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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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INTERVIEWEE: Charles H. Belzile

INTERVIEWER: J.R. Digger MacDougall

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Transcription of Interview Number 31D 5 BELZILE

Charles H. Belzile

Interviewed 19 October 2004

By J.R. Digger MacDougall

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum Oral History Program interview with Lieutenant General (retired) Charles Belzile recorded on 19 October 2004 at Ottawa. Interviewed by J.R. Digger MacDougall. Tape one side one.

BELZILE: I am Lieutenant General Charles H. Belzile. My last name, of course, is spelled Belzile. I hail from a small town in the lower St. Lawrence. I'm from Trois Pistol[?] in Quebec where I was born. I come from a very large family and we moved around to a large variety of schools. As far as my background is concerned, I stayed there until my mid teens – something like 14 or 15 -- and then the family moved to Montreal. My early schooling was done in Trois Pistol until grade 8, which is all there was in this small town. Then I went to boarding school in Rimouski, 40 miles down the road and during that time was a participant in what was almost a compulsory Army Cadet Program. When in Montreal I went to school with the Jesuits, at College St. Marie. On graduation in 1953 I joined the regular army. But prior to that as a student in 1950 I was an aero engine technician for a few months in the RCAF auxiliary 438 Squadron.

Switched, with some friends, to the army COTC and trained as an infantry officer during which time the Korean War started. Some of us were a little fired up with this and decided it was a good time to switch to the regular army which really was in formation at that stage. The Canadian Army Active Force or the Active Army or the Special Force for Korea made it possible for us to have a short term commission for which I was already qualified during summer training. In 1953, on graduation, was posted to 2nd Rifle Battalion in Wainwright, Alberta which became 2nd Battalion Queen's Own Rifles of Canada. But the early stages, it was formed from a variety of Militia companies that came from all across the country. My initial stay with them I was wearing the Regina Rifle Regiment -- which was then not 'Royal'--the Regina Rifle Regiment's badge -- was doing most of the basic training that we were doing for the troops. Got posted along with a sergeant from PPCLI completely as a sub unit, to B Company at that stage. B Company was Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, which was the next badge that I wore.

A few months before going to Korea in the winter of 1954 or fall 1953, I forget which, the Queen's Own Rifles were activated at the same time as the Canadian Guards and the Black Watch were activated. In 1954, from Ipperwash -- in the winter and early spring 1954 -- proceeded to Korea. We arrived after the cease fire and we were the last combat arms company to serve in Korea and we stayed there until the spring of 1955. That's the early days.

After that my next posting was extra regimental. I was a recruiting officer in Northern Alberta based in Edmonton with a territory which spanned the whole of the north of the province from Red Deer through the Yukon and Northwest Territories. [I] was sent back to regimental duty in 1957. Proceeded overseas, but to Germany this time with the NATO forces, as a junior officer

with the 2nd Battalion Queen's Own Rifles. Finished my tour there as the adjutant in 1960. Came back in 1960 to be posted to Quebec Command Headquarters on Atwater Street in Montreal, just near the Forum – good parking place for the hockey games.

Next move from that time was back to regimental duty, in Calgary for a while, again with the 2nd Battalion Queen's Own Rifles. Then on promotion in the winter of 1964, was promoted to Major and went to command the company in the 1st Battalion of the Queen's Own Rifles in Germany, at which time I served for about a year there. Then went to Cyprus with them in 1965, the third infantry unit to serve in Cyprus. Came back from there and went to the Canadian Army Staff College in Kingston from which I graduated in 1966 and went back to Germany as brigade major, or the senior operations officer, of 4 Canadian Infantry Brigade Group, which a few years later whilst I was there was changed to 4 CMBG, that replacing the infantry with mechanized. So, the 4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group -- 4 CMBG.

This lasted until 1968 where -- those two years I spent there I served under two brigadiers. One was E.A.C. Amy for the first year. The next one was Gardner. Both armoured corps, both outstanding officers. Then my next posting was also a change of regimental duty, of regiment affiliation . I was posted on promotion to command the 2nd Battalion of the R22e Regiment in Valcartier and the Citadel in Quebec City. With that unit I went back to Cyprus for a second tour in 1969. Served as a battalion commander there for the usual period of six months. It was a relatively quite period 1969 compared to 1965. From there came back to Canada. Did a manoeuvre deployment with HMCS BONAVENTURE to Jamaica for jungle warfare training. After that, relinquished the command of my unit in 1970 and came to Ottawa for the first time. I worked as a PCO3. PCO3 being the postings and career for officers, 3, indicating the combat arms, that being the armoured, then infantry and artillery that I was responsible for – officers of the rank of Major and below.

From there I was promoted again, as luck would have it. In 1972, went to Gagetown to command the Combat Arms School. The Combat Arms School was an interim organization which came together from the armour and infantry school from Borden, having been amalgamated and moved down to Gagetown. Whilst I was there we absorbed the Artillery School on their move from Shilo to become the Combat Arms School that we knew a few years later. About 1974 or '75 this organization changed. The Combat Training Centre, the three schools, were reborn under their own names as opposed to being departments of the Combat Arms School. I was promoted and sent back to Germany as Commander 4CMBG Brigade which had moved by then from Soest sector in the British Army on the Rhine, had moved to the south to the former French Occupational Zone where we joined with our Air Force and the creation of what became known as Canadian Forces Europe.

From the brigade I went to Heidelberg as the first Canadian one star to serve in that international headquarters. I was the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, as such responsible for the war planning. From commanding the 4th Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group I went to be something akin to being the brigade major of an Army Group. But the army group contained 36 brigades instead of just the one I was used to command[ing]. After a period of about 16 months there, in 1977 I was brought back to Lahr as Commander Canadian Forces Europe (CFE) making my last tour in Europe one that lasted over five years but in three separate jobs.

Came back from there to Ottawa where I was appointed the Chief, Land Doctrine and Operations, the senior army officer in National Defence Headquarters because the army *per se* was known as Mobile Command. I was in St. Hubert just outside Montreal but I was the senior army guy in an army position in the unified headquarters as CLDO. My next posting which turned out to be *almost* the last one was on promotion to Lieutenant General to go and command Mobile Command, the name which was given to the army at that time. I was a commander of the army from 1981 to 1986, at which time, following a bit of a medical problem, I relinquished the command to General Jim Fox, a friend and classmate of mine at the Army Staff College. Then I came to work for a few months directly for the CDS in Ottawa and chaired a study on regional operations command and control for a few months whilst they were clearing up my medical situation. Then I was released about May 1987. So that is the military story.

