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INTERVIEWEE: Mark Watson

INTERVIEWER: Angus Brown

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Commander Mark B. Watson

Interviewed 19 February 2007

By Angus Brown

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum Oral History Program interview with Commander Mark Watson on 19 February 2007 at Ottawa, Ontario. Interviewed by Angus Brown. Tape one, side one.

WATSON: My name is Commander Mark B. Watson W-A-T-S-O-N.

INTERVIEWER: Just want to confirm we have both signed the legal release.

WATSON: Yes, we did.

INTERVIEWER: Can you give me some biographical background on yourself?

WATSON: Yes. I was born on September 8th in 1964 in Fredericton, New Brunswick. I joined the Canadian Forces around June 1983. I did my training at CFOCS in Chilliwack, British Columbia followed by Regular Officer Training Program at Royal Roads Military College in Victoria, British Columbia from 1983 to 1985, followed by the Royal Military College from 1985 to 1987, graduating in 1987 with an honors degree in history and political science. I then went off to do my sea time, starting with some tours in the mine sweepers but did my major time as a systems supply officer serving on the HMCS HURON followed by being a supply officer—first supply officer—on the HMCS VANCOUVER. I then went ashore to Maritime Command Headquarters in the Comptroller Branch. During that time I was deployed.

I was the first Canadian to be deployed on a NATO foreign logistics site in Gritalia, Italy to support ships and Operation SHARP GUARD. Coming back, I went back to the Comptroller Branch where afterwards I was promoted to lieutenant commander. Went off the supply officer HMCS ATHABASKAN for a two year period. After that, I was picked up to do post graduate training at St. Mary's University where I got my Master's of Business Administration. At the same time, I did my Master's in War Studies at the Military College, completing that in 2002. At the same time, I also wrote my first book. I've written numerous articles. The book was called *Sea Logistics : Keeping the Fleet Ready, Aye, Ready.* So I've done a fair bit of writing. Graduating year 2000 from St. Mary's University, I went to Ottawa where I worked in the Comptroller Branch as well as Director of Maritime Strategy. Finished there in 2002 when I went off to Canadian Forces College in Toronto to do staff college for one year. Upon graduating there, in 2003, I went back to Halifax as a formation administrative officer for a three year period.

In 2006 I was deployed to Darfur—El Fasher, Darfur—as part of the Operation AUGURAL, the Canadian Forces contribution to the African Union Mission in Darfur.

INTERVIEWER: And what have you done since you've come back?

WATSON: I've just returned. I came back home after five months being deployed, a couple weeks early because I had a compassionate case – my mother passed away. I'd taken leave and I'm now presently occupied as J-4 plans in Canada Command.

INTERVIEWER: Any idea why you were selected to go on that mission?

WATSON: It was an interesting reason. I'd been trying to get deployed for numerous years. Every time I volunteered I was always told by my bosses it was not time for you, you have to wait, that we have other plans for you. When it came up to mission to, UNMIS, United Nations Mission Sudan, and in spring of 2006 I volunteered. And because there was another commander who volunteered at the same time, I was number two on the [indistinct word] so I was denied. When it came time to be deployed on the African Mission in Sudan, which is different—it's the African Union Mission as opposed to the UN mission—the navy was ordered to provide a body. The first time they came to the navy I was the only one available. I put up my hand and I was told I could not go. There were only two other commanders on the coast who were of the rank and qualification. One had just finished deploying to Haiti. The other one was being deployed, or being sent, to the United States. So the navy offered me up. And my future boss who was being posted at CEF Com said 'no.'

The navy was then ordered once again by CEF Com, which is the Canadian Expeditionary Forces Command, to provide a commander. The navy, once again, said, "We only have one body eligible." And the third time it came down they said, "Give us a body." and once again the navy said, "We have one person available, eligible and interested, Commander Watson." That was in the middle of June. I was deployed within four weeks after that. It was a pier head jump, as we say in navy, in that when I volunteered I was also in the process of moving my family. Less than ideal circumstances. So I moved my family from Halifax to Ottawa, did my training when my bags were being packed, literally, in Halifax. And got here, unloaded my family, left the boxes in the house and was deployed to Sudan.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about your pre-deployment training, such as it was.

WATSON: Well, because I was volunteered with very short notice, there mustn't much. But there was still a requirement for everyone being deployed to do what is called a DAG, can't remember what the abbreviation stands for.

INTERVIEWER: Departure Assistance Group

WATSON: Yes. And this mission was unique. And a lot of things I thought I should have, I didn't. The main thing they were concerned about was getting me on a course to

Kingston, you know, a five day course for peace deployment operations. However, because this is not a UN mission—it was an African Union mission—there were a lot of things that were left out. There were no ROE—rules of engagement—because I found out we were unarmed, which caused a lot of consternation for a lot of people including my wife and family and did cause problems later on in the mission. There were a lot of things—NBC training—and all that we had to go through. And a lot of times it was just checking boxes. Because of my rank and position in Halifax I was given – things that would take two or three days, they were walking me through very quickly. Defensive driving course took one hour as opposed to one day. I went out there, tried a gas mask on, as opposed to having to go through the hut. They just said, "Sir, don't worry. Sign off." So I did my pre-deployment checklist very quickly.

There were no briefings, so I went straight from being a naval officer in Halifax to getting CADPAT tans, arid CADPATs, a five day course in Kingston—half of which was decided to be exempt from because we had no ROEs. And there were certain lectures that were not required because we were not being deployed to Afghanistan. To being sent over there, I did receive all the inoculations and medicals. Unfortunately, even though I did have first aid training which I did get before I left, when I arrived over there several months into theatre CEF Com said, "Where's your UNMO kit?" United Nations medical observers medical kit. There was no blood supply in Darfur and there was no medical support, really, that Canada deemed acceptable. And so when I came back on my HLTA—home leave travel assistance—in October, I actually had to go back to Kingston to learn medical stuff. And, it turns out, all I really needed was one hour to talk to a doctor. So I wasted three hours there. So it was a very disjointed pre-deployment. A lot of things I should have had, such as briefings, were never given to me. And especially when I was a senior officer off in a Region, it would have been beneficial. But none of that happened.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any kind of briefing about the situation? The geo-political situation, I mean.

WATSON: During Kingston you were give one two and a half hour briefing it, on the situation in Darfur. However, there are two missions in Sudan. One is a United Nations mission looking after about 25,000 UN observers in the southern portion of Sudan, which was the longest conflict in Sudan – in Africa, I should say. And the other one was on Darfur. And this mission, because no one had provided information and there was no website or anything about the African Union, 90% of the information provided to us was about the southern Sudan, not about the western Sudan, which is a different conflict, different geography, and a different type of people.

INTERVIEWER: So you weren't well prepared, or were you?

