

Remembering Yugoslavia: The Canadian Military's Service in the Balkans.

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Introduction:

The collapse of Yugoslavia resulted in long wars and ethnic cleansings which the international community struggled to respond to. The historiography has focused on the violence in the region, the underlying political tensions which led to the conflicts, while some of the available literature has looked at the role of Canadian peacekeepers in the former Yugoslavia under the banner of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR). While the available sources provide a basic understanding of the conflict and the role of Canadians in the region, it largely ignores the non-combatant role of the international community and their presence in the region after the violence had ceased. This essay will look to oral history to fill in these gaps through the use of interviews conducted with Master Corporal Tyson King¹, Sergeant Ryan Gow and Master Warrant Officer Tamara Featherstone. These interviews discuss the Canadian presence in the former Yugoslavia and emphasize the role the military played in post-conflict recovery, humanitarian efforts, and the personal and professional difficulties the interviewees experienced while serving in the region. The interviews also provide insight on the ways in which the wars affected Canadians who served overseas, specifically Tyson King's discussion of his struggles with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This essay is divided into three parts. The first explores King's role with UNPROFOR and his experiences in the Medak Pocket. The essay then focuses on the interviews with Ryan Gow and Tammy Featherstone which speak to the role of the Canadian military in the post-conflict recovery of the region. Finally, the essay concludes with remarks on the benefits and limitations of the use of oral history. It can ultimately be determined that the oral history interviews and the academic literature do not stand alone,

¹ Tyson King is currently serving in the Navy with the ranking of Master Seaman.

rather work in conjunction to provide an in depth understanding of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and the Canadian military's role in the region.

Interview with Tyson King:

Most of the available literature explores the situation in the former Yugoslavia through a political lens, while the oral history interview provides a soldier's perspective on the ground. Nicholas Gammer's book *From Peacekeeping to Peacemaking* focused on the complex political climate which contributed to the war in Bosnia, and the Canadian government's response to the tensions. Gammer's discussion of the underlying causes of the conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia, presents a shortcoming of oral history. In his interview, King touches on the role of the peacekeepers when he was deployed to the region. He noted that in his first tour in Croatia, the primary tasks of the peacekeepers were "integrating" as well as "reinforcing the peace of the area."² While King alludes to the ethnic tensions which fueled the conflicts when he noted the challenge of integration, the interview lacked an explanation of the underlying causes, namely those political in nature, which demanded the presence of peacekeepers such as King. This absence is understandable due to King's occupation as a soldier on the ground, but is a limitation of oral history. While King's interview lacks a discussion of the underlying political tensions that drove the conflict, he provides a deeper understanding of the issues that arose surrounding the mandates from the Canadian government which proved unrealistic to those present in the conflict zone. He remembered many locals would fire at UN maintenance trucks to get a response from the soldiers.³ This became such an issue that it forced his commander to act outside of "rules of engagement" and resulted in pressure from the troops for the Canadian government to reassess

² Tyson King, interviewed by Courtney Yanta, Victoria B.C., 22 March, 2016, 7:45.

³ Ibid, 9:00.

these rules.⁴ King's interview highlights that the Canadian mission in Bosnia posed challenges to UN peacekeepers who were forced to take necessary action outside of their mandate. Gammer's book echoed this shift in the role of the peacekeepers as he aimed to prove his thesis that Canada had moved away from its traditional peacekeeping stance toward a peacemaking position. He attempted to prove this by focusing on the difficulties faced by Canadian peacekeepers while serving in the region. In particular, he noted that Medak pocket was a case "of Canadians pushing the envelope in UN operations" when they engaged in battle with Croatian troops who had "indulged in their own version of ethnic cleansing against Serb villagers."⁵ The focus of his book was less on the soldiers and their actions, and more on the government's pressure to maintain involvement in the region, particularly under Prime Minister Brian Mulroney.

Similarly, "Learning Lessons of PROFOR" by scholars Lenard J. Cohen and Alexander Moens focused on the Canadian government's mandate to UNPROFOR troops in the former Yugoslavia. While the article viewed UNPROFOR's mission through a political lens, much like Gammer, it dedicated part of its analysis to the tensions in Medak. He noted the outbreak of the violence in Medak occurred when "Croatian troops opened fire on the Canadian and French troops monitoring the ceasefire line" which resulted in new ceasefire discussions between the UN troops and Croatians.⁶ The authors noted that following this, UN troops witnessed "retreating Croat forces burning Serb houses and killing Serb civilians" but due to "insufficient forces" they were unable to stop the ethnic cleansing.⁷ These sources provide an overview of the Canadian involvement in the former Yugoslavia but do so from primarily a political perspective,

⁴ Ibid, 9.