INTERVIEWER: General Belzile, while this interview focuses on Canada's NATO brigade in the Lahr area, I think it would be important since you've served in both brigades – the brigade in the north and the brigade in the south – to maybe comment on the rationale for the move of the brigade to southern Germany, and perhaps the differences in the two formations.

BELZILE: Well, this is a very timely question because whether I liked it or not, when I was brigade major in Soest under General Jimmy Gardner at that time, we were charged to be cooperative, if you want, with the people in Canada who were trying to redesign the brigade to move south to join with our Air Force for the eventual creation of Canadian Forces Europe. The rationale behind this, I'm not sure what it was except it was obvious we wanted to cut the strength of the Canadians in Europe. The Air Division, which was situated both in France and Germany had ten squadrons at one time of Sabre fighters. They were a very large organization with a headquarters in Metz in France and four large bases. The Canadian Army was in Soest, Hemer, Iserlohn and Werl area and the Ruhr [indistinct word] in Northern Germany and was assigned as the actual tactical formation to the 2nd British Division and had a position on the front, as far as war planning was concerned, which was not going to exist for us later.

At the same time as this move took place, the intention was obviously to reduce us from a large brigade of over 6,000 people that we were in the north with nuclear fire power capabilities and specialist anti tank organizations typical of the requirements of the cold war at that time. We were reduced to about 2,500. I participated in trying to design what was a somewhat truncated brigade -- 2,500. The Air Force was reduced at the same time to three squadrons of fighters. Closed all air bases as a result of General DeGaulle, for all intents and purposes pulling the French forces out of the chain of command of NATO and closing the two bases that existed in France for our fighters, Grostenquin and Marville, and the headquarters in Metz. That headquarters had been moved to Lahr which had been a French air force base in southwest Germany. I forget the name of the first commander. I think it was Lobman. He moved the Air Division headquarters there and created what came to be known as Canadian Forces Europe.

I was involved a couple of years before in the 1966-68 in the first iteration of this smaller organization. We, in fact, had helped from 4 Brigade with our transport company the First Air Division to move from France with all of our ground transport . We wanted to move from France and take over what became known as CFB Lahr, Canadian Forces Base Lahr, from an air force

base. And it was joined with the existing CFB Baden-Solingen where the air force already had a couple of squadrons and in Zweibrucken which was another air force base that was also closed at that time. Now the rationale was reduction. It's a long story. But the rationale was reduction and our efforts went mostly to trying to salvage as much firepower as we could.

One infantry battalion was sent home. The other units, including the anti tank regiment and the artillery regiment were reduced by a squadron and a battery respectively. But we kept all this kit in Europe to be reassigned to some fly-over capability eventually. Which went all the way from a small strength when I took over the brigade with about 211 flyovers to, by the time I left, it was something like 2,500 fly-overs. This would have put us back sensibility to a strength similar to what we used to have up in the north, assuming they could get there in time, should the Cold War turn hot. There was never any guarantee of that but we had all the equipment in situ, and in the fall tried to exercise some of those fly-over elements as best we could. That is not much of a rational explanation but that is what it was. It was a second best, if you want, besides pulling out completely from Europe, which I'm sure was on the table at that time as a possibility.

INTERVIEWER: So what principal units did you have under your command in Lahr?

BELZILE: As far as the brigade was concerned in Lahr, it was reduced to two infantry battalions who were initially the 1st Battalion of the R22e Regiment, and the second unit was 3 Mechanized Commando which was based in Baden. They stayed although the duration. Along with that was the armoured -- was RCD -- and the artillery unit was the 1st RCHA. And then the normal panoply of support units group for the service battalion. We created, at that time, the Military Police Platoon under my directives. The service battalion equivalent engineer squadron which was 4 Field Squadron. The Headquarters and Sigs Regiment and Sigs Squadron which was, in fact, joint with the headquarters of 4 Brigade and was sort of a tactical entity, if you were. Which made sense because it allowed us to save a certain amount of positions. 444 Helicopter Squadron which was then assigned, half way through my tour as brigade commander, to the newly formed Air Command in 1975. For the first time in my life I had a unit under my command which worked for me under an MOU signed with Headquarters Air Command Winnipeg.

INTERVIEWER: This reduced brigade, approximately 2,500 strength, was upgraded to a stronger brigade in manpower through fly-over crews and troops. Would you comment on how that affected the brigade and its ability to function as a brigade in the order of battle you were situated in?

BELZILE: Well, it was very difficult because one must look at the task that the Canadian Brigade was given in those days of Central Army Group. We were in fact just about the only existing army group reserve that available to Commander Central Army Group. We were assigned to mostly – theoretically, almost anywhere on the front of Central Army Group. But primarily assigned to reinforce the 7th US Corps or the 2nd German Corps which was south of them. Our main function was simply to be assigned to blocking positions depending on the routes of attack should the Warsaw Pact decide to come across the line. As everybody knows, with the neutrality of Austria and Switzerland to the south of us, it made for a southern boundary to the 2nd German Corps which was a particularly difficult one. There was the possibility of employment almost anywhere.

As a reserve, one should normally expect to be given some counter attack roles which was always in the back of our mind, which would have been very difficult with our relatively light weight unless the rest of the fly-over had got to us in time. As a blocking position, which we were also quite capable of doing, even a reduced brigade could have been fairly effective. So we had a priority of a variety of routes of approaches that we were responsible to establish blocking positions into.

Very difficult to plan because you have no idea where you are likely to be used. Unlike 4 Brigade in the north that had a very specific position on the front and was, in fact, the right hand formation of the 1st British Corps and flanking the 1st Belgian Corps. We were, for all intents and purposes, the inter-corps boundary between the British and Belgians which was a very significant post. The one in the South was obviously -- from Lahr -- was obviously just as important but very difficult to plan. Because except for assembly areas, you really had no idea where you were going to be sent to. Contingency planning galore!

INTERVIEWER: What units did you personally interact with and /or your brigade staff interact with at your level?

BELZILE: Well, as I stated, our function was mostly a reserve at army group. But the army group involved, of course, had four army corps in it,which is a very significant and strong organization. Two were German and two were American. By priorities, we mostly interfaced with the 7 US Corps which was based in Stuttgart -- headquarters in Stuttgart -- and the 2nd German Corps whose headquarters was in Ulm, east of the Black Forest. Those are the two primary organizations. You must also realize that, inside that, we obviously didn't work directly most of the time with these corps headquarters, so we interfaced with divisions. In the case of the south, in 2 German Corps, [it] was mostly the Fourth Jaeger Division and also the 10th Panzer Division which was, of course, quite capable of using the infantry that we had in some of their counterattack functions. The other corps, such as the 3rd German Corps and the 5th US Corps, we interfaced with on exercises. Occasionally in the fall, the REFORGER exercises would shift from one corps to another. The Americans would fly in up to almost a division on some of these REFORGER exercises, such as the Big Red One -- the 1st Infantry. We found ourselves, quite often, attached to them. Most of the time we became, because of our different equipment and tactics, we became the standard enemy force to exercise US or German divisions. So we worked very closely with them all the time.

