The Canadian Airborne Regiment in Somalia
A Socio-cultural Inquiry

a study prepared for
the Commission
of Inquiry into
the Deployment of
Canadian Forces
to Somalia

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When the Right Honourable Kim Campbell stated that the first Board of Inquiry into the “Somalia Affair,” as it has come to be known in the media, was going to look into “cultural attitudes,” it was probably a polite way of saying “racism.” I doubt she had in mind anything approaching the scope of this study which examines, not racism, but culture — military culture and particularly the Canadian Airborne Regiment’s culture.

At the time the Right Honourable Campbell was making her statements, I was probably off in some remote part of the globe doing what anthropologists love to do — studying someone else’s culture. Much of my work has been focused on nationalism and ethnic identity, yet over the years I have been critical of the type of anthropology that studies only the “sardines” of life rather than the “sharks,” believing that it is as important to examine the cultural workings of powerful institutions of developed states as it is to study indigenous peoples who live on their periphery. Well, this research has been my chance to do this. It has also been an opportunity for me to apply theories of identity formation to a very particular form of “tribe” in modern society — the military.

One cannot undertake a study of this magnitude without incurring many debts of gratitude along the way. I have to begin my “thank yous” with the Commission of Inquiry itself: Stanley Cohen for believing that work on Airborne culture was both relevant and important to the Commissioners’ deliberations; Chairman Létourneau and Commissioners Rutherford and Desbarats for listening to what I had to say with open minds; technical experts L.Col (ret) Doug Bland, Col (ret) Ted Nurse, and Gen (ret) Jack Vance, for sharing information and experience; Gerry Braun, Glenn Gilmour, David Goetz, Eric Myles and Janice Tokar for listening to me talk through some of my ideas. Many thanks also go to the research staff at the Commission particularly David Pomerant and his assistant Kim Lutes for their constant assistance and advice; Linda Cameron for helping
me track down documents; and Neil Blaney and his staff of computer wizards who worked their magic on the difficult interface between IBM and Mac.

On the military side, I wish to thank the Equal Opportunity offices of the U.S. military (particularly LCol Harry Christianson, LCol Kevin Clement, MSgt Johnson) which allowed me to learn about their work and to use the libraries at the Pentagon and the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute. On the Canadian side, I am grateful to the commanders and staff of the Canadian military bases I visited for their logistic support, to LGen Fox and BGen Meating for their interest and assistance in my work, and to Maj Bill Wild at the CF Personnel and Applied Research Unit. I am also indebted to Col Leclerc who always managed to come through with documents and arrangements. But the biggest thanks go to the soldiers and officers of the Canadian Airborne Regiment who so generously gave of their time during the interview process. I cannot express the gratitude I feel for their willingness to take a chance and open up to me with what, for some, were painful memories. I hope that in some small way this work will tell part of their story.

On the academic side, I am grateful to the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ottawa, the Department of Sociology, and particularly Dean Edwards for his continuing support and encouragement. Thanks also go to my number one assistant Irving Gold, who was indispensable, reliable, efficient and relatively calm (at least in comparison to me) in times of crises, as well as to Kevin Jones, Maureen Hooper, André Tremblay and Richard Veenstra. In addition, I had a great deal of help from military sociologists and psychologists, (Ron Gifford, Laura Miller, Charlie Moskos, Owen Parker, Frank Pinch, David Segal, Maddie Segal and Naomi Verdugo) who so generously shared their work with me so I might master a new field in a relatively short time.

The usual caveat that the author alone accepts responsibility for the interpretations and conclusions is particularly relevant in this study, since undoubtedly, there will be considerable disagreement with what I am about to say about the Canadian military. I derive some comfort from the words of the famous French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1979) who once said: "in a complex analysis, people retain the aspect which disturbs them the least."
CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions

Modern militaries are inherently incapable of taking or being used for proactive preventative action. 
Because of their size, composition, equipage and destructive orientation, they are an inherently reactive instrument that can only be used to deal with situations we don’t want at a stage where such situations are largely beyond effective, affordable control.
Dr. Gregory Foster (1997)

Is the purpose of the Canadian military to prosecute war or is it to preserve peace? Some might argue that the only way to preserve the peace is by being willing and able to wage war. The purpose of the final section of our study is not to debate this issue, rather it is to remind the reader that the purpose of the military will ultimately define and determine its culture, that is, the way it does business.