WATSON: No. I don't think so. We weren't well prepared when we were deployed. There were a lot of courses and things we should have had as senior Canadians going over there. There should have been some briefings. I should have received – I should have met some key players in Ottawa. But none of that was provided.

INTERVIEWER: How many people went at the same time as you?

WATSON: The entire mission, it's a very disjointed mission once again. There are three detachments, if you will, supporting the mission. You have to go to Ethiopia and Addis Ababa and that is where the task force commander—in this case Lieutenant Colonel Dave Patterson, a Reservist from Kingston—was deployed with a support team of maybe anywhere from six to eight people. There was another detachment of only two people in Khartoum, Sudan, and they were providing support or advice, if you will, if they're ever invited by the Africans to the mission headquarters. Then there was the forward mission in El Fasher, Darfur, which is right at the front lines, if you will, right in the conflict zone and there were a total of three people there. Occasionally, a fourth person would come down from Canadian Armed Forces. There was myself, a major who was a Logistics officer and I'm a Logistics background, sea logistics. We had an electrical mechanical engineer, a master warrant officer and occasionally we had a combat arms type, normally infantry come down for anywhere from a three to eight week period, if they could get visas.

INTERVIEWER: Can you explain to me what your job was there?

WATSON: The AMIS mission was a very different mission. There was about 7,500 soldiers and civilian police there and their goal was to oversee a peace agreement between one of the rebel forces and the Government of Sudan. However, there was not just one rebel force. There was anywhere from six or seven. And during my stay there, I think, two new rebel groups started up. Canada was a huge proponent of the African Mission in Sudan for a variety of political reasons. Canada was the third largest monetary contributor and we also provided the largest – we provided 105 armored vehicles, general purpose vehicles. We provided all the fuel for the helicopters. We provided the contract for Skylink, which is the helicopter provider. So there was 25 MI-8 helicopters there that Skylink was running. We also provided the flak jackets, the helmets, all this stuff. So Canada wanted to be visible on the ground.

So what they started up to try to co-ordinate all the resources of all the entire force was something called the Joint Logistics Operation Centre, JLOC. When the mission was stood up, it was a very small mission composed simply of some peace observers called the Ceasefire Commission, that only had maybe a couple hundred people. It then grew to include a police force of maybe 1500 and then a military component of roughly 6,000. The problem was that the military component did not talk to the Sudan police. And they did not necessary talk to their political masters.

The European Union, Canada, United States wanted to try and make the mission more efficient. So what they did was create a joint logistics operation cell. And that would be coordinating all the logistics support. For example, in a camp you'd have a camp commandant who is military and a camp commandant police. They may not talk to each other and they both have their own resources. So the partner nations, as the western countries were referred to, provided all the funding for the African Union, directed that

the African Union set up a JLOC, a Joint Logistics Operation Cell, which would coordinate all the supplies. Or that was the idea.

The Africans didn't really like the idea until the advisors were sent in. And I was one of the – my position was one of the senior advisors to go in there. And I was directly responsible for the chief logistics officer, who was a retired Ghanaian colonel, to provide advice to him on how to make the mission more efficient. Inside the centre, if you will, are about two dozen people. When the western countries put their advisors in, the Africans then felt obliged to backfill with people that we could advise. And that happened about eight months before I arrived there. In this JLOC, as I said, there was about two dozen plus people there. There were about seven or eight western advisors. There were two Canadians, two Swedes, one Brit, one American, and then all the troops we had we had to beg, borrow and steal because the general did not necessarily like the civilian police commissionaire nor the political head. So, if we wanted to get anything done, we actually had to beg, borrow or steal from the general who may not like the Ghanaian retired colonel. It was a very dysfunctional headquarters which we tried to provide advice as best as we can.

So my job, I guess, was two fold. One, I was to provide – actually, it was three fold. One, it was to provide advice to the chief logistics officer for the African Mission. Two, was to look after the two other Canadians that were there as the senior officer present. And three, was to look after Canadian interests as the front line. My reporting chain was directly back to Ethiopia, to Addis Ababa and Lieutenant Colonel Patterson who reported back up to CEF Com. So I was on the front line.

It made for some interesting anecdotes in that at the front lines in El Fasher there's a naval officer, an air force officer and then back in El Fasher, which was command segment, they wore jackets and ties to work and were all the combat arms types. So the navy guys were in tents, in air conditioning, not having enough food, wearing combats, while all the combat arms, who are normally the gung-ho people, are all wearing jackets and ties to work, working nine to five with two days off. We worked seven days a week throughout the entire duration of the deployment. There were no amenities whatsoever. Upon arrival it was try to pick up the work. There were no briefings, no debriefings, and it quickly became apparent that the mission was not as efficient as anywhere it should be or could be.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned partner nations, the western nations who were providing advisors and assistance. Could you outline how many there were?

WATSON: Well, Canada was the third largest contributor. Largest being, the first largest was the Americans, by a lot of money. I don't remember how much. Probably the Americans – when I arrived there, there was about five Americans—a couple of lieutenant colonels, air force and army and some majors. By the time I left there, there was no more Americans because the Americans were slowly being weeded out by the Sudanese government in that they were not being able to get any visas. When I arrived in Africa, I had to go to Ethiopia for to meet my future boss and I spent about two weeks

there waiting for my visa. When I left, my replacement hadn't received his and he'd been waiting about six or seven weeks.

INTERVIEWER: This was the visa to get into Sudan?

WATSON: Yes. And the Americans were basing American people out of Djibouti. And when I arrived, like I said, there was about five of them. And there plans were to eventually go from anywhere from 11 to 17 people. But the Sudanese government kept on vetoing any of their visas. So, when I left, the last American left Djibouti just before I did. And they weren't being replaced simply because there weren't any visas. So that was the American contingent.

The next largest contingent was the European Union. The European Union sent people there not as an individual one, or not as individual countries, but as part of an overall European Union. There was a French brigadier general, a British lieutenant colonel and an Italian full colonel. And they're put in to advise on the CFC, originally the Ceasefire Commission. And they were eventually moved over when the advisors wanted to make it a more efficient organization by setting it up what's called a Joint Operations Centre. Which was to bring all the command components in so they could actually talk to each other as opposed to having a command component for the police force, a command component for the army; either to [indistinct word] meet or talk, but put them together. And that's where these three advisors were coming in. Even after two or three months trying to get it to work, the African generals refused to provide any bodies because he saw it as providing bodies would lessen his power. So they were advisors, but they did not have anyone really to advise.

We were pretty good in the JLOC in that the people who at least I advised, and the other Canadians, we were at least listened to and brought in to meetings. So you have the Americans. The other Europeans—there were two or three more, or three or four more, in the JLOC, a Brit and two Swedes—and they provided advice. One of the Swedes was a lieutenant colonel who provided advice to the deputy chief of JLOC who was a Beninian full colonel, who was pretty incompetent. And then there was a major from Sweden who developed the IT section, the information technologies. He did a great job because we had very poor communications.

