

Sarajevo

A Retrospective, 1993-2001

Ed Storey

My first view of Sarajevo was from the window of a United Nations Ilyushin 76 (IL-76 (Candid)) Russian transport as it made its approach to the airport. It was early July 1993 and I was into my second month of a year-long tour with United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) Headquarters in Zagreb, Croatia. I was a Terrain Analyst Sergeant from 1 Canadian Division Headquarters in Kingston; and had only just been posted to Kingston from my parent unit Mapping and Charting Establishment in Ottawa a year previously. To top things off, our first child had been born three weeks before I left for Croatia, so both my personal and professional lives were going through an "adventure."

I was the first Canadian Terrain Analyst in The Former Yugoslavia, arriving in Zagreb on 25 May 1993, and with the insightful guidance of my supervisor and colleague Warrant Officer Bob Stebbings, who arrived a few days later, we formed the first Terrain Team in Theatre. Since our job was to know the terrain first hand in The Former Yugoslavia, our Chief Geographic Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Walker (RE), made sure that we got out of the office as much as possible to see the terrain first hand. This was the series of events that led to my first trip to Sarajevo and subsequent trips thereafter.

Sarajevo during the 12 months that I was in the Balkans was for all intent and purposes a city under siege. The city is built in a valley and is surrounded by mountains. The Bosnian Serbs, with their assortment of tanks and artillery, held this high ground as well as the predominantly Serbian district of Grbavica in the city proper. From these locations they could shell and snipe into the city at will. Of course the Bosnians could also provide their own brand of harassing fire, so each particular side had a

vested interest in killing as many from the other side as possible.

The Bosnian Serbs tried on at least two occasions to either capture the city or at least cut it in half. These attacks failed not only from the defence of Sarajevo that the Bosnians were able to provide (the Bosnian 1st Sarajevo Corps who was defending the city had a reported 25,000 troops at its disposal); but from the fact that fighting in a built-up area (FIBA) requires immense manpower and material resources. This expenditure of material and more importantly manpower, was something that the Bosnian Serbs (Sarajevo-Romanija Corps) were just not capable of investing or sustaining for the capture of the city. Of course the Bosnians were also in the same position, as they did not have the resources to mount an offensive to free the city from the siege. The siege was good for the Bosnian Serbs as they could effectively control what went in and out of Sarajevo, or at least that was the perception.

The Bosnians had an "ace up their sleeve" in the form of a 800m long tunnel that ran in a northeasterly direction from the town of Butmir in the south, under the eastern end of the Sarajevo Airfield to the Dobrinja suburbs in the north. Although planning for the tunnel had begun in December 1992, the work did not start until 23 January 1993 at the Dobrinja end and on 23 April 1993 at the Butmir end. The tunnel was completed on 30 July 1993. In all, 2,800 m² of soil was removed, 170 m² of wood, and 45 tons of steel were used in the construction of the tunnel which had an average width of 1 m and an average height of 1.5 m. On the first night the tunnel was completed, 12 tons of military supplies entered the city and a group of soldiers went out to help defend Mount Igman which is just to the south-west of the city. In the end, a

PTT (Postal, Telephone and Television are state owned and controlled) phone line as well as a 12 megawatt low voltage electrical cable were also installed through the tunnel and on average 4,000 people and 20 tons of supplies passed through the tunnel daily.

Of course the existence of this tunnel was well known to the Bosnian Serbs who made repeated military efforts to capture the entrances, especially the southern end in Butmir. The UN also knew of the tunnel as the Bosnian Serbs had officially voiced their concern over it and an international journalist had been allowed to report on it. One of my first jobs in Zagreb was to determine if it was truly possible to dig such a tunnel under the airfield.

In the end, a 28 August 1995 mortar attack on the Mrkale Market in Sarajevo sparked a two-week NATO-sponsored air campaign, Operation Deliberate Force, from 30 August to 14 September 1995. It was this NATO show of force that resulted in a 5 October 1995 cease-fire by the warring factions eventually bringing all sides in the Bosnian conflict together at Wright-Patterson Airfield in Dayton, Ohio on 21 November. The Dayton Peace Accords were signed in Paris on 14 December 1995. This was NATO's first combat engagement.

During my visits to Sarajevo, photography was always a problem as the UN "taxi" from the Airport to the various UN buildings in the city was a Danish M113A1 Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC). Sitting in the back of "the carrier"

with either hatches down or with just the back cargo hatch open left little opportunity for photographing the sites. There was no problem taking photographs within the airport parking lot as this area was covered from direct fire weapons by earthen berms. I did get one opportunity to drive from the Airport to The Residency and back in a UN Land Rover, so I managed a few photographs of some of the well known buildings in the city.