INVESTED IDENTITIES

In the first chapter we examined the characteristics of traditional military organizations. The core of the traditional system is the discipline of mind, body and emotions in the preparation for combat. According to the professional code of honour, duty comes before individual goals, desires and interests. We then went on to describe system-wide changes in the Canadian military which have led to the emergence of a new type of military man — one that is more concerned with individual career opportunities rather than commitment to the military institution. Loyalty in this case depends more on the conditions of employment than commitment to service.

We reviewed the original work on these trends which were first
described and documented by American researchers such as Janowitz, Moskos and Segal. It was Moskos who developed what came to be known as the institutional/occupational model which describes “a continuum ranging from a military organization highly divergent from civilian society to one highly convergent with civilian structures” (Moskos 1988: 57). The divergent military organization has institutional characteristics of total service to country while the convergent military sees service as another employment opportunity. In Canada, Cotton (1981: 100) noted the decline of the traditional notion of military service as a calling or vocation. What was significant for our work was the observation that both institutional and occupational values could co-exist in the same military establishment.

This theme was elaborated on in another Canadian study (Cotton et al. 1978) which examined the significant changes brought about by the 1966 decision to reduce, unify and functionally integrate the three Canadian military services. The administrative changes, designed to make the Canadian Forces (CF) more efficient and cost effective, included a centralized career management system “which emphasized skills, occupations and military positions as administrative tools rather than loci of commitment and cohesion” (Cotton et al. 1978: 370). What is important to note is that while the administrative and support sectors of the CF were becoming more managerial and convergent with civilian society, the land and sea operations — the combat divisions — were remaining divergent. Thus, the authors noted that Canadian military was becoming pluralistic and heterogeneous, with combat units, such as the Canadian Airborne Regiment (CAR), maintaining their distinctive mores of recruitment and socialization along with different normative and symbolic systems (Cotton et al. 1978: 383-384). Because of the uneveness of change in the CF, traditional military values can come into conflict with occupational trends. Thus, in peacetime armies, the ground combat soldier can feel alienated and surrounded by paper pushers and bureaucrats-in-uniform who do not share his warrior values (Cotton and Pinch 1986: 243).

In the next chapter we described the different normative and symbolic systems of the Canadian army. In examining regimental culture we saw how emphasis was placed on group solidarity and cohesion. As J.C.T. Downey (1977: 62) has written: “An armed force is a body of men organized to achieve its ends irresistibly by coordinated action. Cohesion is therefore the essence of its being.” If the organization is to succeed in battle, cohesion must be encouraged at all levels, from commitment to defend the nation, to
commitment to defend one's buddies under fire. However, exaggerated unit loyalty can lead to dysfunctional behaviour by unit members. We have seen in Chapter 3 how bonds of loyalty can lead members of a regiment or members of smaller units, such as commandos, to protect each other, sometimes by covering up for each other or by setting up walls of silence. Unit pride can become so exaggerated that one only respects the members of one's unit, ignoring and sometimes resenting those outside the group. What is clearly an effective and necessary attitude for the battlefield can then become an exaggerated force which undermines good order and discipline. We have called this force “hyper investment.”

This term was developed by George Devereux in the 1970s to describe the impact of group identity upon the individual. According to Devereux (1978: 162) an individual acquires several group identities throughout his or her lifetime. For example, I am a woman, an anthropologist, born in Canada, with a father who was Protestant, of British origin, etc. Although I share some of these identities with other members of society, the total selection of groups constitutes my uniqueness, that is, no other person will have the same pattern of groups that I have. When an individual becomes “hyper invested” in one group identity then this group identity takes up “more place” in an individual’s total pattern of identities. The other aspects of the individual are then at risk of being subordinated to this dominant identity and the individual loses his or her uniqueness as it is subsumed by one particular group identity.

We have seen that military socialization encourages deindividualization by focusing attention outward, on the group rather than on oneself, thus achieving unity and cohesion. This is because in a combat environment, an unintegrated individual might not only be a danger to himself but a threat to group effectiveness and ultimately group survival. Thus, primary group cohesion promotes motivation and appropriate behaviour in combat. However, intra-group bonding carries with it the danger of creating a we/they dichotomy. Aldous Huxley once wrote: “Loyalty to organization A always entails some degree of suspicion, contempt, or downright loathing of organizations B, C, D. and all the rest” (quoted in Kellett nd). Essentially, as one becomes progressively invested in one identity, one loses the ability to relate to those outside the group who do not share that identity. Again, it depends on which identity is being encouraged. In a combat unit with an emphasis on the warrior identity, this might lead to an ever-widening gap with civilian society. In the army, this might lead to disrespect for other branches of the military who
are not part of the in-group. In a regimental system, this might lead to increased isolation from and disdain for other regiments. Thus, some members of the CAR did not respect "legs" and sometimes refused to even salute officers from other regiments. Another result is that supervisors became too inward looking, being only concerned with discipline in their own unit, thus ignoring possible breakdowns in other units.