When people think of the AU mission, this was the very first time they'd done any major peace keeping operation of its own. It was a very poverty-stricken mission in that they could only do something when countries gave them money to do so. They had no real advanced weaponry or advanced SOPs. It was being run very much on a poverty level. We ran out of food numerous times. Whenever they wanted to do anything, they had to ask for the partners to give them funds. And a lot of times they'd blame Canada, not for giving the funds, but trusting the AU to actually spend the money. Why are you giving money to the African Union? You should be keeping the money and paying for it yourself because the Africans had not been paid for anywhere from two to four months. They had run out of food numerous times. It was a very backwards mission. In fact, we looked forward to the United Nations coming into take over the mission because we

thought they'd be so much more efficient. Anyone who's worked with the United Nations realizes it's not that efficient. But compared to the African Union, it was a huge difference.

INTERVIEWER: Well, was the donated money and supplies just going astray through corruption, or did they have genuine logistics problems?

WATSON: They had financial problems. There was corruption there. I don't know what level it would be for the money. For the money itself, it was given to the Dutch and the Dutch, I think, were paying for the people's pay. The people that were there were not only getting their regular money, they were getting their daily subsistence allowance. MSA it was called.

INTERVIEWER: These were soldiers?

WATSON: Soldiers. And the police they were getting roughly – an observer, a military observer, and a lot of them were—all the officers were military observers—and all the Sudan police were getting $96, I think it was, US a day, which was huge. The average major in Rwanda gets $500 US a month. So you can see they were really keen to get this money. If you're part of the protection force, which means you're just a simple soldier, you got $500 US a month – still good money for a Rwandan, actually the equivalent of a major's salary on top of their regular salary. But this is meant to pay for their food, so they were quite upset when the food didn't arrive and everything else. We're paying, I believe, their MSA. And that's going into a bank in, I believe, Holland. But there were problems because the Sudanese government was trying to disrupt the mission as much as possible and hinder it. So the money transferring hands so many times was problematic.

The Sudanese government was putting up as many barriers as it could to make the mission as problematic as possible. A lot of it – the kit that we provided from Canada was far beyond what the Africans were used to in a lot of areas. A lot of the troops – being a naval officer was interesting. I recognized numerous problems and my understanding of army tactics is basic – basic by Canadian standards but probably moderate to high by African standards. And that's something that quickly became apparent.

Let me give a couple of examples. Canada provided armored personnel carriers, or AVGPs, armored vehicle general purpose; 105 of these Grizzlies which were meant for carrying troops. Well, the Africans did not put troops inside them. They only put a driver and a gunner. And anywhere where these AVGPs went, they had to be escorted by open back or soft skin Toyota trucks with 12 guys in them. They were fully exposed. So one time there was an ambush and two Rwandans got killed and an AVGP got destroyed by blowing up an enemy, if you will, rebel force vehicle. Two of the people inside the Toyota truck got killed because they were fully exposed. They would never put people inside the personnel carriers because they couldn't figure how to dismount them. As one American trainer – and I'll explain what they do – explained you have to pretend this is mostly militaries from 200 years ago. And because Canada gave them AVGPs – they were only given a two or maybe three week training course. You cannot expect them to

be put in an AVGP and drive and fire at the same time as us now. The best you can hope for is they can drive it, stop it and fire.

So it was very basic. But by putting these people in these soft skin vehicles, you're exposing them to all the elements. And it just baffled the mind that we had to go to the range, and these armored vehicles—which had fair, adequate protection against small fire—had to be escorted by a variety of Toyota trucks with six to ten soldiers being exposed. And it just did not make sense here; so back off. It was just weird.

The other thing, too, I should mention is when I said there were no Americans, there were no American serving military. There were numerous retired Special Service Forces personnel under the pay of the State Department employed by PAE, which is Pacific Architect Engineers, which was the contractor—the prime contractor—for the mission. These people were being paid and they would advise the various African countries on how to do business. But they wore uniforms without any rank and they were the advisors. And there was the occasional Brit. I think they had two Brits were military advisors but they were not military.

INTERVIEWER: And in what area would they advise?

WATSON: Tactics. So they went on patrols with them. We were not allowed to go on patrols with them but the Americans did. I became very good friends with a number of these guys and they were on contract to provide support to the Africans as best as they could. They did not fight. They were unarmed just as we were. But they provided them on how to properly attack, lead formations, range practice and all that stuff.

INTERVIEWER: So they were under contract to the African Union, or to individual countries?

WATSON: No. It was through the State Department. And then, I'm not sure how it worked with the Americans. There were a lot of things they didn't want to talk about—how they got paid, offshore billing and all that stuff. But we knew them and we worked out with them in my little gym. And I saw them every day because there were very few western—or white—people there. Outside of the military uniformed people, the dozen of us, the only other people that were white in the region were the NGOs—non government organizations. The civilians contractor provided logistics support for anywhere from these six to twelve ex-military.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me how the JLOC worked, and some of the problems?

WATSON: Well, before I get into to that, I should explain how we were supported. This mission, every which way you can look at it, was unique and different. There was no logistical support, period, for any of the African countries. When they came over to Darfur they brought troops and maybe rifles. So there's no common service support, as we say. There were no mechanics for the most part. There were no cooks, very, very limited medical services. So what the African Union did was contract PAE, Pacific

Architect Engineers, and they were the one who built the tents, ran the camps, fed the people. And they sub-contracted a lot of stuff out. So they sub-contracted the food. And we were in the middle of the desert; there was nothing on the local economy, so everything had to be flown in. So there were a couple of contracts out for that on the African Union. And they flew in all the food, all the fuel and everything else.

JLOC was the interface between the mission and the private contractor. And once a week, if we convinced the Africans to meet with PAE, we'd meet to try and discuss the problems. We would get all kinds of problems sent to us and we had no resource to change it. Everyone complained about the food. We sat down with PAE and said, "Can you improve the food?" They said, "Yes, give us more money." And we'd turn around and we'd have no money because partners wouldn't give any more money.

We regularly ran out of fuel for our air flights. Because another contractor was Skylink, which was a Canadian contractor. Bob Waring was an ex-military guy who oversaw that and it was good from my perspective as a Canadian because I was being brought in the know for everything to do with Skylink, with JLOC, Canadian interests, AVGP. So I was very much in the know, if you will, for the entire mission. But for the JLOC itself, it was problematic because we didn't have any resources to fall back on except our good will and trying to coordinate things. Our job was to try and coordinate things as much as possible and facilitate answers and share things out. But it didn't really work in that way all the time.

