

## **St. Louis High School Model UN Presentation**

### **UN and NATO Peacekeeping in Bosnia**

Good Morning Everyone. Thank you for the very kind introduction and reception. In particular I would like to thank Arthur Lieber, the Director of Civitas, Bobbi Kennedy, and Stephanie Gavin, the High School Model UN Coordinator, and all of you who are involved with Model UN. What interesting and important subjects to study and try to understand. I personally think Human Rights along with protecting our planet are arguably the most important issues to embrace and protect. So, I am very impressed and appreciate all of you and again your kind invitation to be here.

It is also not lost on me when I first spoke with a group of students a few years ago, the world was weeks into the hostile Russian invasion of Ukraine. Those of us in the military and Veteran community did believe in the Fall of 2021 that there was a possibility Russia could invade Ukraine, but none of us imagined the pornographic scope and horrific extent of their and Putin's actions. I also don't believe there were many around the world, who at that time thought that Ukraine would withstand the invasion for very long. But, we have all been awed and inspired by the resilience, determination, and devotion of Zelensky, the Ukrainian Forces and most of all the Ukrainian people. It does remind me of how easily life can change in an instant. My time in Bosnia and the images that we are seeing on the screen behind me are to me so eerily and tragically familiar to what we are seeing on our televisions and news feeds every day from Ukraine. And now two years later it is the added images we see from the Palestinians' escalating humanitarian crisis from the war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas, set in horrific motion by the terrorism and Human Rights abuses inflicted by Hamas last October 7<sup>th</sup>. It is important, as difficult as it can be, to study these subjects, so again thank you for doing that.

In 1991 I joined the Army to go into Special Operations, specifically as a Psychological Operations or PSYOP Soldier. After a few years of training with some short deployments to Panama and assignments with the military, I was called up in early December 1995, days after the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords, to deploy to Bosnia.

I wasn't naïve that I could be activated and sent to Bosnia. It was the Military Era of Peacekeeping Missions in the early nineties with deployments to such places as Haiti, Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and other countries at war with huge humanitarian crisis. As PSYOP Soldiers, we are required to be educated on the events in the world, to be proficient in languages and to be as culturally aware as possible of what was occurring in the specific countries the United States was responding to. But still my call up was really abrupt and immediate. I was actually here in St. Louis visiting my parents, John and Ellen Wallace, both alums of CDS and MI respectively, for a weekend. On that Saturday Morning December 9, 1995, I received a phone call at my parents' house to report to my PSYOP company immediately. The next afternoon I was back at our base in California, on Monday I was allowed to get my affairs in order, to give my financial power of attorney to my accountant to pay my bills for the next year, to write up a last will, and to spend time with my family. By Tuesday I was pulled from family, placed on a tactical PSYOP team that included soldiers from a Company here in St. Louis, and we were gone. First stop was Ft. Bragg (Now named Fort Liberty), North Carolina for a week to process, to be issued equipment and weapons, to undergo physicals, to train, and to attend classes at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare School at Ft. Bragg.

In those classes we learned more in depth about the region of the Former Yugoslavia and where we would be operating. We learned about where and why the war first broke out, the ethnic sides, the rise of nationalism, the political leaders, the military and paramilitary units, the commanders of those units, and the regional war lords. We learned about where, how, and why they operated. We also learned about the war crimes being committed, about a new term "Ethnic Cleansing" and about the Genocide occurring on European soil for the first time since Hitler, Nazi Occupations, and WWII. It was really unthinkable in so many ways. Only eleven years earlier the country was hosting the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo. Sarajevo, Yugoslavia was considered a perfect place for the games as it was cosmopolitan and beautiful, and the people were so welcoming. Of all the former Soviet Bloc Countries, Yugoslavia was by far the most open country because their Dictator, Marshall Joseph Tito, knew he had to allow his people to do business in Europe and beyond. Yugoslavia bordered Italy, Austria, and Greece to name a few. They had the Dalmatian Coast, which was a beautiful tourism coastline with ports and outgoing and incoming trade from all over the

world. So, Yugoslavians could come and go and conduct business out of the county, but on the restriction of heavy taxes upon return.