⁵ Nicholas Gammer, *From Peacekeeping to Peacemaking: Canada's Response to the Yugoslav Crisis*. (Montreal, Que: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001.), 164.

⁶ Lenard J. Cohen and Alexander Moens. "Learning the lessons of UNPROFOR: Canadian peacekeeping in the former Yugoslavia." *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 6 (2, 1999): 93. DOI: 10.1080/11926422.1999.9673175

⁷ Ibid, 93.

which placed limitations on the amount of detail the sources provided on noteworthy engagement by international peacekeepers in places like Medak.

In the oral history interview conducted with Tyson King, he spoke of the initial outbreak of Medak, an event which he was not originally a part of, but later joined. King described a similar story to that in Cohen and Moen's article with regard to the outbreak of the battle, the negotiation of a ceasefire, and the retreating Croat's actions which left a wave of destruction. Despite this, upon hearing King's testimony it became obvious that the academic literature only scratched the surface of the issues in the Medak pocket. King described watching Captain Ayre negotiate the ceasefire while holding a weapon, ready to shoot if the Croatians tried to inflict any harm to the base, Captain Ayre or any other UN personnel.⁸ Tasks, such as the one assigned to King, were absent from the academic literature, but provided a deeper understanding of the conflict. Moreover, in King's interview he discussed the devastation left behind by retreating Croatian forces with more detail than found in the literature. During the interview, King broke down when he spoke of his role in dealing with this devastation. A particularly disturbing memory he shared, was finding the corpses of what he believed to be a grandmother and granddaughter whose bodies had been ripped apart while still alive, and after succumbing to their injuries, had been left to burn in their home where a fire was set.⁹ Scholar Edward M. Coffman argued that oral history "provides a human touch and richness that one cannot get from paper documents."¹⁰ King's interview spoke to this claim, as his emotion when speaking of his time in Croatia enabled a new sense of understanding regarding the severity of the war.

⁸ Tyson King, interviewed by Courtney Yanta, Victoria B.C., 22 March, 2016, 48:00.

⁹ Interview with Tyson King, 40:50.

¹⁰ Edward M. Coffman, "Talking About War: Reflections on Doing Oral History and Military History". *The Journal of American History* 87, 2 (2000): 589. doi:10.2307/2568765.

Additionally, King's interview took to task Cohen and Moer's claim that "insufficient forces" were to blame for the UN's inability to prevent the ethnic cleansing of the Serbs. In his interview, King recalled watching the Croatian army retreat, noting that despite their barbarism, King and his fellow soldiers had "no authority to arrest them."¹¹ Furthermore, he noted that the guilt he felt, and the difficulties of being under the "soldier's ethics to follow orders," and attempting to balance that with "human morals", which has been a burden he has had to bear since his time in Croatia.¹² While perhaps insufficient forces may have been a factor preventing the UN personnel from stopping the ethnic cleansing from occurring, to present this as the sole reason for the forces inaction is unfair to soldiers like King, who were under obligation not to intervene. The inability of the international soldiers to retaliate against the Croatians due to their obligations to follow the rules of engagement was a crucial theme of the interview and Canadian soldier's experiences in the war. This theme provided another dimension of understanding to the Canadian involvement in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, but was largely overlooked in the literature, which made the use of oral history an essential element of a full comprehension of the war.

King's frustration surrounding the restrictions he faced under the rules of engagement was similar to the frustrations with the United Nations articulated by Major-General Lewis Mackenzie in his book *Peacekeeper: The Road to Sarajevo*. As the title suggests, this book explored the role of peacekeepers in the conflict from the perspective of Mackenzie, chief of staff for the United Nations Protection Force. Mackenzie's privileged position was a benefit for accessing lesser known information about the conflict and the politics surrounding the UN'S

¹¹ Interview with Tyson King, 30:00.

¹² Ibid, 25:47.

military operation, while also a limitation as it was a highly personal narrative and told little of the broader Canadian experience in the region. Mackenzie's criticism of the United Nations and the organization's shortcomings in its performance in the region was a prominent theme of the book. Mackenzie's frustration stemmed from what he referred to as "pathetic state of administration" whereby the forces were operating without "simple essentials" like "papers...pencils [and] adequate accommodation."¹³ Mackenzie's critique of the UN provided insight into the difficulties for those working under such banners, and although the book was published as the war was still ongoing, it was an effective historical source for the period which it covers.