INTERVIEWER: What was your perception at the time of what the Canadian brigade was thought of? Here you are working with corps and divisions. What did they think of you and what was your perception of size versus firepower?

BELZILE: I think they thought quite highly of us. And the reason I state that is because there was a certain amount of inner fighting amongst the German and US corps to be able to "snap on" to 4 Brigade because of our different tactics, different equipment, and so on, that we were particularly well suited to act as an enemy force, despite the fact that we were also probably as experienced in interoperability as anybody else. When the Canadian brigade moved to the field, it always interoperated with a German division or an American division. Interoperability was a

byword in those days in NATO. It was very significant to us because we were seen quite often as Mr. Interoperability because that's what we did all the time.

We had a very high reputation despite a relatively small size. Our high reputation was mostly due, and I'm quite proud to state, that it was calibre of the people that we had in the brigade and the air division and the calibre of the staff officers that we had in relatively large numbers as liaison officers through the German and American formations. I say in relatively large numbers because when you work with non-national armies, there's a lot of interpretation that must take place as to tactics and methods of operation and that sort of thing which the liaison officers were particularly critical to.

When we normally teach in our own staff college in the army that we used to liaise with the organization on our left all the time. In the case of NATO you had to liaise both right and left, up and down. So you always had to liaise. We always had fairly large liaison capabilities. We were also a pretty useful organization to help Central Army Group plan for the employment of 2nd French Corps, which were the French forces in Germany, and the First French Army stationed in Strasbourg. Whether one likes it or not, although not under the chain of command in NATO, were effectively over and above what 4 Brigade was able to do and was really the major army reserve of Central Army Group. We could not conceive, should the Cold War turn hot, that the French would not get involved. The French got involved because we had French-speaking units, because we had senior officers including myself, that dealt with them all the time. We had a very close working relationship with the French army and the 2nd French Corps in particular.

In fact, we were asked to do such things as lexicons all the time which I personally worked at in trying to sort out, not only between the English-speaking units, such as the Americans and the Canadians, who invariably use military terminology despite the STANAGs and standardization system which has somewhat different interpretations. We were always taken up with that and we produced lexicons upon lexicons. The Canadian brigade was particularly useful as a liaison element between all the three of them.

For a Canadian officer like myself, when I was a deputy chief of staff for operations in Central Army Group, as the first Canadian to have that job, it's an incredible opportunity. Because who else in Canada in those days had a chance to literally look at the war plans, influence the war plans for the whole army group of four corps. In fact ,I spent so much time interfacing with those people which to this day has resulted in a large number of senior US and German officers who became personal friends, as well as French officers.

INTERVIEWER: That's basically what the formations did. I might be interested now in finding out from you what your specific duties were in the field and in garrison. Talk us through a day in garrison as brigade commander of Canada's NATO brigade, and talk us through a typical day in the field.

BELZILE: In garrison, except for the fact that we lived in Germany and we had people scattered in about 225 different communities –other than the fact that a lot of us, because of that, had to do a certain amount of operating in the German language as well as the French language – the life in garrison was not very different from what it would have been in Calgary or Valcartier except for

the surrounding area. We had, as you very well know, our complete civic capability. We had our own schools. We had our own stores. We had a complete Canadian community which with dependents numbered between 20,000 to 22,000 people, scattered over about 225 organizations. A lot of our people intermarried with the Germans so we were really intermeshed with the German community to a large extent.

But the garrison life was not very different. We ran individual training. When we got a chance to go out to the field, of course, we did collective training which is something that we did much more than we were able to do in Canada usually because [of] the distances and the ability to displace the brigade all over southern Germany in a relatively easy manner. We also used, of course, a lot of the French training areas on the other side of the Rhine. We had a pretty distinctive meshing with other NATO forces around there.

But this really came to the fore, to go to the second part of your question, when we were out to the field. When we were out to the field, of course, we had to adjust to each other's tactics. We had to understand each other, which the Canadian brigade, as I stated earlier, was even more useful for that than perhaps any other brigades because of our ability to interoperate with all of them. Life changed considerably and it was pretty exciting in the field. Now what does that mean to be under command in a large scale exercise, a Fourth Jaeger division, for instance. Rather interesting, the commander of that division in my days was a General Gerdt Colhmann [?] who had been a prisoner of war in Canada in the later years of World War II, having been wounded and captured in North Africa and became a very good friend of mine. We did a lot of planning and work together with that kind of people.

When we deployed the troops out in the field it was considerably different from what we did in Canada. Because in Canada it is very rare that you will see the large army formations -- which for us can be a brigade -- moving around the highways of the country, moving around the fields of the country and that sort of thing. Which we were able to do in Germany because of the Status of Forces Agreement which allowed us to do that whilst taking all the care that you can possibly take about not ruining, not having too much manoeuvre damage. A certain amount of it was inevitable. So the German polizei and the Bavarian police and all of these organizations worked very closely with us. So, in the field it was very different than it would be in Canada because our large scale exercises -- such as the RV series that terminated sometime in the '80s -- we were in places like Gagetown, Wainwright. Effectively, except for watching trains move through, watching convoys carrying tanks from one part of the country to the other, really did not apply nearly as much in Germany. But when we did that sort of thing in Canada, we disappeared into these large training areas and the public and the people, except for the invited media and groups of people, really saw very little of it. So we were much more in the public light in Germany.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned the Status of Forces Agreement, would you comment on that and what implications there were for the Canadian NATO brigade with respect to that Status of Forces Agreement?

BELZILE: The Status of Forces Agreement applied to all of NATO. It was really intended to legislate the official relationship between the host country, which was Germany in our case, and

Canada. In fact, [it] implied such things as whatever we had as garrisons, for all intents and purposes -- may have been old German garrisons of World War II time or airfielda -- they remained the property of the German government. Even if we built on them, all of this became, at the time of leaving, as per the Status of Forces Agreement, property of the host nation. In Lahr, specifically, when we left completely, and in the north also when we moved from the north to the south, all of our garrisons, all of our camps, were handed over to the German government. They, in turn, may have given them back to some British garrisons or some German army garrisons or left them idle.