We also learned about the vast number of refugees we would encounter, how we were to help them safely leave or live in hostile areas, and where their ultimate destinations could be. I learned one fascinating and for me very proud aspect about the refugees' destinations. In the United States we would be receiving upwards of 60,000 refugees. It was decided that the Serbs would be sent predominately to Chicago, the home of the largest Serbian – American community, the Croatians would be sent to San Pedro, California, a port town in the larger port of Long Beach and also the home of the largest Croatian – American community. But the United Nations High Commission for Refugees had been struggling about where to send the Bosnian Muslims, the ethnic group primarily persecuted in Bosnia. They announced to us at Ft. Bragg that it was decided on St. Louis, MO. We were told that St. Louis had a strong European community in South St. Louis with the Hill, Dutchtown, German Town, and the UN believed they would be welcomed, nurtured, and that the Bosnians would thrive and become assets to the St. Louis community. How correct they were. I was very proud to hear that and these many years later to have that belief verified and for our town to be the home of the largest Bosnian – American community in the United States. It became cemented with me very early that our country had to be an advocate and destination for refugees and immigrants.

After our time at Ft Bragg, we then flew to Germany for winter training in the highlands of Germany at the U.S. Training Grounds of Hohenfelz living in a mock Bosnian landscape. We spent that week going on foot patrols, negotiating mock mine fields, encountering villages with actors playing the parts of refugees, paramilitary aggressors, farmers, families with children and even war criminals trying to hide from us. It was so cold and miserable at times, but once I was actually in Bosnia a week later, I was thankful for that experience, as it really helped prepare us for what we were about to encounter.

But a person can't really be prepared for war until they are there. My entry to Bosnia with our small team of 8 men and 1 woman, our vehicles, weapons, and equipment was on an Air Force C-17 in early January 1996. These planes are small but incredibly strong Air Force Transport Jets that have the ability to maneuver in tight places. As we flew into the American Sector Tuzla Air Base in northern Bosnia, we began a tactical landing procedure where the plane radically pitched,

rolled, and bucked up and down, while deploy flares to attract any heat seeking ground fire. We made numerous attempts to land, but were unable to after the first 4 tries, so the crew chief told us we would be returning to Germany, but then there must have been an opening and before I knew it we were heading what felt like straight down, with an abrupt tilt upward. Suddenly we hit the ground hard, came to a really quick stop and the crew chief screamed at us to get our weapons, get off the plane and hide in a ditch on the side of the runway. He and his crew unloaded our vehicles in about 2 minutes, they closed the back hatch, the engine roared and they were gone... and we were there. I knew very quickly that this was very real.

Within a couple of days, it was decided we would embed at a former dairy farm about 30 miles east of the base and a mile from what was called the ZOS, the Zone of Separation between the Bosnian Croats, and the Serbs. It was their front lines. The region was a wasteland of burned-out villages and torn up farmlands. There were also refugees, including a lot of children, many of whom were orphaned. Once there we discovered some orphaned children living in a makeshift barn. We alerted the UN Refugee Representatives, and they were quickly picked up and placed in a shelter where they would stay until a relative in the area, in Europe or even the United States could be located.

The orphans, the refugees, the villagers trying to survive were indeed living in desperate and often dire circumstances. But despite this, they were very optimistic and appreciative that we were there. I would learn over the months how resilient, how brave, how strong, and beautiful they were. But selfishly it became very tough on us, especially if we had children and families of our own. Ruminations and worry for our loved ones back in the United States was always with us, as you couldn't help but picture your child, parents, and families being in this desperate situation. And the loss, victimization and suffering some of them endured was really startling. And we see it today.

Those first months in Bosnia out of the Dairy Farm, which would become a forward base called "Steel Castle", our mission was to establish our presence and be Force Protection and Providers. That means we spent our days doing whatever ordered to support and protect our NATO Mission, the people, and to enforce the fragile peace. Being with PSYOPS, our team had the mission to influence the warring parties and the aggressors to see things NATO's way. PSYOPS dispenses the art of persuasion. We are an intelligence based Special Operations Unit, but our entire mission is to ultimately influence the direction of the hostilities. We do

it by extending an olive branch, developing programs, and offering a lot of support, or we do it by demonstrating that we have the power, we have the weapons, we have total control.