Similarly, Carol Off's *The Lion, The Fox and The Eagle* worked as a critique of Major-General Lewis Mackenzie and the United Nations through the case study of Bosnia. Off calls the UN a "villain" and explores the organization through what she sees as failures in peacekeeping missions like Bosnia, which directly resulted in "innocent people being killed."¹⁴ This critique of the UN pointed to the complexities of the conflict in Bosnia and highlighted the organization's uncertainty surrounding questions of what to do and how to bring stability and peace into the region. Similarly, the anti-UN sentiments were echoed by Robert Murray and John McCoy in their article "From Middle Power to Peacebuilder." In the article they noted "many senior officers" in Canada quit the military due to "discontent with peacekeeping experiences."¹⁵ The dissatisfaction with the United Nations regarding its missions in the former Yugoslavia was a theme that was present throughout the academic literature.

¹³ Lewis Mackenzie. *Peacekeeper: The Road to Sarajevo*. (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993), 143.

¹⁴ Carol Off. *The lion, the fox & the eagle: A story of generals and justice in Yugoslavia and Rwanda*. (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2000.), 1, 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 181.

Despite being articulated throughout much of the scholarship, explicit criticism of the United Nations is largely absent from the oral history interviews. When probed about his accommodations in Croatia, King unknowingly corroborated Mackenzie's claims that many of the peacekeepers lacked adequate accommodation. In his interview, King discussed living in bombed out buildings that his company would have to fix up and clean, lacking adequate hygiene facilities and equipment to do the work necessary to make the building hospitable.¹⁶ He notes that it was not until later in the tour that they finally received ATCO trailers.¹⁷ The harsh living conditions King was forced to endure early in his tour spoke to Mackenzie's claims that the UN was insufficient in providing many necessities to the troops in the former Yugoslavia. While Mackenzie cited inadequate accommodation as evidence for his dissatisfaction with the United Nations, as noted previously, most of King's frustration stemmed from the restrictions of the rules of engagement which were often directly contradicting his deeper human morals. King's critique appeared to centre around the Canadian government, the mandates that were passed down to him from Ottawa, and his treatment upon return.

Much of King's interview revolved around the horrors he saw in Bosnia and the ways in which they affected him and his fellow soldiers. Throughout the interview he noted seeing the devastation of burned down houses and dead bodies, the smell that came along with decaying corpses, and hearing exchanges of fire. King did not shy away from the effect his experiences in Bosnia had on him, speaking openly during his interview about his struggles with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and the toll it took on him. Moreover, King discussed his return home and the restrictions that were placed on him back in Canada. In the interview, he noted returning soldiers

¹⁶ Interview with Tyson King, 1:09.

¹⁷ Ibid, 1:11:08.

were given a “gag order” and were unable to speak of their experiences in the former Yugoslavia.¹⁸ He continued by discussing the Canadian government’s attempts to conduct a “stress debrief” whereby the government sent in two doctors who told over two hundred returning soldiers that they “[knew] what they were going through.”¹⁹ The government attempts to comfort the returning service men and women largely failed, and instead added more insult to injury. King noted in his interview that because he was a reservist, he received no support upon his return to Canada.²⁰ Moreover, King was often left to defend his experience and the impact of his experiences on his mental health against those who called him a liar and were uninformed on the situation in the former Yugoslavia.²¹

While a large portion of the scholarship focused on the Canadian government’s mandates and the role the government played administering troops overseas, little of the historiography touched on the role of the government when the soldiers returned home. None of the sources consulted mentioned government rehabilitation programs for returning soldiers. While the literature often discussed the impact of the war on the local population, rarely did it note the effects of the wars of Yugoslav secession on the UN soldiers who participated in them. The books and articles noted Canadians exchange of fire but largely ignored the aftermath of these experiences including PTSD or the suicides of soldiers following their return from the former Yugoslavia. The ignorance of these struggles is something scholar Allison Parr touched on in her article “Breaking the Silence: Traumatized War Veterans and Oral History,” when she noted the “under-diagnoses” and the silence of many World War II veterans about their struggle with Post

¹⁸ Ibid, 51.

¹⁹ Ibid, 52.

²⁰ Ibid, 56.

²¹ Ibid, 56.