One of our major things was refueling. We had 25 helicopters in the Darfur region. Canada had bought a fuel truck, OK. Unfortunately, this fuel truck kept on being commandeered by the Government of Sudan. The Government of Sudan is one that legends live for. At the same air field you have the AMIS airplanes or contracted helicopters. You have the Government of Sudan attack helicopters 50 feet away, as well as their bombers. We had a curfew that finished roughly, depending on who you talk to, anywhere from seven to ten at night. And numerous times the GOS would go out and steal from our helicopter fuel to put in theirs. There was only two refuelers in El Fasher, the camp in Darfur. One was always broken. And it was given to a private company called Matthews. Well, Matthews had arranged with Canada, and I believe it was Canada, to get a refueler, a brand new one. Well, this refueler which had a big sign, said AMIS, was a regular refueler of the Government of Sudan bombers which were now going to drop bombs on local villages. And sometimes these villages were only ten minutes away. And refuel attack helicopters. So what you have here is the Canadian government paid, or bought, a refueler that has AMIS signage on it that people would see was going to refuel attack bombers or attack helicopters that would kill innocent civilians or the rebels who were trying to keep peace. So we had lost a great perception of neutrality because of this. It took us – six months from the day we got there we finally removed the signs of AMIS and forced Matthews Petroleum Company not to use that to refuel the Government of Sudan. And I sort of felt sorry for the guys because, as one of the managers, a local manager said, "What am I supposed to do? The government shows up, they point a rifle at me, they say, 'Refuel my truck or we shoot you.'" So there wasn't much we could do and there was a lot of political problems in that. But that was

just one of the areas we were trying to solve. And that took a great amount of effort just to resolve a simple problem like that.

INTERVIEWER: The Government of Sudan was pretty much against the AMIS force, wasn't it? From what you tell me, they seem to put a lot of obstacles in your way.

WATSON: They, the Sudanese government wanted the African Union in there because they could control the African Union better than they could control the United Nations. And the African Union had so many problems they could work around it. The African Union did not patrol at night when a lot of the bombings took place, some of the movements took place. They did not have enough weapon systems, did not have enough people. So by having a small force there, they were able to – I don't want to say overwhelm them, but they were able to do things just by ignoring them. The one thing they did not want to do was have an efficient, effective force in the region, one that was well led. This unit, even though there were some excellent officers in the AU—I saw several of them from Ghana especially, some South Africans and the occasional, very occasional, Nigerian—for the most part there was bad leadership at the top of the mission.

In fact, when I arrived there—and I can't remember his name—the general was about three months into his relieve due to incompetency. And normally when a general, a three star general's, relieved it is because he wants to come back into his home country to enter politics or for personal reasons. He was given 72 hours and the message was he was relieved for his incompetency. I mean, that's actually what the letter said. And so it's clear that on the top level we had a very problem with leadership. And the only people that were pushing the envelope a lot of times were the advisors. And you can only push so long until you get a little upset. The lack of strong leadership had become so strongly ingrained long before we got there. Even when they had a new general show up, he had given up within about three weeks after getting there because he couldn't change anything. And he became very tribal. One time I remember him talking to Bob Waring—Bob Waring, the Skylink manager—and said, "I need to have more weapons, I need to have more ammunition. I need to protect my troops." Bob turned around and said, "Well, who are your troops?" "Nigerians." "What about the Senegalese and the Rwandans? "Don't care about them." That's from the force commander. So, different.

INTERVIEWER: You said that you were not armed and that became a problem at one time. Can you elaborate?

WATSON: Yes. When I was deployed I found out I did not have to do weapons training, which was fine. This was the first peacekeeping mission I had been on. And I joked to my wife they issued me a Gerber. A Gerber is a mechanical tool and that was my only peacekeeping weapon, if you will, self-defense weapons. We got there and we didn't have weapons. We were in a compound called Camp Zamzam, about six or seven kilometres on the other side of airport in the capital of Darfur, El Fasher. So we were well protected by Rwandans and we had the AGVPs like in Europe. But we had no personal weapons. Some of the other western countries did have their own cache of

weapons for self defense, notably the Americans. I knew that by talking to them. But they would not advertise it nor did they carry them regular. But their compound had fencing around it. They had an armed guard there and they had a C-130 flown in—a Hercules—to drop off some required kit. By the end of September, no one knew what was happening with the mission because its mandate was ending and we were preparing to exit. Unfortunately, there was no exit strategy so one of my jobs at JLOC was to come up with one. And I came up with the exit strategy only because no one else was willing to do it. And technically, I was supposed to advise someone how to do it. But no one was willing to do the work. So what it came down to was Major Aaron Spot [sp?], who worked for me—the Canadian—myself and a British major actually came up with the exit strategy because no one else was willing to put their words to paper. So we put up together a 60, 70 page document that probably would not pass any staff college in Canada but was an ideal document in Africa. In fact, because it was thick, the Africans thought it was great, not necessarily what was the content. No one actually reviewed it to my knowledge but at least it started the ball rolling. And we hoped eventually that someone in J-5 plans—there was no J-5 plans—someone would actually take this and make it a living document to review in case we ever turn over to the UN or withdraw. At least we put something in place.

Anyways, at the end of September, there was concerns what would be happening to us. And there was great concerns whether the Canadians in Darfur should be withdrawn or not. Time came, time passed and no on withdrew us even though there was great concern in Ottawa. Eventually we had a visit from the CEF Com over there and they found out there was no blood supply. So, if I got injured or one of the other Canadians got hurt, we could have bled out before we actually got back to any place that was a hospital. Canada decided that I was not allowed to leave El Fasher at that point because there were concerns that if I got out I would have been shot, or could have got shot, which was a possibility. And I could have bled out. And due to the political ramifications to Canada – we'd just lost a major in Lebanon and the people in Afghanistan, they wanted to protect us as much as possible. So we were ordered to stay within our camp in the town. We never went into town because dysentery and cholera were going on at that time so I forbid the Canadians to go down there. So we simply ate the food that was sent to us by our wives and everyone else.

Things were starting to heat up by the end of November. We were restricted in camp and some of the incidents that happened locally – the internally displaced personnel, about 100,000 of them on both sides of El Fasher were becoming a little agitated and we received word in early December that the African Union would be targeted. Not by IDPs but from some of the rebel forces that saw us too closely aligned with the Government of Sudan. And I had been asked several times before then what would be my triggers to getting us out. And I said, if the United Nations pulls out, if we're being targeted, if one of the western parties was attacked on purpose. And it was clear in early December that that was happening. I was given word that El Fasher might be attacked, the AU would be identified as targets and the UN would be withdrawing its people within 24 hours. So Canada – I made the decision and I told Lieutenant Colonel Dave Patterson—or recommended to him because he had the authority to pull me out—and Lieutenant Paul

Pickle, “Let’s evacuate to Khartoum,” which made Canada happy because we were no longer in the site.