The other aspect of the Status of Forces Agreement, which I think is significant, is that we were expected to look after our own troubles, including to a large extent even criminal actions on the part of our people, that sort of thing. The Status of Forces Agreement gave eventual jurisdiction to the Germans if they felt like taking it. But because we were seen as being fair and conducting our own trials, for instance, they didn't mind at all if we handled them instead of overloading their courts. There have been a few cases that went to German courts but they would have been, invariably, things that affected either injuries or even murder of a German resident by Canadian troops. In certain of those cases they would have kept jurisdiction but, by and large, we had total jurisdiction of our own people. The military justice was what carried for us. That was the Status of Forces Agreement.

You had the reverse if you came to Canada because you have Germans that have trained in Shilo, Manitoba, you have British that have trained in Suffield and there again the jurisdictional approach is decided between the two countries. But by and large, if it's things are not overly serious, the nation that owns the troops is the one that handles that. However, in Canada, these visiting troops are not in the countryside like we were in Germany. They are in training areas such as Suffield and Shilo and, as far as manoeuvre damage and things, it really doesn't apply as it did to us. You don't do much manoeuvre damage in an area that's specifically designed to do manoeuvres in. In Germany, we did that in the countryside through villages and through towns. So some damage was inevitable and the Status of Forces Agreement takes care of that. That's basically what it meant to us in a day-to-day application.

INTERVIEWER: Now, you mentioned that you looked after your own troubles. What did you personally get involved in with respect to disciplinary action?

BELZILE: Well, a whole range of them. Obviously, a lot of them what would be in Canada handled by summary courts and local courts – such things as highway traffic acts and impaired driving situations. All of that sort of thing that the Germans would have been perfectly entitled to look after for us but they preferred not to because their courts, like everybody else's, were probably overloaded. We managed to do that ourselves. As far as personally I got involved, it was very much the same as it would be in Canada. In disciplinary cases which affect a certain level of rank which a commanding officer could not try in a summary trial were often passed up to me as a superior commander. I would conduct summary trials or order courts-martial, the same as a senior commander in Canada would do. If it went to German jurisdiction, then we got right out of it. But that was a very rare occurrence.

INTERVIEWER: How would you rate the equipment and vehicles that you had in the field in the

relatively reduced brigade that you commented on?

BELZILE: Excellent. I mean, compared to some of the waiting periods that we've seen recently in the army we had -- 4 Brigade was the shop window. If new kit came to the Canadian Army, as indeed if new aircraft came to our air force, [units in] Germany were the first ones to get it. When the introduction of the M113 APCs, whether it was the introduction of the M109, the self-propelled medium guns of the artillery, when all those things were introduced in Germany -- they were introduced by Canada, they were introduced in Germany first, other than the schools and the training establishments in Canada. We had the top of the line in equipment, basically. Plus what we call the national stocks which were parked there for eventual wastage in time of war, if it came, but also to be crewed by organizations or by reinforcements that would come from Canada. We had large storage capabilities. We had probably as good a set of equipment as anybody.

If I omit the time in the last couple of years of the life of the Centurion tank -- there was more problems getting them moving, then eventually -- I personally received the first Leopard C1 tank in Kraus Mafei in Munich, on behalf of Canada. Once we moved to that, the army was as well equipped as any in Europe. But fleets being what they are, whether in Canada or in Germany, they age and eventually they need refitting or they need changes to their fire-control systems or their communications capability and all of these things. The upgrades of any weapons systems we had would also usually take place in Germany first.

INTERVIEWER: You had tactical helicopters under your command. How did you use them?

BELZILE: Well, tactical helicopters might be a misnomer. I would define a tactical helicopter as one that is capable of lifting troops and moving them around. The 444 Tactical Helicopter Squadron, it was called that but basically it has a tactical usage but it's usage was mostly reconnaissance and fire direction for artillery or for anybody else for that matter. They were really scout helicopters more than tactical, in the sense that we couldn't really move troops with them. Also on fly-overs, every fall on large scale exercises, we often had a fair number of Chinook helicopters and Huey helicopters that would be sent over to Germany to exercise with us. But they didn't stay there. They would come back to Canada at the end of the deployment, the same as we do now for some of the peace support operations or stability operations in which the troops are involved. What we had were all the light Kiowa helicopters and, if I remember correctly, the squadron had 14 of them.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned there were air force fighter aircraft on the airfield at Lahr. Did you have any direct involvement with the deployment and employment of the fighter squadron personnel and the aircraft?

BELZILE: If I advance a bit to my time as Commander Canadian Forces Europe, when I was commander of the brigade the only air unit that I had any control over -- operational control as we call it -- was the Kiowa squadron which was 444 Squadron. As far as the fighters were concerned, there were none based in Lahr in peacetime. There were three squadrons. They were all based in Baden. But at a certain stage of alert, one of these squadrons would deploy to Lahr to disperse. By then, the brigade which occupied most of the facilities around the airfields at Lahr --

except for the airhead for Canada to Germany weekly. Well, three flights a week of 707s, and that sort of capability, rotating the troops and also being earmarked for reinforcements if they should ever be needed. We had the airhead in Lahr, but other than that there were no fighters stationed there. At a stage of alert they would come on there.

Now, I had very little direct responsibilities for their employment because, again, as part of the NATO command and control structure, these people came under the operational control of NATO. In the case of the air force, they were under AFC and 4th Tactical Air Force. They were employed by NATO, as indeed was the army. Now, as the national commander, my responsibilities were really a national support. National support never left the national commander. So even during the period of hot operations, if you want, the responsibility to look after the bases at Lahr, to make sure the capabilities were there to fix them should they be attacked, that sort of thing, to a large extent fell back to Canada. But not uniquely, because NATO and the host nation would have been helping. I had no tactical control of those aircraft if ever committed. During training periods and peacetime training, of course, as the commander Canadian Forces, if I wanted to do some interfacing between our own air force capabilities and our troops on the ground to co-exercise and that sort of thing, I was the one responsible for that.

INTERVIEWER: General Belzile, what I plan to do is continue this excellent interview on the other side of the tape. I would like to just take this time to confirm that we have both signed the legal release. Is that correct?

BELZILE: Yes we have.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you. Tape of interview with General (Retired) Belzile, end of side one.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum, Oral History Program Interview with Lieutenant-General (Retired) Charles Belzile. Tape one, side two.

General Belzile, you trained in both the north when Canada's NATO brigade occupied the north and in the south. Were the training areas in the south adequate for what our brigade had to do in training?