For instance, we would travel into a number of areas that had been handed over to the Serbs as their territory, but still populated by Muslims or Croats, many of whom had lived there for generations. We would let the Serb paramilitary or political leader of that area know that he, his military units, and his Serb population must let all live their lives peacefully, with full rights, and opportunities. NATO would in turn get the engineers and civil affairs teams to rebuild their water plants, electrical stations, schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure. We would start a mine awareness campaign for the civilians, we would give them money to develop businesses and opportunities to be legitimately recognized. But if that leader or his subordinates didn't do what we told them they must, if they continued to persecute, harm, or deny the rights of the civilians, or if they shot at our helicopters, our convoys, or at us operating on foot patrols in their sector, then they simply will be removed from their leadership positions by whatever means we determined was necessary. We would remove them. And for the most part, they took that suggestive influence to heart and they complied.

So, during those first few months our team was involved in those types of visits, with foot patrols around villages we would approach, convoy duties and protection details to various areas that needed that connection. We developed materials regarding mine awareness, resources, education, and opportunities for the civilians. We also provided security and fact-finding missions with NATO Explosive Ordnance Disposal Teams, and you can see some of the slides that show that work.

The unexploded ordinances and left-over mines, booby traps and improvised explosive devices were absolutely everywhere. The UN and Human Rights Watch estimated that in 1996 there were well over a Million unexploded ordinances across Bosnia and Croatia. For my team, and I can emphatically say for myself, our biggest fear were the mines. At the beginning we never walked loosely into snow, grass, dirt, or mud. We wouldn't get off hard surfaces where we couldn't see what was around or underneath us, unless we were told ahead of time that the area was clear. If we entered buildings we were always looking for fishing lines, trip wires, or hidden booby traps left behind. You will also see some of those images on the slides. Whenever we drove our routes from one point to another we

always had a briefing before about the mines, and where on those routes they had been removed and where they had not. I was a driver of our HUMVEE, and we were trained as to how to look ahead for possible points of concealment. After driving 200 kilometers or more in a day on maybe icy or snowy roads, we would be absolutely spent. Moving about the country was very stressful and exhausting.

At the end of March, I was pulled from my Team in northern Bosnia, left the Dairy Farm and was assigned to the Special Operations Documentary Team in Sarajevo. I was moving out of the American Sector and into to the French Sector, with the other primary NATO sector controlled by the British in the northwest area of Bosnia. My job now was to drive or fly with and provide security for NATO's team of journalists and our interpreters. We were again a small team made up a civilian Irish Producer, a French Cameraman, a French Photographer (Most of these slides are her photographs). We had our Bosnian Muslim Interpreter named Senada, our Serb Interpreter was Rudy, and our Croat Interpreter was Mitch. Then there was our leader Captain Dale Walsh, myself Corporal Wallace, and a rotating group of other PSYOP Soldiers who would also drive and provide security with me and Captain Walsh. We had three separate interpreters, because we were operating with the three separate ethnic groups. We tried to avoid taking our Muslim Interpreter into Serb and even Croat territories. The same with our Serb interpreter into Muslim or Croat areas. Sometimes it was unavoidable, and in those cases, our interpreters changed their dialects and we called them different names to reflect the area they were in. Senada, she became Senad or Dragana, Rudy became Mirza, and Mitch would become Milos. Sometimes we took civilians with us, who helped with intelligence, or who would take us to the place of an atrocity, but we always had to hide their identity or camouflage their identities to the area they were in. Sometimes it didn't work.

Sarajevo was an amazing city that before the siege must have been a beautiful place to live. Imagine Clayton but surrounded by mountains, hills and an old town with minarets, churches, buildings, and homes over 200 years old. But it was also quite eerie and very surreal. My home for the first couple of months in Sarajevo was actually below what was the ice rink of Zetra Stadium, the ice arena where they held the hockey games and figure skating competitions during the 1984 Winter Olympics. It was a British Army compound and we slept on a rifle range below the ice level that acted as a bomb shelter. If you went to the ice level and looked up into the Arena the entire roof had holes punched out where mortars and shells had come down. The Olympic clocks had all stopped at the same time. The

entire place smelled like cordite and gun powder and certain areas were even cordoned off where unexploded ordinances, that could not be safely removed, still lay. We used the locker rooms to shower, a tent towards the back of the ice rink to eat our meals, and a nook on the rifle range to sleep, but most of the time we were out traveling around Bosnia, into Croatia, or into the Republic of Serbska, to help NATO get their documentary footage and for us to exert our PSYOP influence.

