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Peace Enforcing: Never Let Them See You Sweat

Interview by Patricia Slayden Hollis, Editor

Editor's Note: This interview was conducted on 13 October 1996 at Kime Base, the 1st Brigade Combat Team's headquarters north of Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina (see the map on Page 6), shortly before the brigade began redeploying back to Germany. As Major General Nash, commander of Task Force Eagle, indicated in the previous interview, the Joint Military Commission (JMC) at the brigade and battalion levels are the "front lines" of negotiations in treaty compliance enforcement.

Q *Bringing together the leaders of former warring parties in JMC meetings who may or may not have been belligerent toward the IFOR, how did you ensure the JMC would work?*

A We crossed the Sava River into Bosnia-Herzegovina on the 31st of December. But the JMC preparatory work started about the 20th of December. A few of us in four HMMWVs [high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles] ferried across the river and faced 30,000 armed troops. We stopped at the first Serbian tank, and I banged on the side of the turret with my helmet to get somebody's attention. The Serbian liaison officer with us thought we were all going to die.

It was theatrical, banging on the side of a T-72 turret with my helmet. But we wanted them to understand clearly up front that they didn't want to tangle with us—"We're the IFOR, and we're here to enforce the treaty, any questions?" Then we lumbered across the Sava River bridge with the lead tank flying the red and white cavalry guidon, helicopters in the air and howitzers with their big gun tubes rumbling around everywhere. That said, "We're here, and if you start something, we'll take



care of business and be back across the river headed home in two days."

In this type of mission, looks count. So we were calm, professional and deliberate without being provocative. We were tough-minded without "swaggering" (challenging them to take us on) or without making them feel small. We made sure they all understood we had legitimate authority to enforce the military provisions of the treaty and would do so impartially.

For the first few JMC meetings, we occasionally had a show-of-force as the faction leaders arrived for a meeting: Cobras passed by low, high-performance aircraft flew at 5,000 feet or less and tanks and howitzers moved around. It got their attention.

Occasionally, about 30 to 40 minutes into a meeting, loud jets would pass over. At that point, I would become annoyed and tell my JMC deputy—who, by the way, was my FSCOORD [fire support coordinator]—to get rid of those jets. Then, all of a sudden, the jets or

other "annoying" show-of-force systems would disappear. The faction leaders respect the fact that the IFOR commander can summon or dismiss considerable force—but you don't want to overplay that.

It all worked. Ten months into the mission, some of the factions leaders told us they believed that from the beginning, we were deadly serious. The key here is, we were.

So, initially, that's how we established the JMC. I have to tell you, those were pretty scary times. But we never let them see us sweat.

Q *How did you operate the JMC?*

A The JMC was so critical to our mission that we prepared for each meeting as if it were a battle, war-gaming all the possibilities. My FSCOORD, the commander of 2d Battalion, 3d Field Artillery, was in charge of treaty weapons and ammunition site inspection and verification, so it made sense for him also to be the JMC deputy. The faction leaders knew he inspected their sites and had the indirect fire assets to target their sites. So he was ideal to play the "heavy" in the JMC meetings—bad cop to my good cop—when I needed him to.

We also employed a number of strategies in the JMC. First, we met with each faction separately, helping to develop a plan to withdraw forces, store their weapons at sites, etc.—intuitively, the faction leaders knew it was their responsibility. Then in meetings with all parties present, we codified the agreements reached bilaterally and reduced the argumentative, provocative aspects of those sessions.

The second strategy was to make the plan the factions' idea through education, coaching and discussions. For example, for the separation of forces JMC meeting, I had a detailed plan on how to separate their forces and was prepared to brief it if they couldn't agree on an arrangement; however, they agreed on a plan similar to the one we prepared, so we tore up our plan.

A principle we always adhered to was never to lie or exaggerate about requirements or consequences. We always told the factions the terms precisely and made



sure they understood the ladder of escalation—exactly what would happen if they didn't comply.

Let me give you an example. Early on, we were trying to transfer an armored brigade with its tank battalion and several APC [armored personnel carrier] battalions from one side of the ZOS [zone of separation] to another. We were not sure how the battalions were going to comport themselves because of an ongoing crisis. An IFOR aircraft had flown one of that faction's senior generals accused of being a war criminal to The Hague to be considered for trial. That faction had "broken relations with us."