My recent tour in Sarajevo (September 2000 to March 2001) was with the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) NATO Headquarters in Butmir Camp, which is very near the eastern end of the airfield and close to the Butmir Tunnel entrance. The Headquarters is built on an old Yugoslav Military Airfield that straddled the confrontation line during the war. For the most part, Sarajevo is back to normal, much of the debris of war has been cleaned up although most of the buildings are damaged. There is freedom of movement throughout Bosnia for SFOR Forces and it is very easy to go into Sarajevo for business or to enjoy a meal at one of the many restaurants. What caught my eye were the changes that had taken place since my last visit in 1994; and I thought that it would be interesting to photograph as closely as possible from the same angle, many of the photographs that I had taken during earlier visits to the city. The following images are the result of that work.

I would like to thank CJ2 Geographic, Canadian Terrain Analysis Team, Headquarters, NATO Stabilization Force for kindly providing some of the current photographs used in this article.

Then: Even the media required armoured vehicles in order to have some protection when reporting the news. Here a French Channel 2 armoured car is parked outside of the Terminal building at the Sarajevo airport. Note that the vehicle is painted white with very prominent press markings to afford high visibility to all of the warring factions. A French Army VBL Armoured Car is visible in the background.

Now: The earthen berms in front of the building are gone and shrubs and trees now replace the French armoured vehicles.

Ed Storey is a Warrant Officer with 20 years service in the Mapping and Charting Establishment. He has had several operational tours which include Croatia, Uganda, Honduras and Bosnia. Ed has an extensive and comprehensive collection of Canadian Army Militaria that he has built up over the past 25 years and he has written several magazine articles on various aspects of that hobby. WO Storey is married with two children and lives in Ottawa.





S261-23



S203-3

Then (above left): A pair of Canadian Cougar Armoured Vehicle General Purpose (AVGP) at the Sarajevo Airport. Chains are a must on wheeled vehicles, especially those that travel outside of populated regions as the infrastructure to clear and repair the antiquated 1950s-style Bosnian road network had disintegrated during the conflict. **Now** (above right): The tower with the lights are the base of comparison and the true size of the Airport parking lot is evident in this photograph. Note also the Dobrinja suburb which stretches off into the background as well as the snow on top of Mount Trebevic.

Then (below left): A pair of Danish M113A1 APCs in the airport parking lot with their crews taking a "breather." Note the height of the berms and that helmets and body armour are still being worn in this relatively secure area. The other side of these berms faces directly towards a large group of row houses. **Now** (below right): With the berms gone, it is easy to see not only how close the houses that used to be the front line and face the airport are, but also Mojnilo Hill, which was captured by the Bosnians from the Bosnian Serbs on 5 June 1992 as it had the tactical advantage of overlooking the Bosnian-held Dobrinja housing suburb.



S261-11



S202-24

Then (below left): A Danish M113A1 APC in the parking lot of the Sarajevo Airport. This was the standard UN "taxi" for personnel in the city. The armoured shields on the crew commander's hatch and for the pintail mounted .50 cal. M2 Heavy Machine Gun are commonly referred to as Armoured Cavalry (ACAV) Shields as these were first used by the US Army Armoured Cavalry units in Vietnam in the 1960s. **Now** (below right): The taxis now park a little further down, to the left of the photograph, in order to pick up fares from the newly renovated and repaired terminal. Note that the International Red Cross Volkswagen Golf carries both the red cross and red crescent symbols in recognition of the Christian and Muslim populations in Bosnia.

C261-21



S202-20





S14-151

Then (above left): Heavily armed and armored French troops stand beside their 20 mm gun equipped VAB APC in the parking lot of the Sarajevo Airport. For someone interested in international military vehicles, rarely seen in Canada, the variety of vehicles from Canada, United Kingdom, Denmark, Russia, France, Spain and a host of other UN and Yugoslav sources was staggering. **Now** (top centre): The French APC is gone, now replaced by a VW Golf belonging to the International Red Cross (S202-25).

Then (above right): Sergeant Ed Storey in the UN-run "Terminal waiting room" at Sarajevo Airport, 1 July 1993. UN movement within the city was stopped due to shelling and it was very hot and humid, about 30°C. Everyone was resting and killing time after a meal of French Army rations which included wine. The sign says it all, as "maybe the UN Flight will be in, or maybe it will not." **Now** (above centre): The passageway has been sealed off, but on a warm and pleasant afternoon in September 2000 WO Storey stands close to where the original photo was taken (S196-9).