BELZILE: Yes, adequate. Whether you should be contented with adequate is another matter. One of the things that we did in the south that we found after working with the British in the north, we found that the American control of training areas such as Grafenwohr and some of the training areas in the south which are occupied, or in France for that matter that we were able to negotiate with the French to go and train en suite and organizations like this in France, they were adequate. But we had much more flexibility, we felt, those of us who served in the northern training area. Because of that we felt very strongly that the tanks particularly, and the self-propelled guns in the artillery, should try and negotiate some time in the north again like we used

to have. I remember personally going to the office of COMNORTHAG in Munchen-Gladbach which was senior headquarters of Canadians in the past. They were relatively anxious to get us back there. I don't know whether it was because we paid our rent, paid our way, I have no idea. But the fact remains that we were able to negotiate a return of our guns and a return of our tanks initially to Hohne, and Munsterlager in the case of the guns.

That quickly turned into a request by the infantry battalions to get back to the absolutely outstanding training that Sennelager was, particularly for the small arms imaginative training. So we negotiated that also. One of the things that I was able to get from COMNORTHAG was some sort of an agreement. Of course, we had to be fairly flexible with the dates because, obviously, he had to give precedence to his own units in those training areas. For whatever it was, and I'm not sure whether it ever became a little of an offset for the training of the British in Suffield in Alberta, I'm not sure, but I know that all of these things came onto the table at one time. We were able to negotiate, anyway, getting back into the British training area. That did not prevent us, at the same time, from continuing to use the southern areas particularly for brigade manoeuvre.

INTERVIEWER: Would you comment on how you and your staff were trained or how you trained your staff for the war?

BELZILE: We trained a combination of a lot of things. One of them being, every time we had the large manoeuvres taking place with the German army or the US army, the staff of the brigade inevitably got its excellent work out of this. Not only from an operational point of view but also from an interoperability point of view. The other ways that we used to do that is not unlike what we've done in Canada. We used to have WINTEXs and we used to have all sorts of exercises. They were most through CP Exs. CP Exs, of course, we would conduct along with other NATO forces and some of them strictly on our own.

We had study weeks like we used to have all over the place to inform our officers all the time of what was going on and whatever changes there were in tactical doctrine. This is pretty well the way we did it. The practical aspect, of course, was done in actual simulated operations or large scale exercises. Now, below the brigade headquarters level or the HQ CFE level, HQ CFE got a lot of its exercises through Canadian exercises such as WINTEXs and that sort of thing, would take place as a CP Ex basically with a secure communications between Ottawa and us. This was the national support systems were exercised that way, most of it notional because you can't afford to deploy all sorts of additional equipment from national stocks and things. We did most of this notional. At HQ CFE, when I had my second job with the Canadians there, this was the early days of secure line, but the chief of staff could phone me anytime and vice versa. We did so during exercises too, in notional training.

INTERVIEWER: What was your personal involvement with training that went on in the battalions and the regiments under your command?

BELZILE: The same as it would be in Canada. Basically, most of the concentration areas we would work mostly at the combat team levels in the concentration areas. We did some live firing and some of those things, in Grafenwohr and things like this. The brigade staff would actually

write the exercise and exercise down to company level, squadron level, battery levels in the combat arms units and the support systems. We would do that. There would be very little difference between what the brigade commander would do in Canada and what we did over there in those days. At that level, the COs participated all the time in all of our recces and all of these things. We tried to make the training as relevant to the Cold War turning hot, if you want, because basically that's the reason we were there.

INTERVIEWER: I'd like to move away from the battlefield scenario for a minute and look at your responsibilities in garrison. What was your perception of the amenities, the benefits for service personnel, officers and their families?

BELZILE: Basically, I would think that they were pretty good. Maybe some of our families and some of our dependents would be better at commenting on that, but from my own observation we pretty well had what we needed. From an amenities point of view, we had our own stores, we had our own schools, we had our own hospital as relatively modest as it was. Except at the end of the tour of the Canadians there, we built a new one which I had the pleasure of seeing as a visitor last year. By and large we had most of the things that we needed. The type of shopping we were used to doing in Canada, Janet would be a little better in explaining that to you but basically we had what we needed. The Canadian content seemed to be there including good cheddar cheese and that sort of stuff that came from Canada.

We had an interchange capability also with the French and the Americans in shopping in their own Economat and places like this. A great source of very cheap, very good wines and cheeses and that sort of thing. Basically, I would think that it would be a fair statement to make that the amenities were quite good. Now, this would vary considerably with each family, too, because some of them, because of a German mother, the children may have been sent to German schools as opposed to others. But, by and large, the support was there and we moved our people around where needed. If there was a weakness in the amenities side it probably would have been what we consider in Canada "Canadian content". What's the difference between milk in our own Canex that comes from Denmark or Holland and the one we get in Canada? I'm not a judge of that but basically we didn't seem to have any problems.

INTERVIEWER: Did your duties as commander of Canada's NATO brigade require you to travel back and forth to Canada?

BELZILE: Absolutely. In fact, sometimes with very little warning. I don't know how many times I came back to Canada but it would be fair to say that about three or four times a year I was back here for conferences at FMC. I mentioned FMC for the first time here, except in the introductory remarks, because the Canadian brigade in Germany and the air division in the south were not part of the structure in Canada. We were separate. As you know, the brigade was considered an advanced element for a division, actually. And, of course, the air division, I don't know if they had a similar plan. I think most of their aircraft were over there anyway. By and large, we were seen as the people on the ground that in case of war, [who] would be reinforced as quickly as they could with some sort of a national support system, which we worked at considerably when I was commander CFE in trying to modernize that to a certain extent.

There was not nearly as tidy as what we used to have as the Benelux L of C that we used to have with the British because a lot of our things were very common in the north. Through the Benelux, through Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, which was the L of C out of Emblem [ph?] in Belgium was really a parallel to the British thing. This was a lot more difficult in the south because that line, for all intents and purposes, died for Canadians. We had to work with the Americans and the host nations in trying to replace that. The real test, unfortunately, of a lot of those things is operations and nobody wishes to have to start operations just to prove that your doctrinal system is correct or not. Because that's a very costly way to do an analysis. But by and large, I think it worked pretty well.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of direction did you receive with respect to your command when you came back to Canada and attended these conferences and high level meetings?

BELZILE: I think I was here much more to -- I would come here to FMC then… To come back to your previous question, we were not in FMC initially but before we actually moved south we came under FMC and started to wear the FMC badge in 4 Brigade. In fact, I was still there during General Ned Amy's time. I was still the brigade major when we switched to FMC so the conferences that I would be brought back to, it would always be FMC because FMC provided NATO with my brigade. Later on, when I was a national commander, then I would deal with NDHQ a lot more. But my channels as brigade commander were FMC initially. So I would come back two or three times a year probably. Basically, it was more to brief them on my requirements, what our requirements were. Sometimes I would send a relative number of staff officers on specific conferences, whether it was maintenance support, or reinforcements or that sort of thing. I would not necessarily be there myself all the time.