Traumatic Stress Disorder.²² It was alarming to hear that years later the men and women who served in the former Yugoslavia were still being silenced about their mental health struggles in both society as well as academia.

A noteworthy exception to this ignorance is another one of Carol Off's books titled *The Ghosts of Medak Pocket*. In her book, she corroborated much of what King had said in his interview. Early on she notes that for many Canadians serving in Croatia at the time of the Medak pocket incident "the rules of engagement...were incomprehensible."²³ The book discussed the four day battle in Medak through the experiences of Canadian service men, as well as the impact this event had on them. Off hinted to the topics King discussed in his interview, including the ignorance of the Canadian population to the events in Medak, as well as the trauma it inflicted on many of the soldiers, notably Colonial James Calvin and other men she spoke with who had participated in Medak.²⁴ Off did a better job at looking beyond the actions of UN soldiers to see the various factors at play, but it should be noted her ability to provide such detail was through her own use of oral history with individuals who had participated in the events in Medak. Both Off's findings and King's interview highlighted the usefulness of oral history in providing an understanding of the conflict and the ramifications of this fighting both on local civilians and the Canadian forces which bravely served there.

Interview with Sgt. Ryan Gow and Tamara Featherstone

The interviews with Ryan Gow and Tamara Featherstone were very different from King's, in that they primarily revolved around post-conflict recovery in the former Yugoslavia, a

²² Allison Parr, "Breaking the Silence: Traumatized War Veterans and Oral History," *Oral History* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 62.

²³ Carol Off, *The Ghosts of Medak Pocket*, (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2004), 2.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 286-288

topic which is largely absent from the historiography. Throughout most of the literature, the primary focus of analysis was the role of international troops who were forced to engage in violence, although some sources did note the humanitarian efforts by Canadian troops and other international forces in the region. In his book *On the Front Lines of Leadership*, Horn Bernd discusses the relief convoy he was a part of, which was sent to Srebrenica to bring “humanitarian supplies” and the difficulties they faced from the Serbs who had control of the area.²⁵ The oral history interviews conducted told of experiences similar to those of Bernd, of individual’s serving in Bosnia whose focus was primarily on humanitarian duties. The interview with Ryan Gow touched on this subject as he spoke about his role in Bosnia, which saw very little violence. In his interview, he discussed trying to build a rapport with the community and delivering aid to the villages in Bosnia, including jackets and other basic supplies.²⁶ Gow also touched on the challenges they faced in attempting to deliver these supplies to the community. He spoke about his experience delivering aid to one village, and watching an elderly woman try on a jacket only to have it ripped off of her by another civilian who fled.²⁷ Similarly, in her interview, Tammy Featherstone also discussed delivering aid to civilians, primarily to refugee children in Bosnia. She told of the padre organizing a trip to visit the refugee children so the Canadian troops could bring items they may have needed such as diapers and clothing, many of which came from the soldiers families back home in Canada.²⁸ The humanitarian efforts by soldiers like Gow and Featherstone and the role played by those back in Canada was an important part of the Canadian

²⁵ Horn, Bernd, ed. *On the Front Lines of Leadership: Sub-unit Command on Operations*. (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2006.), 17-25.

²⁶ Ryan Gow, interviewed by Courtney Yanta, Victoria, B.C., 1st March, 2016, 18.

²⁷ *ibid*, 18:20.

²⁸ Tamara Featherstone, interviewed by Courtney Yanta, Victoria B.C., 9th March, 2016, 18.

experience in the former Yugoslavia, but these accounts were largely absent from the historical literature. Oral history provided an opportunity to better understand and appreciate the humanitarian efforts of Canadians in the former Yugoslavia and recognize the multifaceted duties of soldiers who have served overseas.

The academic literature also provided an opportunity to hear perspectives on the conflict from Bosnian civilians. The humanitarian role played by the international presence in the region was recounted in Mark Cave and Stephen M. Stone's book *Listening on the Edge*. In it, an oral history interview conducted with a survivor of the Srebrenica massacre named Hanifa was recounted. Hanifa recalled the UN's declaration that Srebrenica was a "safe area" and her reliance on the peacekeepers limited distribution of food to keep her and her family fed.²⁹ While Hanifa's experience did not mention the Canadian military, it offered a civilian perspective of the role of the peacekeepers, many of whom were Canadians, and their mission in Srebrenica. In the oral history interviews conducted, the interviewees were asked if they felt the Canadian presence in the region made a difference. Sgt. Gow looked back on Bosnia in a positive way when he said he thinks and hopes that "the people we met benefitted from us being there."³⁰ Featherstone felt similarly in her interview, when she noted she believed the large Canadian presence in the former Yugoslavia made an impact.³¹ While Hanifa's recollections of Srebrenica primarily revolved around the massacre that took place there, her mention of the role of peacekeepers to keep her family fed was noteworthy and spoke to the sentiments articulated by Gow and Featherstone, that the international presence in the region made a positive difference.