C261-24

Then (left): Canadian Mercedes Unimog U1400 series Field Ambulance parked at Sarajevo Airport. This is one of a small number of these vehicles purchased by Canada and used by 4 Field Ambulance which was part of 4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade in Germany. Many of 4 Brigade's vehicles were transferred to The Former Yugoslavia with the first Canadian UN rotation which came from Germany in 1992.

Now (right): The Canadian Unimogs have been phased out of service, although the tower with the lights remains as a point of comparison between the two photographs.



S203-4



Then: Warrant Officer Bob Stebbings walking toward the camera at the front of the Sarajevo Airport. Note the earthen berm in front of the building as well as the one to the right of the photo. The M113A1 Armoured Personnel Carriers in the background are Canadian, and are awaiting orders to return to their camp. At this point in the day, 4 July 1993, the shelling and gunfire between the warring factions was so intense that all UN road movement within the city had been suspended. The berms around the airport parking lot were high enough to afford protection to walk around, although a Helmet and Body Armour were a must.



S17-151

S19-161

S205-12

Now: Sport utility vehicles and Bosnian Government cars replace the line of APCs at the front of the airport.

Then: Metal shipping containers have been erected at the corner of Alipasina and Marsala Tita streets in central Sarajevo in order to block direct fields of fire by Bosnian Serb snipers.

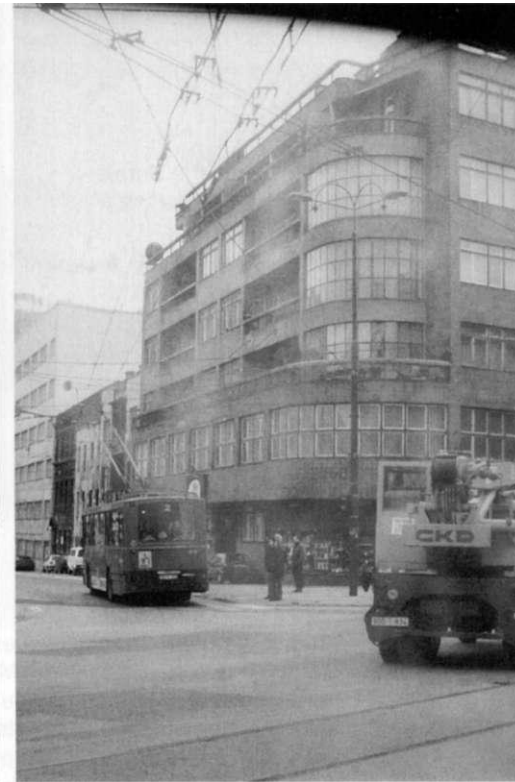
Now: The same corner in 2001. Pedestrians are free to walk the street, tram and electric bus lines have been repaired, but the large tree growing from the median had been cut down for use as firewood during the siege.

Then: Damaged and abandoned tram on the line that runs down the middle of Bulevar Mese Selimovica. The public transportation system was a favourite target with only 60 of the 6,000 city transportation vehicles surviving the war. The Bosnian "Jukas Wolves," a paramilitary organization, was tasked with defending this region.

Now: The same location in February 2001, the tram lines have been repaired and the trams are running again. The tram yard to the left of the photograph is filled with the hulks of damaged and destroyed trams.



S261-19



S205-7





S261-19



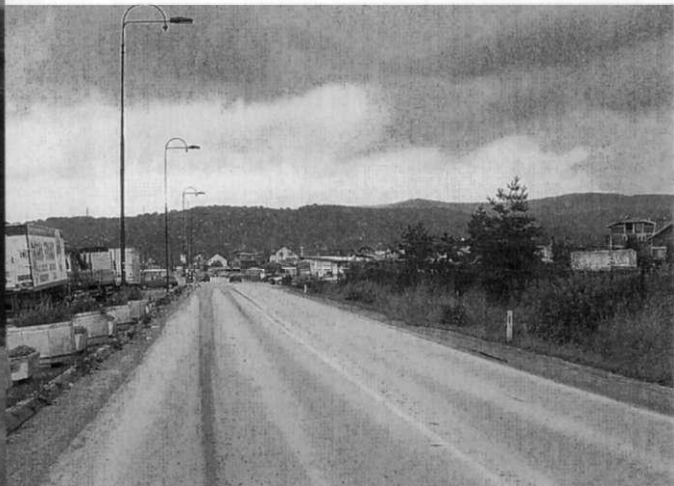
S202-20

Then (above left): On the road just west of the Sarajevo Airport at the confrontation line between the Bosnian 3rd Motorized Brigade and the Bosnian Serb 1st Illidza Infantry Brigade. Two Bosnian Serb T54/T55 Armoured Fighting Vehicles, the first a T54T Armoured Recovery Vehicle, lie disabled by the side of the road. **Now** (above right): The same stretch of road today. The tanks have been removed, the damaged buildings to the left have been torn down and a shopping complex has been constructed to the right.