INTERVIEWER: So would you comment on what your requirements were? What did you need to help you do your job over there that you came back and asked FMC for?

BELZILE: There was two or three things that were a concern for us. When I first took over command of 4 Brigade, we were about 2,500 strong with a fly-over identified with about, I remember exactly, it was 211 positions. I'll never forget that because my first reaction to that was that that was ridiculous. What are those 211 positions? Those 211 positions were mostly L of C people which would not have added significantly to the war fighting capabilities of the front. It might have added a little bit to our durability but basically it wouldn't have helped in manning the additional guns, and tanks and things.

The one thing that I fought for as a brigade commander all the way, and didn't completely settle when I was brigade commander and it continued when I was at the CFE, was really to convince Canada that the fly-over had to be more realistic. The fly-over that we eventually negotiated was closer to about doubling the brigade in size which came pretty close, assuming they all get there time, to making it as strong a brigade as we had up north. With two differences. One of them the nuclear unit had gone. The SSM battery had disappeared. The specialist anti tank unit which was provided by the 3 R22eR had also disappeared and their weapon systems had gone into the infantry battalions as a reinforced anti tank capability. The national stocks were all put into place where they did not exist and, in fact, were sufficient to outfit the brigade of about 5,000 to 5,500. Those are the things that we found were weak when I arrived there and those are the things I like

to think we left in better shape by the time I left there. That was a period of about 5 years.

INTERVIEWER: What other changes did you implement in Canada's NATO brigade in Europe while you were commanding the brigade?

BELZILE: I'm not sure how to answer that. Changes come in all sorts of categories. Doctrinally and training wise, we pretty well continued all the time what we had been doing. I said a little earlier in the interview that one of the difficulties that we had with 4 Brigade compared to the 4 Brigade up north is the uncertainty of a location and type of employment. As an army group reserve with a frontage of four corps, which easily would have been 400 to 500 kilometres of front, you can imagine that pre dropping of ammunition and things like this which we would have been able to do in the north was really out of the question because you could have easily put them in the wrong place for the employments. So all of these sorts of things was a constant concern. The changes that we did, I think, that helped was that I eventually convinced Central Army Group that we had to have a more specific plan of tasking. Just to say a small brigade or a brigade reserve of an army group, we needed something more specific than that so that our deployment plans and all of this could be firmer. I won this argument because it led to the priority of employment would be to meet the threat from Highway 14 out of Czechoslovakia, basically.

That means that our initial deployment area was going to be along that sort of routing. We had three or four deployment areas as opposed to 50 or 60 possible ones – maybe I'm exaggerating here – which we exercised during our Quick Trains and our bug out exercises that we actually moved troops to some of those and recced all of these things. That is a change that I able to implement.

The other change was the bigger fly-over. Tactically, I don't think things changed very much because we had the same equipment, the same doctrine. Nothing had changed very much. We continued to work very much on the combat team, sort of strong point system, with a mobile or fire power capability between these things which we had developed for a long time up in the north after the arrival of the APCs. Even before, with the 3/4 ton truck, dispersal because of the possibility and even the probability of tactical nuclear weapons was a form of survival. We developed those things to a bit of a science.

INTERVIEWER: Now you mentioned Highway 14 coming out of Czechoslovakia. What was your perception of the Warsaw Pact threat and their forces?

BELZILE: I'd like to think it was fairly realistic. We were non believers in the – I certainly wasn't a believer in the fact that the Soviets had nothing but nine-foot tall soldiers that would sweep through us and be in France in a couple of days. I never really believed that because having worked not only in the north with the British but having worked, particularly in the south, with the German and American corps, they were pretty formidable organizations and were very well equipped and very well led. Although they had in Vietnam -- a great amount of difficulties because a lot of their good people were in Vietnam at the sufferance of their deployment in Germany. But, basically, the fire power there and the leadership was excellent. If the individual soldier's training might have been a little bit weaker than they became later, mostly because of

Vietnam, I honestly believed that "we" – the collective NATO – could have stopped them cold. I know a lot of people say with the overwhelming number of tanks and things like this it would be inevitable that the NATO front would crack eventually. Well, I'm not too sure I'd be that pessimistic. I think if it would have been the other the way -- I have a feeling that the Soviets, at least on three or four occasions, such as 1968 when they went into Czechoslovakia -- that if they had any intentions and thought that they could have succeeded without turning it into a nuclear holocaust, they might well have been tempted to do it. I'm not talking specifically Canadians here. I'm talking about the front. The Canadians were a modest part of this and I think a very important one, if only for the reason that our flag was there.

INTERVIEWER: How were you kept up to date with respect to what was happening with the Warsaw Pact Forces? How did you receive that sort of information?

BELZILE: A variety of sources. One of them was the national intelligence systems kept feeding us all the time. The other one is the allied intelligence capabilities of the Germans and the Americans. The association between the Canadians and the Americans in those days were very strong. My presence between the brigade and CFE and a place like Central Army Group was pretty key to that. Because of the ABCA arrangements and because of the close relationship between the American military in those days and the Canadian military, I would in those days probably get more on a national level – get more information – than even the Germans would from the Americans. I have no way of proving that. I had access to certain briefings that even my German intelligence officer at Central Army Group did not have access to. Which makes for some interesting situations that I think would have disappeared in wartime . But in peacetime headquarters, it brought a few anxious moments occasionally. It think we were fed very good information. The national one almost invariably we would get it even after I had already received it from the Americans and things like this.

We were able to follow things like the Czechoslovak invasion by the Warsaw Pact fairly closely. We'd lock ourselves into the war room during the period building up to this and I would literally spend 16 hours a day in there. The brigadier would come in every second hour or so and [see] if there was anything new. But we were using everything, including linguists listening to East German radio and things like this. The intelligence picture was as much as you can see by the intelligence picture how accurate it is. It is a flow of information that you have got to weed through. You have got to be able to discard the ancillary stuff which is meaningless. This only comes, I think, with a certain amount of usage and working of this kind of stuff. If anything, before I left the forces, if anything was going on – during the Falklands War, for instance, I was at FMC. If anything these things today, with the new information technology, are so voluminous and overwhelming that it must be considerably harder today for people in command to discern the wheat from the chaff. But by and large, in NATO it worked very well -- certainly, in the days that I was there. Once we started to pull out all of these links that we had -- certainly in the time that I was there -- obviously were probably weakening inevitably as they are probably weakening now between the US and Canada. I don't think we have the same impact that we used to have. But that is a matter of judgement.