The Swedish evacuated a medical team. There were, I think, six medical civilians there and they pulled them out when we pulled out. This caused some concern because the Africans wanted to know why we were withdrawing. And I said, “Well, the UN’s withdrawing. I’m a non-essential personnel and so are my people. And the contractors are withdrawing their non-essential people so we’re taking the precaution.” There was some angst with that because as my major said, he did not want to go. And I understand his rationale. He wanted to stay and see things where it’s at. This is the first time Canada has ever withdrawn from a theatre. We left the Italians and French in place. So there was a little back and forth. But when we got to Khartoum we spent about five days there and I had various e-mails from my Swedish counterpart who said, “You’re right. You should have probably left,” because what happened during that period was our camp had been attacked by internally displaced peoples—IDPs—and they burned down these little two stores at the outskirts. On one of the other afternoons at camp some of the African Union soldiers actually shot some unarmed civilians because the rioting had got so bad. And there had been a Nigerian major who was abducted. We’re not sure if it was because he was African Union or if he was involved in criminal activity. It hadn’t been solved by the time I left. So no African Union soldiers were killed but it was a very tense situation for a week period, at which time I had withdrawn the Canadians.

Around that period I remember receiving a phone call from the United Nations mission in Sudan who was overseeing it. Their chief of staff was Lieutenant Colonel Cameron, who was a Canadian. And she phoned me one time saying, “OK, New York’s looking at the rules of engagement for AMIS.” And I said I’d get back to them. “And I [Cameron] was wondering what kind of ROE and what kind of weaponry you have.” And I said, “I have no ROE and I have no weapons.” And she almost blew a gasket because even in Khartoum where the UN was, and where she was, the Canadian compound had small arms. And here I was in the front lines totally unarmed. And she could not believe that Canada sent us up there without any kind of self protection whatsoever. So Canada never did arm their people up there because there was an agreement, I assume, in place before I received there saying that there would be unarmed advisors. But I think in hindsight it would have been good if they’d put a little cachet in just for our own self defense. That was made a recommendation as I was leaving theatre but I’m not sure if it was ever followed up.

INTERVIEWER: In your duties at the JLOC did you have occasion to travel out from El Fasher to any of the AU contingents?

WATSON: In the first half of the mission Canada did not put any restrictions on me and I was able to travel anywhere whenever I wanted to. I was planning on doing a lot of that my second part of my trip—my tour of duty—but I found out that eventually I was cloistered. My travel restrictions were— I had a lot of travel restrictions imposed by Canada. So, for the first part of the tour of duty I did get out to Nyala, which is a large city in south Darfur. And Misteria to what was called one of these military group sites.

There were about 35 of these group sites throughout the region. And then I started sending my master warrant officer to do evaluations on training for the AVGPs. And he went to half a dozen sites before I was told to cease sending him outside our wire, or our area, just out of the risk zones. The MGS sites were, like I said, 35 sites that had Rwandans, Senegalese, South Africans and Nigerians in charge. And they were anywhere from a company size, about 130 people or so, to two company sizes maybe.

INTERVIEWER: Sorry, what type of site was that?

WATSON: It's called MGS, military group site. And we had about eight sectors—six sectors, I'm forgetting now—and two of those were taken over by Rwandans, two by Nigerians, one Senegalese and one South African. So there's six sectors. And each sector had anywhere from three to four group sites in that area.

I went to a place called Misteria where the Nigerians were and saw what they had. It was a very small camp. And you have to remember that this mission was very poor so no camp had any amenities. In my camp which was headquarters for the sector as well as a transit area, there was a total of one TV for 600 people. There was no gymnasium. There was no canteen. There was no mess per se. There was an eating area and the food was horrendous. By Canadian standards, it would be unacceptable. But for the Africans, they had to eat there. And numerous times we ran out of food at these MGS sites because we just couldn't fly it up there. So they had to eat what was available and a lot of times some of the Africans ate the dog or whatever there was locally.

And we often had numerous discussions on how we could stop the Africans from eating or killing animals inside their tents and eating the food. And as one African light colonel told me, "You cannot tell us to stop this. We like the smell of the freshly killed food on our fingers. It is part of our culture." So my colonel refused—or my retired colonel refused—to do anything about it. And he said, "That's just the way it is. Let's just try to make sure it doesn't happen too often, or at least it's controlled." And the camp commandant for the camp headquarters, I remember having a discussion with him. He says, "Look, they don't do it inside the camp. I tell them to go outside the camp to kill the dogs and the other stuff."

So we ran out of food and there's no amenities. What we did at Canada is I tried to work as closely with trying to improve the quality of life for the soldiers. At my camp, Camp Zamzam it was, besides the transients—people coming in and out of theatre—were the Rwandans, a company of Rwandans. And every Friday night we had an LCD projector and I hooked it up to some speakers and we actually showed a video on the side of a tent. And I said, "At least that's something for these guys to do." So the first night I remember we had about 400 people come out and watch. Sound wasn't that great but it was there. And most of the Rwandans couldn't speak English anyways. They either spoke Swahili or the occasional person spoke French. But it was something for them to do. They thought it was great. And I said to the other two Canadians, "Maybe we'll do this on a weekly basis. We'll do it every Friday." And the next day I talked to one of the majors who was working for a Rwandan and he said, "Sir, that was great. Why don't you do that

every day of the week?" And I said, "No, you're the major. You have the LCD projectors in our stores here. Why aren't you guys doing this?" Of course, he didn't answer and walked away. But we were trying to set the example so these guys could actually realize that they should try to build up the morale of their own troops. But it was beyond comprehension.

Even to advertise this one film night we tried putting up posters and I handed out posters to the officers. I told them to tell their men, and they kind of looked at me like, why should we tell our men this is happening? So it eventually got out by word of mouth and people saw this big screen that we were doing it. And it came after about five or six weeks people really wanted it; it was a big moral booster for these people. But it was little things like that that it was phenomenal that no one would take the initiative. So all these troops at night, hundreds of them, would just walk up and down inside the camps at night holding hands. There was nothing for the troops to do. And not having them paid for a couple months was very, very bad for these guys. We tried to do what we could.

INTERVIEWER: If Canada supplied 100 AVGPs and the capability—mechanical capability—of the troops was as low as you describe, how did that work?

WATSON: Canada brought over, had loaned over 100 AGVPs and a mobile repair vehicle called the Husky to the African Union. The repair contract was given through PAE—Pacific Architects Engineering—to MCAVS, which is the Military Canadian Armored Vehicles in Sudan, which is sub-contracted out. MCAVS had about 60 or 70 people employed and their contract was paid by the Canadian government. The Canadian government paid the American State Department who paid PAE who gave the money to MCAVS. Their budget was fairly robust as opposed to PAE. PAE got money building camps, not for sustaining them. The MCAVS vehicles were a built in contract so that as long as they kept on going, the MCAVS were making a profit. So they actually had a fairly robust budget. Most of the MCAVS personnel were ex-Canadian military—or a large portion were ex-Canadian military—or had worked with Canadians in Afghanistan.