We always carried in our flak jackets, or in the pockets of our uniforms Ordnance Identification Cards and War Criminal Identification Cards. You can see those on the slides too. If we came upon an unexploded ordinance or booby trap, if at all possible, we were to mark it, and chart where it was to provide to the disposal teams. The War Criminal Carry Cards were provided to us by the International War Crimes Tribunal, as one of our primary missions was to bring War Criminals to justice. If we chance saw or received intelligence about where they were, we provided that information to our Head Quarters back in Sarajevo and then extraction teams would possibly go after them. The same for narcotics, weapons, or the most egregious human and sex traffickers.

The great majority of the Bosnians, Croats, and Serbs who we and I had contact with were truly kind peace loving people. They wanted peace. They were men, women and children who had lived happily with one another. Before the War growing up, a Serb would have his or her best friend be a Bosnian Muslim, a Croat would marry a Serb, families traveled all over the country to see their Serb, Muslim, and Croat friends. They truly touched all of us with their generosity, their appreciation, and even their concern for us. We had one friend back at the Dairy Farm named Saban who was an elder who looked after a group of farmers and families that lived just north of the Dairy Farm. He saw what we were eating and was worried that our Military Rations were not enough, so one day he brought us back two live chickens to eat. We didn't want to take the chickens, felt they should be spared and left for Saban and his community for eggs or whatever. He showed up two hour later with two perfectly cooked chickens.

But, with that great good and gracious humanity, there were a few who we encountered who were seemingly inhuman. A dentist with a thriving practice in Sarajevo became a genocidal warlord in Pale and the Srebrenica area. A concert violinist became an oppressive politician who ethnically cleansed his neighbors. A banker would run a criminal cartel and funnel weapons to paramilitary thugs who would murder, kidnap, rape and commit atrocities. With the surge of Nationalism

and Ethnic hatred, Christian Orthodox Serbs took the opportunity to drive out the Catholic Croatians with the justification that they were Ustasha Nazi sympathizers during WWII. Or the Serbs ethnically cleansed and committed genocide against the Bosnian Muslims to create a greater Serbia, and as an act of justified vengeance from when the Serb Prince Lazar was massacred by the Turks during the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Or the Mujahedeen freedom fighters who came to Bosnia from Chechnya, Afghanistan, or some other fundamentalist war torn area of the world as Muslim mercenary jihadists and who would leave their own version of carnage and atrocities against the Serbs in their wakes. No side was intrinsically bad or evil, but sadly there were some very evil people from all sides, who committed unthinkable crimes against humanity during the four years of the civil war and beyond. About 100,000 people died during the war, about 2.3 Million people were displaced or became refugees during the war, 800,000 from Bosnia alone. Over 12,000 people were killed during the siege of Sarajevo, over 8,000 men and boys were murdered and thrown in a Mass Grave at Srebrenica, and that was just the biggest one. There were mass graves all over. There are a few slides of a mass grave my team and I had to go to. It was dug in the back of a beautiful graveyard in a town called Mrkonjic Grad, Bosnia. The Croats massacred Serbs there and thought the cover of the graveyard could conceal their murders. It was awful and terrifying to be there, to learn and see what had happened there.

At the time it was unthinkable, and the mantra from World War II and the Holocaust of “Never Again” was repeated as a rallying cry by the international community. But we all came to Bosnia way too late, with the UN’s lack of power, the European and U.S. leaders’ years of hand ringing, and everyone’s abject fear of escalation. What will we do today? Are the horrible events, violence, human rights abuses, and genocide occurring in the world today going to take root and grow. Are our actions or inactions too little, or too late. We are truly at an inflection point. I am betting on humanity, democracy, decency, respect, and human rights prevailing.

I appreciate so much the time you have given me today to share some thoughts, stories, and images from my time in Bosnia. I am humbled and honored that you all allowed me this time I would really love to answer any questions and to hear your thoughts, your knowledge and interpretation of Human Rights & Genocide that occurred in Bosnia, or in other regions you are studying. And I would love to hear your opinions, thoughts, and solutions of what is happening today in



Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine, Sudan, Israel, Gaza, Myanmar, and beyond. Thank you.