INTERVIEWER: General Belzile, you spent three years commanding Canada's NATO Brigade,...

BELZILE: Two years.

INTERVIEWER: Two years, sorry. How did that command position prepare you for your appointment as the first brigadier general employed at Central Army Group? And perhaps you could continue on and say how that prepared you for your employment as Canadian Forces Europe commander?

BELZILE: Well, it is an interesting way to ask a question – how it prepares you. Let me go back to my days as Brigade commander. As you know, as a general officer, the Chief of Personnel at the time was General Quinn, who had commanded CFE before, [and] was quite familiar with the scene, had phoned me a couple of times and had sort of indicated to me when I was at brigade. He said, "You know you can finish your two years. What would you like to do?" I said, "Well, I've missed out on IDC or NDC." I said, "How about a year as RCDS in London or something like this before we go back to Canada?" He said, "Well that sounds pretty good. Just let me think about that."

The next thing I know I get a call from him and he says, "We've got a chance to put a one star in Central Army Group. Both General Blanchard and General Haig ...." --who was then SACUR. "General Blanchard had mentioned your name because of working with the French and that sort of thing which were getting much more critical and trying to involve the French in the war planning -- that I might me a pretty useful person to have there because [of] my relationship with the French at the time when we were starting to discuss their eventual war involvement. Literally you didn't need much more pressure than that for me to say, "Well, that sounds like a good idea." He says, "The other thing I was thinking about for you was perhaps replacing Pat Grieve at the Canadian Army Staff College in Kingston," which would have also been very interesting for me. But I got neither of those things. Neither RCDS nor the posting in Kingston and eventually I told my family that we had to move to Heidelberg. And I accepted that with great pleasure and it was, in fact, quite an experience.

What commanding the brigade gave me to prepare for that? I think first of all the personal contacts. The personal contacts that I had with General Haig, who I got to know reasonably well as brigade commander. The personal contacts I had, particularly with General Blanchard who was COMCENTAG and I was his chief war planner for all intents and purposes. He had a chief of staff which was a German two star. And he had two brigadier generals working for him. One was American because he was the guy who was responsible for logistics planning and the national support system. I wound up with the operational job which had been done before by a US Army colonel. I replaced a US Army colonel who stayed there. A different person, but the position stayed there as my right hand man, if you want, which was very useful. So you had the German chief of staff, myself as deputy chief of staff for operations. There was a deputy chief of staff adm [administration: *ed*] which was a American BGen. I had an American colonel who was my right hand man in war planning who was both a Korea and Vietnam veteran, an outstanding individual.

This is how I got there. Remember, as I said earlier, that I got very involved in negotiating with the French their eventual employment. I think what prepared me for that, besides the language

and the fact that I knew I had the personal contacts with the French, was the fact that I had worked with them on lexicons and a variety of other things to try. Even when I was in the brigade I was involved in some of that. I guess the authorities involved felt that it would help if there was a Canadian there.

In fact, the German chief of staff told me that directly. He said, " You are not going to be nearly as influenced as an American or a German would be because they have a lot more at stake than you have i.e. two corps each. If you a German and an American there, the perception is always to a certain extent going to be that you are going to be looking over your shoulder at an American or German commanders and perhaps be unduly influenced by them." I said, " Well, that wouldn't apply to me," to a certain extent because I knew them all. So I was very lucky I did that and it was a tremendous experience. It didn't last very long unfortunately. It was about 16 months before I was promoted to go back to command CFE.

That was a great preparation, actually, to go back and command CFE because I could see what, compared to the other national forces, what the flaws and what the loop holes and what the difficulties the Canadians had, over and above what I perceived when I was there as brigade commander, from the point of view of national support systems, particularly. Which became when I was Commander CFE my major driving force. We did all sort of studies when I was there which we called WECFO 1, WECFO 2, which stood for War Establishment Canadian Forces Overseas or something. Which led eventually to my firming up the additional fly-overs that was for the brigade and the national support system by creating Field Mobile Support Unit (FMSU) and that sort of thing that didn't exist before. And bringing a few key officers to do the planning to do that.

The other thing that my session at Central Army Group did for me is get me a lot closer with what we generally refer to as 'host nation support' -- host nation, of course, being the Germans. I hadn't realized until I was there the heavy involvement of the German infrastructure, including some civilian infrastructure in the rear area of Central Army Group and the national support systems of the Americans and the Germans and the Canadians in that case, and to a certain extent the French also. I got very close during my days in Heidelberg because their headquarters was also in Heidelberg. The host nation support was something that gave me leverage when I got back to Lahr to be able to influence that to a great extent.

INTERVIEWER: General Belzile, there must have been quite a departure from the training you were doing in the north, with respect to training for the nuclear battlefield, than what you did in the south. Would you comment on that?

BELZILE: With pleasure. I think to a lot of the serving officers today I think they would probably try and laugh us out of the room if I described to them what, as a young officer, we encountered in the late '50s in Germany. I was serving with 2nd Battalion Queen's Own Rifles and we were the first people, to a large extent, of the units of the brigade at that time in the Soest, Werl and Hemmer Iserlohn areas to face the doctrinal issues of what we would do to survive on a nuclear battlefield. How would we best position ourselves to first of all survive that kind of battlefield and second to be reasonably effective? What came out of it was what led directly to our doctrine as it applied to us later once we got APCs and we got a lot more mobile in the

battlefield with self propelled guns. And, of course, the infantry being able to keep up with the tanks and to a certain extent be faster than the tanks with APCs and that sort of thing.

It would make a few people laugh if we explained to them that really we developed most of this doctrinal approach with 3/4 ton trucks – a 3/4 ton truck which was an outstanding vehicle which I still miss to a large extent. It lasted for years in the Canadian Army. Of course, it had very little protection but allowed the troops to move back and forth to different blocking positions along with the tanks and the self propelled guns in the defensive posture we were expected to have to adopt. The basic principle was that if fractional nuclear weapons ever got used in the battlefields -- without speculating as to whether it was going to grow almost immediately to large nuclear exchanges which would have made any tactical doctrine totally irrelevant anyway -- but accepting the fact that this might stay the fractional yields initially. So we had to approach that the most you could afford to lose with a nuclear fractional strike would be a combat team at the most so you wouldn't wipe the a whole battalion. You wouldn't wipe out a whole unit. We operated in what became known as combat teams. This is really where we started developing this thing. We didn't have any APCs. We did it with 3/4 ton trucks which allowed us to be able to move with the tanks. With the road networks in Germany being what they were, we could limit our cross country needs to a large extent and be able to go from one side of the battalion, defended localities to the other side very quickly. And just as fast, if not faster, in certain cases of the tanks.