It's interesting to note when I first got there they lost so many Canadians, or so many personnel at MCAVS who were either fired or had given up their jobs to go back to Kandahar or Afghanistan, because the working conditions in Afghanistan were so much better than in Sudan. Because there were no amenities for these guys. There was no kitchen. We cooked outside for the first three months that I was there in a little pot.

So there was a contract for these guys and they did the repairs for all these vehicles. The problem was they were not supposed to leave the camps. So, if the vehicle broke down, they were not supposed to go and pick it up. We had to figure out how to get it back. And these people were all civilians so they shouldn't be put under threat of any fire. Well, one of the problems we had was that we had no recovery vehicles. So if one of these vehicles got destroyed, which did happen, we could not pull it back. So that created another problem. And I wrote a memo saying—a letter—saying we should buy three or four recovery vehicles. And it was never actioned.

Anyways, one time we had the Rwandans go on a patrol and they were ambushed for some of the rebels trying to get some of the fuel. In that skirmish, two Rwandans eventually died and one of our AVGPs ran over a Land Rover that had about 12 people in it and an extra fuel tank. Going above the Land Rover, crushed it, killing all the occupants I've been told, and then the vehicle itself exploded. The AVGP was destroyed and actually fused together with the Land Rover. Canada wanted to get the AVGP back, and they told me that you have to get this back because we don't want to leave material like this out in the Sudanese desert. Well, I went out there – the next day sent my MWO to give me an appraisal situation. He came back and a couple days later I went out again. Because of ITAR regulations—International Traffic of Arms Registrar, I believe it is—which basically controls the use of technical weaponry, we had to pull back the barrels and the sights. So we went out there and we were able to withdraw those when we went back.

The vehicle, though, what are we going to do with the AVGP? Canada said, "Do something with it. We cannot leave it out there." The problem was there were no EOD experts—explosives experts, if you want—and we had no explosives. So I finally convinced the South Africans, who had a team, to do it. Unfortunately, the day I finally got permission to blow it up on site, the only qualified person had been repatriated to South Africa. There was no other people attached to the mission that had the qualification.

So that made the decision to not do anything because I'd heard rumors that the South Africans would probably be bringing in their own recovery vehicles. The South Africans were being very smart in that they were planning for the future development of a United Nations mission. And according to UN SOPs, the more vehicles you get, you actually get money for how many vehicles. So they're actually putting all their stuff in theatre with the idea that it will be a commune mission and they'll actually get money for having their Nyalas—which are to an armored vehicle similar to—actually Mombas, which are similar to Nyalas that Canada has purchased and some other vehicles. And they had finally brought over two or three recovery vehicles called Venderman[sp?], I believe they're called.

Anyway they arrived. I saw them come straight off the aircraft. I went straight to the airport and asked them if we could borrow one to pull back this AVGP. The captain, a young South African man, was very apprehensive about letting us use it because his sector commander was up north. And eventually I wrote a letter and said we needed it for one day. So after two or three days of waiting, I finally phoned up and said, "Have you guys given any thought to this?" "Oh, yes, we're going up tomorrow morning." "OK, it would have been nice if someone had talked to me about this because I would like to go with you." "Have you arranged a patrol?" "Well, you haven't talked to me, so I haven't arranged a patrol." So I got the Rwandans to come and we had a patrol laid out of about six or seven AVGPs and, of course, six or seven soft skinned vehicles to protect the AVGPs, to go out after about a five hour trip.

It was destroyed about 52 kilometres away and that took about four hours of going there. But my MWO and two South Africans—two sergeants, very, very good guys—they went out there and it was a long journey. And they thought it was a pointless day at that. Because it had fused, it took an entire day to pull it apart. In fact, we couldn't pull it apart. We actually broke the haul-down mechanism of the recovery vehicle. So we came back. And we had agreement from the two sergeants that they'd come back the next day and they'd get another one of their vehicles and we'd go out there. Well, the next day we waited. We were supposed to go out there at seven o'clock. The South Africans didn't show up. The captain said we did not submit the paperwork to let his guys go a second day. And I said, "What paperwork?" "Well, you have to talk to my colonel." And my colonel didn't do it. Anyways, we had an agreement where the two sergeants actually volunteered to go and the captain said, "If you get hurt, do anything wrong, you'll be court martialed." So these guys took the risk on their own selves to help the Canadians out.

They arrived. The Rwandans were getting upset because they like being back before five o'clock and, by the time we get out there and back, they were getting very edgy. We finally got the South Africans in line, placated the Rwandans, whom I'd built up a good repoire with with the every Friday night filming and I'd talked to them and given them free food and pants and all that. We went out. I think it was nine o'clock when we got to the site and we were able to pull the AVGP from the Land Rover finally. And while there we were going to put the wheels on. Well, we tried putting the wheels on, and it didn't quite work. Took us another two or three hours of these two sergeants and my master warrant officer, Dave Isin, putting it together, and we were then eventually were able to move it.

What happened was, the transmission was good enough that we could put two out of four wheels on the back and pull through the sandy area. And it was off the road for about four kilometres inland. We eventually got it there, got it to the road and had our IMP, well, our lunch. For the Rwandans, an IMP is a can of sardines, an orange and two cookies. And that's their lunch. And some juice. And they offered that to us and we said 'no.' They were a little upset we didn't take their food but we said we had some other stuff. We gave some IMPs to the South Africans who were used to a little bit better quality. They thought our—the Canadian Forces —IMPs were the best they'd ever tasted. They were great and they'd do anything for them. That was the quality of their food.

And we got on the road. After about five kilometres, the first wheel exploded and after another 10 kilometres the second wheel exploded. So then we were running on something called mud flaps. So we were dragging this AVGP behind a South African recovery vehicle, escorted by Rwandans. It's being dragged now on mud flaps, and we actually had a fire on the side.

INTERVIEWER: Interview with Commander Watson. End of side one.

END OF SIDE ONE

INTERVIEWER: Interview with Commander Mark Watson 19 February 2007. Tape one, side two.

You were saying that you were dragging the vehicle back on its mud flaps now.

WATSON: Yes. So we were dragging it back on its mud flaps now. There was at least one fire started. Pieces were actually being broken off in the middle of the road there. We were trying to pick them up, put them in. The Rwandans couldn't understand why we actually wanted to get this thing back in the first place. In fact, none of the Africans could not understand why we did not just want to leave it in place because they were risking; this would have been their fourth time off of site; we were in unpatrolled territory, why are we doing this? I said, "Because my country wants to have it back."