In Chapter 4 we saw that even though the CAR were "technically" not an elite unit of the CF, members perceived themselves to be elite and behaved accordingly. Military elites are particularly likely to develop powerful in-group/out-group attitudes. We also observed just how inclusive the three commando units were. Through the structure of the Airborne itself, divided along the parent regimental affiliations, strong in-group identity was allowed to develop, sometimes unchecked. Thus sub-unit individuality was created and reinforced with little mixing among sub-units. This led to an emphasis on sub-unit solidarity at the expense of regimental and army cohesion. This fracturing is particularly important in the case of elements of 2 Commando which became progressively invested in a "rebel" identity.

In Chapter 5 we observed that Somali clan society is also an inclusive society, that is, it rejects outsiders. The sense of social solidarity created by the kinship system means that those outside the system are considered as socially inferior. Non-Somalis, particularly foreigners, are looked down on and regarded with suspicion because they are not bound by rules of reciprocal rights and contractual trust based on descent and kinship. Thus the Somalis had an in-group/out-group attitude which was not unlike that of the Airborne. When the soldiers arrived in theatre, they were rejected as galle (infidel, outsider).

In Chapter 6 we looked at the social organization and physical and psychological stressors associated with the peace-making mission to Somalia. The stressors our interviewees identified included the environmental demands linked to the extreme heat and inadequate living conditions they faced (shortage of water, hard rations for six months, etc.), poor communication with home, training which did not prepare them for what they were about to encounter, fear of physical danger from an "enemy" which was not clearly identifiable, boredom, loneliness and frustration.
THE DEATH OF SHIDANE ARONE

We began our study asking if it was possible to explain what occurred on the eve of March 16, 1993 when Clayton Matchee and Kyle Brown allegedly tortured and beat Shidane Arone. Bendfeldt-Zachrisson's (1985) research describes the mental preparation for torture which is done by emphasizing the “non-humanness” of target groups who are seen as a threat to the common good and by education that emphasizes loyalty to an organization that will protect the individual and maintain secrecy. We have seen how infiltrators were regarded as a serious threat to security by some members of the Airborne. Kellman (1995: 21) writes that torturers believe they are engaged in some higher purpose and they come to see themselves as playing an important role in the protection of the common good. Certainly, some members of the Airborne believed that Somali infiltrators needed to be taught a lesson so they would stop coming into the Canadian camp.

Somalis were dehumanized through the use of such derogatory terminology as “smufty,” “nig nog,” etc. According to Kellman (1989: 19) labels help deprive the victim of identity. Kellman (1989: 15) also tells us that there is a relationship between frustration and aggression. Situationally induced frustration toward the target contributes heavily to violence, but it does so largely by dehumanizing the victim. “Through dehumanization, the actors’ attitudes toward the target and toward themselves become so structured that it is neither necessary nor possible for them to view the relationship in moral terms.” Similarly, Creilsten and Schmid (1995: 9) observe that “the dehumanization of the out-group” is one of the conditions under which torture is likely to occur. Kellman also states that “the main source of dehumanization of the victims is their designation as enemies...” (1995: 31). Grossman (1995: 160) has described the emotional distance necessary for torture to occur and has listed levels of emotional withdrawal which include cultural distance (racial and ethnic difference which permit the killer to dehumanize the victim) and moral distance (the intense belief in moral superiority and in the rightness of vengeful action).

In terms of the final criteria above (education that emphasizes loyalty to an organization that will protect the individual and maintain secrecy) we observed in Chapter 4 a 2 Commando subculture which was hyperinvested in an aggressive rebel identity with strong antipathy for out-groups. In addition to fierce commando loyalty, there was a tradition of protecting each other, which was encouraged by the regimental system. At CFB
Petawawa, in-group loyalty was so strong that authorities were unable to find out who had participated in the car burning incidents. Investigations only encountered a wall of silence concerning a serious breach of discipline. By assuring anonymity through norms of group loyalty, acts of subversion and defiance were facilitated. It would also seem that the mistreatment of Somali prisoners had occurred earlier, prior to March 16th, and these acts had not been sanctioned. Although impossible to know, Clayton Matchee might have felt that he was operating in a permissive atmosphere where his acts were somehow " unofficially" approved. It seems clear that some members of 2 Commando believed that it was OK to beat up a Somali infiltrator in order to teach him a lesson.