Then (below left): Another view of the two disabled Bosnian T54-T55 AFVs. In this case, the T55 with bulldozer blade is in the foreground and the T54T ARV is in the background. The hills in the distance is the Brijesko district held by the Bosnian 2nd Motorized Brigade.



Now (below right): The same section of road today, but the tanks are gone, the fence remains and newer construction has changed the look of this once heavily-contested region.



Then (below left): Barbed wire entanglements, barricades and partially destroyed houses in plain view when leaving the airport. This is the Bosnian 5th Motorized Brigade front lines which faced the Sarajevo Airport. They were responsible for the defence of the Dobrinja housing subdivision which was situated across the road from the airport. Scenes like this quickly bring home the contrasts of what appear to be sterile images of the fighting on the nightly news in Canada, but are in fact the reality for those people defending their homes in Sarajevo. **Now** (below right): The entanglements and barricade are gone, the houses have been repaired and a mural advertises the common perception, "Europe for Sarajevo." It is believed these houses were repaired with money from Middle East sources rather than European.



S3-161



S201-24



S20-161

S205-13



Then (above left): The Sarajevo PPT Inzenjering or Postal, Telephone and Television (PTT) Building on Bulevar Mese Selimovica was used by the UN as its Headquarters in Bosnia. Note the tetrahedrons blocking the left-hand lanes of this major thoroughfare and the non-functioning traffic lights. In the background to the left can be seen the Studentski Dom. This building was used to hold foreign students who remained in the city when the war began. The students eventually had to be evacuated to safer locations when the building sustained severe damage from shelling. **Now** (above right): The tetrahedrons are gone and the traffic lights work. UNPROFOR has moved out of the PTT Building and a German Audi car dealership has been built in the lot just in front of the PTT. The Studentski Dom in the background, has been repaired and is now the headquarters of the UN and its various agencies in Bosnia.

Then (right): This is the Oslobođenje which was the press and newspaper tower. It was destroyed by shellfire in the summer of 1992 and is perhaps the most famous building of the Bosnian conflict and the Siege of Sarajevo. Despite the destruction of the building, the presses in the basement still produced a daily newspaper which was distributed throughout the city. **Now** (far right): Still standing in February 2001, only the wrecked car has been removed and a fence erected around the Oslobođenje to keep out the curious. Rumours are that this tower will not be repaired or torn down, but left as a lasting symbol of the war.



S20-161



Then (below left): Looking west, another view of the Oslobođenje Press Building. Note the bleak look of this photograph with the empty bus stop and the damaged buses sitting off the Bulevar Mese Selimovic. **Now** (below right): Still somewhat bleak looking, even in February 2001. This photograph shows Mount Igman in the background and illustrates how the Bosnian Serb control of the mountains around the them clear fields of fire into the Sarajevo.

S205-15



Then (above left): The Holiday Inn was built for the 1984 Winter Olympic Games. Before the war, Sarajevo boasted a 49,000 hotel bed capacity. During the war, the Holiday Inn was the only functioning hotel. Room prices were dependent on where the room faced - those facing the front line cost less than those facing rear areas. The Holiday Inn has the infamous reputation of being the location where Serbian SDS political party members shot from the roof at people gathered in front of the Parliament. This incident helped to spark the war in Bosnia. The building was spared much shelling as foreign journalists stayed in this hotel. **Now** (above right): Repaired, though still painted in its garish yellow colour, the Holiday Inn is once again the hotel for foreign travellers to visit.



S16-151



S205-10

Then (far left): Just beyond the Holiday Inn (visible in the foreground) are the Unis Towers. These are the two highest buildings in Sarajevo and they were the target of much heavy shelling. Even though both buildings contained advanced fire suppression systems, they burned out because the citizens had emptied the water reservoirs located on the roofs. Locally, the buildings are known as Momo and Uzeir, after two famous characters from a Sarajevo joke.

Now (left): Repair work was ongoing in 2001 and both were due to be reopened.

Then (below left): Many of the larger airports in The Former Yugoslavia had an outdoor display of military and civilian aircraft near the parking lot and Sarajevo was no exception. This small collection of Yugoslav military aircraft was photographed on 3 July 1993 sitting in an overgrown park just outside of the terminal building. In the background can be seen white painted French military vehicles. The low building in the background is the Airport Fire Hall.

Now (below right): This area of the airport has been remodelled with the trees being removed, the aircraft hauled away and more buildings constructed. The low roof of the Fire Hall and the characteristic dip in the mountains are the only features to link these two photographs.