It's now dark and we've reached the outskirts of the city. And the way El Fasher is, there are three paved roads. And there's a paved road here. Unfortunately, if we had gone on a paved road we would have ripped up the road going to our camp and we have to go through downtown. So then we asked the Government of Sudan who has check points—military check points—at the entrance if we could leave the vehicle there. We pull off to the side. The transom, or the back, had been ripped off; there's no wheels left or anything but it's still the hulk there. They said, "Yes." We go back and then what happened the next day was, realizing that the recovery vehicle could no longer drag it through the city, we had to ask PAE if they could borrow a forklift – they had some fairly heavy duty forklifts—to go out there and lift it up and put in on a trailer and bring it in. They did that. So now, not only did we have Rwandan patrols escorting us, South Africans who helped us, of course Canadians overseeing everything, we actually contracted civilian contractors to lift it up and bring it in. We eventually, I think, got back early afternoon. I sent my major and MWO at this time, because it was sitting at the edge of the city just waiting for a PAE to bring it back. It was put back there. After about a month of doing the necessary paperwork—because Canada wanted it chopped up into certain pieces—and we had to certify that it was no longer serviceable.

So that was the long story of the AVGP that in Canada would take a couple of hours to do but, when you're in the middle of Africa with the African Union, it took days. And I don't think it was ever appreciated back in Canada how much work it was.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about your communications, laterally and up and down.

WATSON: As I said, there were three Canadians in El Fasher and there was two in Khartoum. Even though they were superior headquarters we dealt with them sporadically only because we knew who they were and we knew they were competent—very good officers. So we talked to them about contracting issues, about air issues. There was one who was advising on contracts there and one who was advising on air operations. However, they did most of their work on air operations and most of the advising stuff on

contracts. Luckily one person, a Major [indistinct name], spoke Arabic so prior to his arrival Canadians weren't even being invited to various meetings. He got there, they started inviting him to meetings because he could talk to local contractors.

Addis Ababa, even though they were superior headquarters and they had a lot of people there—they had a petty officer in charge of stores and an administrative clerk—the only time I really dealt with them was on a weekly sitrep back and forth. A couple of times we got into arguments because they didn't really appreciate what we were going through over there. And we made fun of them a couple of times. I remember one time there was a major—I didn't get his name—but he was quite, he wanted to get a sitrep into Ottawa on the Mondays. Well, we worked seven days a week there and he wanted to do it on a Thursday, maybe Friday so he could have the weekend off. And we said no, we'll give it to you on Sunday when it's due, tomorrow, and you can work it up late on Monday.

But, they provided what support they could but they were dealing with the political level of the African Union and we were dealing with the tactical level. And sometimes they couldn't understand what we were doing because one of the problems they had is none had been to El Fasher. They couldn't get visas. Dave Patterson was one of the few—not the only one—while I was there that had actually been from Ethiopia to theatre, so he could understand what it was like. But when you've only been there for a day or two, you don't get the full appreciation of not having the proper food or all the conflicts unless you'd been there for a couple of weeks. When I was leaving, or just had left, two of the other officers had just made it down there. And it wasn't for lack of trying, it was just the Sudanese government did not want anyone in. So they eventually made it in; they fully understood and said, "Oh, now we understand what you need." And we understand that you don't have any food and that there's this and there's problems here. Because, until you got to El Fasher, you could not understand the depth of the problems or the logistical challenges that we faced.

INTERVIEWER: Did you run into continual problems with the Government of Sudan?

WATSON: The biggest problem we had with them, from Canadian perspective, is the visa issue. For the mission itself, they had representatives as part of the Ceasefire Commission. And they were not there to help out. They were there to put up road blocks and unless you overcame them you couldn't really move too far ahead. So they were there. They weren't detrimental, but they weren't beneficial to us. The biggest problem we had is, they didn't talk about anything. We had a CBC come out and even though their paperwork was valid in Khartoum, it wasn't valid when we arrived in Darfur because it was its own little fiefdom. And the military advisor did not necessarily agree with the military, senior military, officer in Darfur. And they did what they wanted without necessarily talking to each other. So it was a very complicated mishmash. It was very tribal, even the Sudanese military. When I left, the Janjaweed had come to town and the Janjaweed had been brought in by the government. And they didn't listen to anyone and they were under the employ of the government.

The Government of Sudan actually fought a couple of battles inside the city against their own forces. And a couple times they encircled – and when I left there had just been a couple—the Janjaweed or the GOS, I forget which—had been killed and that was by one of their own allies. And that was one of the reasons we got bunkered down one night and, in fact, there was a lot of gunfire. And we were afraid to go out at night. In fact, it was just hell broke loose.

In fact, that story – I remember myself and my major driving through in our Land Rover from headquarters to our base camp, which was only about six kilometres away. And we saw this massing of Toyotas with vehicles and wondered what was going on. Go back. We actually went out to dinner to Bob Waring who was saying good bye to a couple of people, invited us in to town. His house is right next door to the headquarters. So we go out there. On the way, we find out our normal route to the headquarters has been blocked off because there's a little fight going on between the Janjaweed and the GOS. By the time we reach Bob Warings's house we found out his neighbour, who is one of the colonels of the GOS, an advisor—actually it was SLA Minwin which is one of the other factions—had taken two or three of his wounded people. There were all these soldiers around, ready to fight, and we decided to go home early that night which was lucky because there was another roadblock pointing away—I'm not sure where they were pointing to—we had to only follow them. It was pitch black. It was only seven o'clock at night but everyone was armed. There was gunfire around the corner. We make it back into our camp and that night we heard gunfire quite a bit. And the next day there was restricted movements throughout the city. And we found out that anywhere from two to 20 people had been killed, all civilians, all internal fighting. It was just one of those tribal things that happened in this area.

INTERVIEWER: Describe for a little bit more your food and amenities situation.

WATSON: Yes. Canada; we were – I was the third officer over there in El Fasher, the first being a commander Larry Ryder and the second being Lieutenant Colonel Marc St. Pierre. They were living at the headquarters at El Fasher. And there they have what is loosely termed an officers' mess. But the officers' mess is nowhere what you would expect in Canada. In fact, the food was totally unacceptable by any Canadian standards. You go there and you're getting a metal plate like you see on M*A*S*H with the five or six pockets. Canada got rid of those in the 70's or 60's, I think it was, because they realized they were highly allergenic. Well, they're using them and they're cleaning them with, at best, maybe lukewarm water. But chances are it's cold water and maybe with or without soap. You have rice for lunch and would be either goat or camel or beef. They always said it was beef, but a lot of people who knew it said it was something else but beef. And all of this would have to be flown in, for the most part, from Khartoum. It wasn't initially, but after too much with all the problems of cholera and local area, that they had to fly everything in.

INTERVIEWER: Now this food was prepared by the civilian contractors?

WATSON: Civilian contractors. But the food was the same every day at lunch hour. What it was was rice with this meat, which was a grayish meat with large bones in it. Not necessarily any meat but there was a lot of bones. There was some type of soup, which was water based. There might be some noodles in it. The salad was simply, for the most part, just onions. That was the salad, onion salad. You'd get one bun. And then dessert was some type of jell-o, sometimes with things in it. I'm not sure, I didn't eat too much of it. So that was the lunch you had a choice of buying and that was a $4 US meal.