²⁹ Ibid, 20.

³⁰ Interview with Sergeant Ryan Gow, 54:50.

³¹ Interview with Tamara Featherstone, 59:30.

While some of the historiography focused on the Canadian government's response to the conflict, other works looked at both the Canadian and international military involvement in the region. In Purusottam Bhattacharya's article "Conflict in Yugoslavia" the response from European Union member states to the wars of Yugoslav secession was analyzed. While the article did not explicitly reveal much about the conflict in Bosnia, it exemplified how large scale this issue was, with tensions regarding what to do spreading beyond the former Yugoslavia's borders and transforming this conflict into an international crisis. Similarly, Jutta Paczulla's article "The long, difficult road to Dayton: Peace Efforts in Bosnia Herzegovina" highlighted the international tension by analyzing the journey toward bringing peace to war-torn Bosnia. Paczulla touches on the role of the international community at the end of the war, but does so by focusing primarily on combat techniques.³² These works highlighted the complexities of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, by showcasing the uncertainty among the international community as to how best to solve the tensions.

While the available scholarship focused heavily on the international presence in the region, largely absent from the literature is discussions of post-conflict recovery. Paczulla analyzed the end of the conflict, but largely through military action taken against the Serbian government which led to the Dayton Accord, the formal treaty which was meant to end the battles.³³ Relying just on the academic literature, it would seem as though once the fighting ceased, the international presence in the region significantly declined, or disappeared altogether. The military oral history interviews with Ryan Gow and Tammy Featherstone revealed the important role the Canadian military played in the former Yugoslavia after the conflict had been

³² Jutta Paczulla, "The Long, Difficult Road to Dayton. Peace Efforts in Bosnia Herzegovina." *International Journal* 60, no. 1 (04, 2005): 261-262, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/220854484?accountid=14846>

³³ Ibid, 261-262.

subdued. Gow noted that when he was deployed to Bosnia his role was more about “maintaining the peace” rather than “making the peace.”³⁴ Similarly, Featherstone’s second tour of Bosnia came ten years after the outbreak of the war, and as such the devastation was “less apparent” but the “repercussions” were still very visible.³⁵ Despite entering the region at the conclusion of the war, both Gow and Featherstone spoke of the significant role their military contingent played in the region.

Throughout Gow’s interview, he highlights the various ways the Canadians tried to help contribute to the recovery of the region. Both Gow and Featherstone speak of hiring local civilians to work on the base and developing a rapport with the community. In Gow’s interview, he noted the difficulties locals faced in securing a job, both as a result of the devastation of the economy and the remaining ethnic animosities, so the base did their “best to employ the community” to show the locals the troops were “invested in the area.”³⁶ Featherstone echoes these sentiments in her interview, in which she also described the employment of the local population at her base. Beyond having interpreters, locals were employed for secretarial duties as well to work at the coffee house on base, for which Canada would remunerate them in their local currency.³⁷ In one instance, Featherstone recalled a local who worked on financial tasks for the base, and did an exceptional job that when the base closed in Velika Kladuša and moved to Van De Luka, she was invited to move as well and continue her employment.³⁸ Both Gow and Featherstone’s recollections of the ways in which locals were employed on their respective bases

³⁴ Interview with Sergeant Ryan Gow, 4:40.

³⁵ Interview with Tamara Featherstone, 36:50.

³⁶ Interview with Sergeant Ryan Gow 15:17.

³⁷ Interview with Tamara Featherstone, 24.

³⁸ *ibid*, 25.

underlined the positive impact the Canadian military made not only on these individuals lives and livelihood, but the local economy as well.