We also have to remember that the eve of March 16th was the beginning of the regimental birthday party for the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI). Members of 2 Commando seemed to be in a party mood, which is a more permissive atmosphere and alcohol was flowing. From testimony to the Board of Inquiry and court-martial hearings it is clear that Clayton Matchee had consumed much more than his two beers per day. As we have argued earlier, alcohol does not necessarily relieve tension; in fact, it can be a catalyst in a very "lethal" mix.

If all the factors described in this study contributed to the events of March 16th, why did some members of the Airborne behave as humanitarians and quiet professionals and others not? We have seen that hyperinvestment in a group identity leads to strong in-group/out-group tendencies which in turn can be expressed in varying forms of aggression. Nevertheless, it is important to note that strong group identification can be offset by discipline and leadership. Thus, a truly elite unit with a strong sense of professionalism and discipline would, in fact, be less likely to commit aggressive acts against members of the out-group. This is because the individuals are invested in an identity which has components of self-discipline and ethics embedded in it. In the best of all worlds, Canadian military ethos prescribes this self-discipline and ethical code for all soldiers and officers. Nevertheless, personal discipline, self-control and commitment to high standards of personal conduct need to be continually reinforced. The cultivation of aggressive behaviour needs to be balanced with respect for authority and the rule of law. Priorities need to be clearly established within the regimental collective and within individual units so a healthy balance of loyalties is firmly established. The role of leadership in this is clear: "Leaders are the primary agents by which an organization's culture and role norms are modelled, transmitted, and maintained" (Schein 1985).
SHOULD COMBAT SOLDIERS BE PEACEKEEPERS?

We should keep in mind that the mission to Somalia was not a peacekeeping mission but rather a peace-making mission, that is, an operation other than war which is closer to war than a Chapter VI United Nations peacekeeping mission. There is, however, a heated debate among military professionals and academics about the suitability of combat troops for peacekeeping.

Peacekeeping is an effort to stop two countries from fighting one another. By putting military men between military men there is a certain understanding among people in uniform of what the code of conduct is. If I give my word it will be recognized and respected by my counterparts on the other side. Not to say that civilians don’t have that. The discipline is recognized. They know you have the weapons and you know how to use them too. Peacekeeping is really a military thing (Col LeClerc April 20, 1995, meeting with the Judge Advocate General, Ottawa).

The Board of Inquiry also thought that combat training for Somalia was sufficient to perform peace-making duties in Belet Huen. “The Board found that the Battle Group was very well-trained for its eventual task in Belet Huen because of its general purpose combat capability, the previous training for the contingency task in the Western Sahara, and the comprehensive training it underwent in Petawawa in the fall” (BOI Vol. XI Annex E 1993: 6).

Yet some feel that combat training is not enough. For example, while the military feels that the law of war is enough, Amnesty International maintains that special training is needed to complete its readiness for police duties. “If troops are to carry these policing functions [of arrest, detention, investigation and prosecution] they must abide by and be trained in international standards of policing rather than the practices of war” (Amnesty International cited in Noone 1995: 13). An interesting anecdote related to the author by U.S. military sociologist David Segal describes the different attitudes toward civilians that military and police personnel can have. In describing comments by U.S. infantry soldiers stationed in Somalia, Dr. Segal said that they felt they were less capable than military police of performing certain functions. According to Segal one soldier said: “We’re trained to enter a room and spray it with gunfire, but police are not. When we caught incoming fire, our inclination was to suppress it and let the civilians worry about getting out of
the way. The MPs [military police] were more concerned about civilian casualties" (Segal, personal communication July 1995).

In general, combat units, such as the CAR, have always resisted the constabulary role. When Janowitz (1960) proposed a constabulary model for American soldiers he did remark that the professional soldiers would resist identifying themselves with police-like duties: "[T]he military tends to think of police activities as less prestigious and less honorable tasks" (Janowitz quoted in Miller 1995: 4). One of the interviewees also had very clear ideas about the difference between the police and the military.