And I never ate the breakfast there, never ate the supper there. One of my predecessors tried to convince Canada this was totally unacceptable because there was no dairy products, there was no fresh vegetables. It never changed. And they were given a per diem to buy locally. And we bought food locally. It was normally pasta, which was a big thing because you cook that with some tomato paste or things like that. I arranged for my wife to send parcels over to me and that is what I actually ate, was the foods she sent me. And my other subordinates followed suit when they realized that they weren't going to live that way. I lost 12 pounds, my predecessor lost 35, my major lost 25. So you lost quite a lot of weight there. The heat was, in the summer, about 35 degrees Celsius in my air conditioned tent.

Anyways, the first officers that went over there were living in at the headquarters along with the Africans and they were cooking on a hot plate. Just before I arrived, they had arrived, they had moved us into Zamzam where the civilian Canadian contractors were. And we had hot plates but we had our own tent now. And we actually had our own recreation tent. And when I brought European Union representatives over to talk or to relax in front of our little TV, they thought it was great because they were living in a house. But their house may have beds for 8 people and sometimes they had over 16 people. And there was nowhere for them to go. We each had—three of us—had our own tent and if we had a problem we could go to rec tent or we could go back to our own tent. We actually had pretty good spacing. And the Canadian military actually got us a gym so we actually had something to do outside. And we had the only gym west of Khartoum, I think. And that was a life saver for something to do at night.

So we were living off the food that, really, our relatives were sending us, to our friends. And it didn't really come to us. We had to go to Khartoum and it took anywhere from three to seven weeks to get any mail to us because there's no mail service whatsoever. So you can't send pieces of correspondence out. And there's no fax machine. There was just e-mail. So we had e-mail at this base—at our little compound, if you will—a little gym, a TV and a couple of other things.

But compared to what the others had, it was grand. None of the Africans had air conditioning, unless they were a senior officer. The transient tents had 100 people. When I got there they were finally putting some fans in—one fan for every six people in this huge tent—because everyone was entitled to what's called [unclear word] time off and they were allowed two weeks off during the six month deployment. And most of the Africans were there for a year. And so were some of the European and the Americans, too. But they brought these Africans from the field to Zamzam as part of the transients,

but there was nothing for them to do. So they put them 100 to 150 in each of these tents with one fan for every six people. And the rest of the time they just stood outside talking because there was nothing for them to do. So in comparison to them, we were like living in the Hilton. But compared to guys in Khartoum or Lieutenant Colonel Dave Patterson in Addis Ababa where they had a house with a maid and with cleaners and all that, it was very, very different.

INTERVIEWER: Did CFPSA provide amenities for you?

WATSON: CFPSA did provide amenities. But in the long term when I got there they had received some support but for some reason it stopped. When I arrived there in July I had been told they had not received any packages or any type of correspondence, newspaper, videos or anything for about eight weeks. Eventually, after some prodding, we actually had a shipment sent over that came, I think, at the end of October. So it was almost four months since they had received anything. For some reason, they had sent some of our stuff to Senegal. And when the AGVPs arrived in Africa, they were first dispatched to Senegal. But they kept sending all our stuff to Senegal. And so one of the reasons, I understand, even our 2005 Christmas presents arrived in Senegal. And we received them in November 2006. A year later they'd finally got them from Senegal, or wherever they were, to our theatre.

INTERVIEWER: So that was a big breakdown in communications between CFPSA and the deploying headquarters, I guess.

WATSON: Yes. That was one thing. And the other thing, too, was because there was three detachments, some of our stuff went to Ethiopia. And Ethiopia assumed that they had received it at the other two attachments without necessarily asking us. So they received three of a kind. The way you'd only get it to theatre was to pass it from someone physically traveling from Ethiopia to Khartoum to us. So we had to have people carry this information. There was no way of getting it there. When they finally did come up with an option—to have direct delivery from Canada—no one actioned it. We kept on saying, "Here's a way to solve the problem," but there seemed to be a lack of initiative, saying here's a problem, here's a solution. All we needed was someone to say yes, and do it. When we had the SIV team came in, they gave us all kinds of excuses saying, "It's too expensive" And we said, "It's an extra $5 a kilo." I mean, that's not bad to an extra, going through another country. "Well, we don't know who approves it," and we just kept getting the run around and we became very discouraged because we'd offered up a problem and no one was going to act on it.

When we finally fixed the problem we started seeing CFPSA support fairly well. Starting November onwards, they realized we were there and they were sending stuff to us. We received videos and DVDs and TVs. So that was a big accomplishment that I was able to achieve—them getting us back on the mission. Some of the guys had been there before said, "Oh, we don't care about CFPSA. I'm only here – I don't get it," not realizing there's always a follow along person. And Khartoum hadn't received anything and we finally got theirs fixed as well. And because, when they do turn over a turn over

of personnel, the new guys will want to have videos. And they forgot there's lots of things you can do with lending videos out to other countries and lending people books and things like that. And they're very appreciative of that.

INTERVIEWER: Can you give me any personal reflections on this deployment?

WATSON: Well, I'll break it down into personal and professional. Professional, it was a great experience. I am naval officer, done most of my time at sea or with the navy, I should say, about six years sea time and the rest ashore with the navy. So being deployed for five plus months to the middle of the desert, overseeing army equipment and having a say in aviation fuel and working directly on a peace keeping operation was a very unique experience that not many naval officers get a chance to do. I learned a lot about how peace keeping doesn't work, if you will, and a lot of – a greater understanding of how the politics in Africa and European Union works, especially for a highly visible mission such as this. It's more important to be seen than actually doing. From a professional standpoint, I think I've come away with a lot.

Personally, I learned a lot about myself. Being deployed was a definitely a challenge for my family and for me being separated for six months. As my wife reminded me, it was the longest we'd been separated. When you're aboard ship – I was just talking to a lieutenant colonel—a friend of mine who'd just come back from Afghanistan—he said, "I thought you guys understand those deployments." Navy, you go away for two or three days, you go alongside for three or four days. You go out and have a drink, go to a nice restaurant and back aboard the ship. You might be at sea for a month and then you go ashore. Here it was deployment quite a bit and it's a very different situation. You're not used to seeing the poverty in the areas and all the weapons and all that. So it was a very different mindset I had to go with, or I had to change, when I reached there. So personally wise, I learned a lot about myself, my limitations and what I could and couldn't do.

And I just met with the godfather of my logistics branch— Sea Logistics—and suggested that everyone should, all of our officers, should go there because it just gives such development opportunity that would not be available any other way. So I'm glad I went on the mission. I'm happy to be back for the next year or so and it taught me a lot of how things work, how they could work and how they don't work.

INTERVIEWER: Interview with Commander Mark Watson on 19 February 2007. Interview ends.

TRANSCRIPT ENDS