While the Canadian military played a part in bolstering the local economy, they also made an effort to bring joy back into the lives of the locals. In both interviews, the interviewees noted the visible toll the war took on the locals and the efforts by the international forces to reengage the community and try to make a positive impact. In one particular example Gow explained the role he and his fellow soldiers played in helping an individual re-establish his cheese factory business.³⁹ The willingness of the soldiers to help this man, perhaps provided him not only a chance to succeed economically but an opportunity to immerse himself in something he enjoyed and return as best he could to what life was like before the war. Similarly, Featherstone recalled that her base would have parties and gatherings; she remembers the locals creating costumes for the events.⁴⁰ Arguably, the opportunity to lead a normal life and have fun when around the bases was a crucial element to the post-conflict recovery. Scholar Kathleen Blee argued that oral history has been a means of studying “people, who historically speaking would have otherwise remained inarticulate.”⁴¹ As such the interviews conducted for this project enabled two individuals to tell their own stories and their experience with the Canadian military’s post conflict-recovery mission in the former Yugoslavia, something which was absent from the scholarship written on the region.

While oral history provided an opportunity to learn of the Canadian presence in the region following the war, the use of oral history had limitations as well. The most obvious

³⁹ Interview with Sergeant Ryan Gow, 12:20.

⁴⁰ Interview with Tamara Featherstone, 32:30.

⁴¹ As quoted in Kathleen M. Blee, “Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan”. *The Journal of American History* 80, 2 (1993): 59, doi:10.2307/2079873.

limitation is that it did not provide the same broader understanding of the conflict and the underlying reasons behind its outbreak, as found in the academic works published. Largely absent from these interviews were a discussion of the fierce ethnic hostilities which were perhaps the most important underlying cause of the conflict. In his interview, Gow did speak of the locals complaints that they were unable to be hired because they were a certain ethnicity, and that there was some tensions between the ethnic groups.⁴² While the ethnic tensions were still there, they were relatively tranquil since the fighting had stopped. Similarly, Featherstone alludes to the ethnic tensions when she said she saw the peace treaty that ended the conflict as merely a band aid solution.⁴³ While both interviewees mention the hostilities in the region, the larger discussion of the importance of the tensions in the conflict was perhaps better learned from the broader approach of the academic literature, and as such was a limitation of oral history.

Conclusions:

In his book *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, scholar Paul Thompson argued oral history enables an opportunity “to explore and develop new interpretations, to establish or confirm an interpretation of past patterns or change, and to express what it felt like.”⁴⁴ All three of the oral history interviews conducted told personal stories both unique and similar to what was found in the historiography, but did so with a human element. Each interviewee could remember the sights, smells and sounds of Croatia and Bosnia as well as share stories about emotional moments, both good and bad, which made their experiences relatable. While all three of the

⁴² Interview with Sergeant Ryan Gow, 14:30, 16.

⁴³ Interview with Tamara Featherstone, 59:35.

⁴⁴ Paul Richard Thompson, *The voice of the past: Oral history*. 3rd ed. (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000,) 265.

interviews have these similarities, Tyson King's experiences in Bosnia were very different than those of Ryan Gow and Tammy Featherstone. The distinctiveness of each interview presents both a challenge and benefit of oral history. While the interviews offered a better understanding of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, it was difficult to find connections between the them, specifically with regard to King's interviews with Gow's and Featherstone's. That being said, both King and Featherstone did discuss the challenges posed by the rules of engagement during their deployment. While King was understandably frustrated by them due to the nature of his service in Croatia, Featherstone found the rules to be more of an adjustment than outright problem when she was switching forces.⁴⁵ The distinctiveness of the interviews also worked as a benefit of oral history, as the differing perspectives offered access to new information or new ways of understanding the conflict.

Perhaps the biggest benefit to the use of oral history was the opportunity it provided to hear first-hand experiences and the emotion that comes with that. The interviews discussed personal reasons for volunteering to go to the former Yugoslavia, the various interactions with local civilians, both good and bad, as well as the challenges of returning home and dealing with the aftermath of their experiences. The personal elements that come across in oral history interviews are a crucial part of the narrative of military history and helped to make the subject of the wars more relatable. By way of contrast, the scholarship attempted to provide information in an objective manner, but had an argument that it was trying to make. This objectivity was beneficial in providing a far reaching understanding of the conflict, highlighting the underlying reasons for the wars as well as the presence of the international community. Arguably though, the objectivity of the sources was most beneficial when paired with the subjectivity of the

⁴⁵ Interview with Tamara Featherstone, 3:50.

interviews. The interviews and the literature worked together to fill in the gaps, while the limitations of one method of learning history spoke to the benefit of the other. As such, oral history was a valuable source, but its value was heightened when it worked in conjunction with the academic scholarship to provide a comprehensive understanding of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia.

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