So the day this brigade was supposed to move its forces across the ZOS, we had Bradleys at the start point and brought in Apaches and high-performance fixed-wing aircraft overhead. The brigade commander and one of my battalion S3s had a brief discussion about whether the unit was to move on time—so I brought the Bradleys and helicopters in closer and the jets down about 5,000 feet. The faction commander said, "Don't attack. We'll do what you want." Our response was, "It's not what we want, it's what the treaty requires." Problem solved.

There's a lesson here. If part of your peace enforcing mission is show-of-force with the goal of not having to fight, then you need to show overwhelming force.

We applied another principle (after we tested and confirmed it): go into the JMC with the assumption that the factions want to make the treaty work—even when they have problems complying or need to vent their frustrations. If one leader says his commander won't let him do such-and-such, then you work through the JMC at Task Force Eagle or higher level to make sure faction leaders up and down the chain are on line with the requirements of the treaty.

We are like referees. We maintain a presence, patrol and verify compliance by inspection and inventory. When faction soldiers violate the treaty, say for example, have weapons in the ZOS, we take their weapons. We impose penalties that compel the factions to comply with the treaty.

Q *Your direct support [DS] FA battalion is organized into a mini-division artillery [Div Arty] with a meteorological section, target acquisition*

battery and multiple-launch rocket system (MLRS) platoon. Why?

A The reason is twofold. First, our AOR [area of responsibility] is large: 3,500 square kilometers. The Div Arty doesn't have enough resources to position them throughout Task Force Eagle's AOR—more than four times the size of our AOR. So the Div Arty commander decentralized operations and assigned support assets to his FA battalions; in effect, the DS battalion commanders became mini-Div Arty commanders.

The second reason for this organization is the way the task force functions. It has 15 brigades, five of which have AORs assigned in decentralized operations. The task force commander functions like a corps commander. The maneuver brigade has some divisional functions to perform in its AOR, such as running its own counterfire program. The brigade has slices of everything needed to plan and execute operations in a decentralized mode. For example, we have our own air capability and surgical team.

The problem this FA organization has caused is I don't have enough fire support assets to do all I need to do. So with the advice of my FSCOORD, I decide where the gaps in coverage will be. Ironically, I used to blame the division commander for gaps in coverage; now I'm responsible.

Another challenge has been that the FA battalion staff isn't robust enough to perform all the additional functions. What I'm saying here is, we still need a division artillery.

Q *You deployed your howitzer platoons in "presence missions." Why and what were the advantages and risks involved?*

A Here in 1st Brigade, we send a howitzer platoon out to occupy a position that can range certain targets for three or four days as an IFOR presence. Actually, 2d Brigade does something similar, which it calls "Raids." But as I understand it, 2d Brigade's howitzers come back to their base camps every night.

My area is so large that we, literally, maneuver our FA platoons to certain important towns and areas that we otherwise

physically could not cover. We never want the factions to forget that our howitzers are here and prepared to take care of business.

We have invited faction soldiers and leaders to watch howitzers occupy positions and conduct fire drills and to examine our fire direction system. It did not take them long to appreciate that our FA is significantly more effective and faster than their artillery—not a capability they want to examine from the business end.

We based our platoon presence missions on the assumption that, doctrinally, an FA platoon can defend itself. Obviously, the risks include the potential for a small unit tactical defeat, if attacked. However, there's also a certain amount of risk associated with parking all the howitzers in base camps, so we decided the risk was manageable. We always position what few howitzers we have to range targets of value to the brigade.

Q *What message would you like to send Redlegs stationed around the world?*

A I would tell Redlegs two things. First, when you train, think in terms of providing fire support in decentralized operations with no front line, no rear and no flank. Second, keep your bags packed—we need you and you're going to go.



Colonel Gregory Fontenot commands the 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, Germany, also part of Task Force Eagle in Bosnia-Herzegovina for Operation Joint Endeavor from December 1995 to November 1996. He commanded 2d Battalion, 34th Infantry, part of the 1st Infantry Division (Mechanized) at Fort Riley, Kansas, and during Operations Desert Shield and Storm in the Gulf. His battalion earned a Valorous Unit Award for actions during the initial breach of the Iraqi forces and a night tank battle against a Republican Guard brigade. In the 3d Armored Division in Germany, he commanded B Company, 33d Armor. Colonel Fontenot served as the Director of the School of Advanced Military Studies at the Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, before taking command of his brigade.