Now, in order to get people to think tactically that way, we actually took those 3/4 ton trucks and put sand bags on their cabs and mounted Bren guns and actually armed and almost sort of made them into make believe APCs. It had a weakness. It made you think that you were less vulnerable than you were. But I still maintain that this was pivotal to the development of our tactical doctrines when we started to get APCs. We already had troops that could think battlefield dispersal. We had young officers that could understand battlefield dispersal and when the APCs came in the early '60s the transition to what we came to call mechanized warfare was a lot easier. I still look at that as probably one of the biggest tactical training influences that I've ever encountered in my career.

It was so different from what we did in Korea which was for all intents and purposes a repeat of World War I with static, bunker like positions and the domination of the no-man's-land on patrols and that sort of thing. The Canadian Army in Germany left that kind of thinking and started to think mobility a lot more, and even before the advent of APCs.

INTERVIEWER: I want to give you an opportunity to talk about some return visits to Europe that I know you have been making in the recent past, perhaps as the position you are holding within the Legion, perhaps within the position you are holding within the Battlefield Foundation. Would you comment on those please?

BELZILE: Well, if I could take them in turn. Let me talk about the Battlefields Foundation first, without the long history. We started this organization 1992. Founded by a gentleman who was an Italy veteran. Hamilton Southham, which is a well known philanthropist invited me and a senior navy and air force guy to get together at his place. By the time we were finished, we had launched a foundation which was called the Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation. For a

gentleman who had not served in Normandy but in Italy, it was an interesting departure. He lived in France half the year and he thought it would be a useful thing to establish a presence from a memorial point of view in Normandy, to encourage the organization to get involved in the educational process to teach our young people what their elders had done during World War II and the other wars of the 20th Century of the time. I was one of the original directors and I'm still there as chairman. A couple of years ago, we changed our name to the Canadian Battlefields Foundation, as opposed to Normandy. The reason being is that we do study battlefields with bursary students in Italy and Sicily and Holland and Benelux and Belgium and we do the First World War and Dieppe all the time. All of those things that do not fall in under the term "Battle of Normandy Foundation", so we changed the name, which is more realistic.

That means that I have had the opportunity and the great privilege of travelling to Europe quite a few times, usually once a year for Normandy and that sort of thing every year. But adding my Legion hat to that, I think it would be useful to point out we have four Legion branches in Germany, Holland and one being formed in Belgium right now. The Germany Zone of the Royal Canadian Legion is now called the Europe zone because we are into Holland and to Belgium. But that gave me the opportunity to go back last year in 2003 to visit those Legion branches in Germany. We have two in Lahr and one in Baden and we have Geilenkirchen which is really the only place that a sizable number of Canadians are still stationed with the AWACs command andcontrol system.

When I was in Lahr and Baden, it was a bit of an education for me. I referred earlier to the SOFA, the Status of Forces Agreement, and the fact that as a Canadian Brigade and a Canadian Air Force Division left Germany, that all of the infrastructure that we had there -- including a brand new hospital in Lahr -- had to be handed over back to the German authorities for them to do whatever they wished with. It was a bit of a heart break for me to see Lahr again because other than the brand new hospital -- I commend the Germans for using it. They are using it for a heart institute and I had the pleasure of visiting and I was right at the entrance what was used to be the Black Forest Officers Mess -- right beside it and outstanding facility that they still use. The airfield which used to be our command post is mostly deserted hangars. A lot of the tactical air force fighter shelters that we had there had been blown up and the rubble was still there. The caserne in Lahr that I had operated from for four years of life as Commander 4 Brigade and Commander Canadian Forces Europe really is all boarded up with broken windows except for the old brigade headquarters building. So it was a little bit discouraging to have seen that.

Baden has faired a lot better for the one reason that the airport is now used as a commercial private facility, as an airport, and they have maintained the Canadian Golf Club. So at least the place still looks somewhat like it used too, unlike Lahr. It is a little bit sad when you consider that we were there for so long.

You could obviously ask the question what we doing with Legion branches in Germany? Well, what we are doing with Legion Branches in Germany is catering to about 550 Canadians that have stayed there, either because of German wives and their children wanting to stay close to the German grandparents, Omah and Ompah. A lot of Canadians have stayed there. We estimated about 550 and they were anxious to get together again. One was started when I was still Commander CFE. They have started four Canadian Legion Branches there. They actually meet

up with us in my other capacity in Normandy or somewhere else. Every year they come with flag parties and help us with commemorative activities. The link is still there. It is not quite what it used to be. Lahr as gone much quieter than in the days of the Canadians. Baden, being a big international tourism centre with casinos and things like this, the disappearance of Canadians is not nearly as noticeable. But in the case of Lahr it has left quite a void. Talking to some of the German contacts that I had there, economically and what have you, they feel it too. Because 20,000 Canadians with salaries brought quite a bit of an economic impact to those areas which has disappeared by now.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned the Canadian Golf Club. It reminded me to ask this question. What kind of a social life did you have as Brigade Commander of Canada's NATO Brigade?

BELZILE: Very busy. You might imagine that being the airhead to Europe that just about every Member of Parliament and every Senator that had to go to Brussels for briefings normally came through Canadian Forces Europe and Lahr to be briefed in advance, if you want, so he would not be caught by surprised when he went to Brussels. That involved large parliamentary groups. It involved Ministers of the Crown, and not only Defence but quite a few ministers visiting us. It also involved [me] as the National Commander the almost diplomatic side of the position. Janet felt that a lot worse than me if anything. We did host quite a number of black tie dinners in our residence and things like this. Not always for Canadian parliamentarians but for our NATO friends, too. Whether it was a visiting senior French officer we'd gather up our COs -- visiting German officers and visiting American officers such as COMCENTAG and people like this -- we would often have dinners. They were not always large like in the mess. They would often take place in the residence. The residence is very well suited to that, like most of these houses that had been built by the Germans out of reparation money. The house of Commander CFE was built for the French Air Force Commander who had a very nice wine cellar. It had, of course, a huge dining room which could seat about 22 people at the table. It had about three living rooms on a sort of a split level splitting. You could literally host cocktail parties for quite a few people, sometimes over 100 during the Christmas/New Year's season. So the social life was pretty heavy but most of it very pleasant.

INTERVIEWER: Interview [with General (retired) Belzile ends.]

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