Liabilities as well are different for the police and the military. The police, of course, are liable under the Criminal Code for their actions, whereas, in war, the soldier is liable under the Law of War which, although it concerns individual behaviour, it is also individual behaviour in a group. It would be almost impossible to conduct a war if every individual soldier was faced with the same restrictions as the police, or the Criminal Code restrictions on the use of violence. The soldier would have to question himself endlessly if he applied the minimum force, did he shoot to kill or shoot to maim, and that kind of stuff. Questions that indeed soldiers have got to ask themselves when they are in aid to the civil power. So that's the difference. When you're looking at problems in the police, or in problems in the military, they have a similarity in that both deal with very unpleasant facets of existence — violence. But they come at it from very different ways, and are controlled in different ways. The individual policeman has got to have a very good understanding of charges, Criminal Code, that kind of stuff. Whereas what you require of a soldier is that he has discipline in handling his weapon. He doesn't need to have that much individual understanding of the grand principles of why he goes to war.

According to Grimshaw (1995: 9) "the public thinks about clean-cut, fresh-faced stalwart young Canadians representing Canada abroad and doing good." Soldiers, especially infantry soldiers, "tend to think of themselves in a rather more traditional image, of people whose fundamental job is to close with and destroy the enemy." However, an enemy mind set can affect a combat soldier's evaluation of a situation and thus, heighten tension. Canadian combat soldiers have resisted the transition from institutional to occupational. Cotton (1979: 16) noted antipathy from the experienced combat soldier toward the shift in military life from being a vocation to simply another occupation. One can expect even more resistance to constabulary values.
In his observations of the 10th Mountain Division on peace duties in the Sinai, Segal (1995b: 8) noted that "the active duty soldier in the 10th Mountain seem to have a more martial and somewhat less pacific view of peacekeeping than do the soldiers in the composite [unit], most of whom were from the National Guard." Segal's data shows that soldiers did not "gleefully embrace" the peacekeeping role. "Most soldiers in the two units we studied do not believe that peacekeeping missions are appropriate for their units, or that peacekeeping assignments are good for their careers. To be fair, neither did they believe peacekeeping was for civilians. Most soldiers reject the notions of unarmed peace keepers, or of peacekeeping being done by civilians" (Segal 1995b: 12).

Peacekeeping is a military function. It is not the boy scouts, not missionary work. It's situations where you encounter people who are armed, encounter lands which in many cases have been mined. So you have to know these things. You have to know how to use your weapon.

Similarly, many traditionalists believe that the constabulary role is potentially dangerous since it puts emphasis on police-like duties at the expense of conventional military preparedness (Parker 1995: 72). A previous commander of the Canadian army, LGen (ret) Gervais said: "The Army must be a fighting force" (quoted in Parker 1995: 92). These men believe that it is best to train for war and scale down for a peace mission accordingly. This brings us back to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: Is the purpose of the Canadian military to prosecute war or is it to preserve peace? The way one goes about the business of training for an overseas mission will be, in part, determined by the answer to this question.

Studies of the Canadian Forces in the 1990s suggest incompatibilities between conventional war and peace requirements (Eyre 1993, Pinch 1994a). This research shows that combat-trained officers and soldiers require additional non-conventional or special skills and knowledge to be suitably equipped for peace operations, as well as a re-orientation in the use of conventional combat skills. Studies of European peacekeeping forces arrive at the same conclusions. For example, Johansson's (1995: 14) work with Swedish peacekeepers in Bosnia concludes that the preparation and training needs include the tools/knowledge to understand and to deal with situations, rather than traditional military skills or aspects of leadership. This is because soldiers are asked to evaluate and make decisions in peace missions that they would not traditionally be asked to make.
Structural conditions and the ambiguity of recent peacekeeping missions have tended to push some of the decision making down to the individual level. In the absence of policy that can apply to the incredible range of circumstances a soldier might encounter, the common soldier’s personal interpretations of the situation sometimes become at least temporary policy. For this reason, soldiers’ assessments of their mission and their roles can be critical (Miller 1995: 9).

Can training be added on in the couple of months or weeks before a mission or should peace training begin in basic training and continue as a seamless web throughout a soldier’s career? Certainly, this will depend on what Canada decides the major role for the CF will be in the future.

Even though the death of Shidane Arone was the result of the actions of a few, it is simplistic to reduce what happened in March 1993 to the explanation that it was the work of “a few bad apples.” Peace missions (like war) occur in extremely complex environments where any number of factors are at play. It is our belief that what happened in Somalia was the result of cumulative impact, that is, a mixture and accumulation of several factors — poor discipline, alcohol consumption, hyper-investment in a rebel warrior identity, a vision of Somalis as “the enemy,” environmental and psychological stress, and poor leadership — which, when found in combination with each other led to a tragic death. The difficulty in identifying cumulative impact is that no one factor in and of itself may be enough to alert authorities to the danger. One might discipline soldiers for excessive drinking but excuse it as “boys will be boys.” One might notice a breakdown of dress codes when soldiers sport bandanas and knives but ignore it as something small instead of seeing it as an indicator of emerging “Ramboidism.” We have attempted to explain the events of March 1993 from a socio-cultural perspective and found that the roots of the death of Shidane Arone go deep into the past of the Airborne Regiment and into the heart of Airborne regimental culture.
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Belgian sergeants beat and tortured a Somali with electricity. (See Auditorat général, Belgique 1993 and Brodeur 1996).

