked by the scale at which it had been carried out. But this could not have been foreseen at that moment in time.

Summarizing, it could be said that the persons and organizations that were most involved had to choose between two deeply felt convictions (a) to get Dutchbat home quickly and safely and (b) to protect the people who had flowed through to Potocari for as long as the Bosnian Serbs were in the vicinity. The balance between the two choices shifted for each person and institution through time, but they eventually became reconciled: it soon emerged that Dutchbat could not leave Potocari as long as some of the population were still there.