14 Hate can be described as an attitude or an emotion caused by frustration and involving hostility (Ballard and McDowell 1991: 230).

15 If Miller and Moskos (1995) data from American soldiers are extrapolated from, we can assume that Black soldiers would have adopted a humanitarian response to Somalis.

16 According to Addicott and Hudson (1993: 162) the use of derogatory terms and characterizations of inferiority inure soldiers to killing their enemy.

17 Similarly, Maj Magee testified to the BOI that he looked at well-off Somalis with a “jaundiced eye” because they seemed to be getting all the aid and all the resources, Vol. IV: 1084.

18 There are studies which show that empathy and aggression are inversely related. According to Miedzian (1991: 24) “empathy is considered soft, irrational, effeminate and antithetical to rational hard-nosed thinking.”

19 This quote suggests the role of leadership in what went wrong on the evening of March 16 cannot be overlooked. As we noted earlier, there had already been precedents which suggested that mistreatment of prisoners in order to “teach them a lesson” was tolerated “unofficially” as Kyle Brown (Worthington 1997: 122-124) described it. At Maj Seward’s court-martial, Capt Sox (GCM Maj A.G. Seward, Vol. 2: 336) testified that he believed that the order to “abuse prisoners” meant “to rough up” or “teach a lesson.” Maj Seward (GCM Maj A.G. Seward, Vol. 2: 336) himself testified that he said: “I don’t care if you abuse them, but I want those infiltrators captured.... Abuse them if you have to. I do not want weapons used. I do not want gun fire.” Capt Sox (GCM Maj A.G. Seward, Vol. 2: 348) then went on to tell his men that “we have been tasked to capture and abuse prisoners.” Sgt Hiller (GCM Pte D.J. Brocklebank, Vol. 2: 348) testified at Pte Brocklebank’s court-martial that Capt Sox said that if a prisoner resisted “you could beat the shit out of him.” After receiving his instructions, Sgt Boland (GCM Maj A.G. Seward, Vol. 3: 413) reportedly told MCpl Matchee, a member of his section “that Capt Sox had given orders that prisoners were to be abused.”

CHAPTER 7 — CONCLUSIONS

1 Even in peacetime, cohesion had been found to be conducive to enhanced military performance. See Kellett (nd).

2 For details on the dehumanization of victims see Grossman 1995.

3 Israeli research indicates that the risk of death for a kidnap victim is much greater if the victim is hooded. Cultural distance is another form of emotional hooding that can work just as effectively according to Grossman (1995: 161).
4 Training in basic human skills is needed for peace missions. Unfortunately, as Col Oehring (February 17, 1995) has pointed out: "young officers and NCMs in the Canadian Army have never been taught basic human interaction techniques."

5 Johansson (1995: 14) found that the qualities of good peacekeepers are flexibility, patience, humility, diplomacy, tolerance, adaptability, staying powers and an ability to stand the strain.
The Canadian Airborne Regiment in Somalia: A Socio-cultural Inquiry

Donna Winslow

This study examines how military culture, and particularly that of the Canadian Airborne Regiment, affected the behaviour of Canadian soldiers in Somalia. It argues that the events which occurred in Somalia in 1993 can be traced to contradictions within the military establishment (due to the tension between the traditional, or combat, paradigm and the modern, or bureaucratic/occupational, paradigm); to the culture and organization of the Airborne combat unit; and to the situational contingencies that arose from the external environment in Somalia. Material was gathered from visual records, personal and official documents and studies on other national forces in Somalia, and on Canadian peacekeeping operations elsewhere. The interpretations and analysis in this study are based on more than 50 in-depth interviews and focus groups held with military personnel who were deployed to Somalia.

Donna Winslow is an award-winning anthropologist and associate professor at the University of Ottawa. She received her PhD from the Université de Montréal and has done field work around the globe. Dr. Winslow has published numerous articles on national identity and indigenous knowledge of the environment.

Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of Canadian Forces to Somalia