



NOT FOR SALE



Item	Commodity	Kg.
1	Wheat Flour	9
2	Rice	3
3	Sugar	1,5
4	Lentils	1,5
5	Sun Flower Oil	0,91
6	Salt	0,75
Total Weight Per Ration (Kg.)		16.66

# World Food Programme Cross-Border Operations

Personal Experiences of Alumni

Published by: **The World Food Programme Alumni Network**  
Joseph Kaifala, Editor



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**The World Food Programme Alumni Network**



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Front cover image: Iraq food recipient, WFP/Abeer Atefa



### **Dedication**

To those who devote their lives to humanitarian service with the World Food Programme; to the resilience, courage and determination of those in the places they serve; to the mothers and children who are recipients of their nutritious food; and to the 68.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide.





## Foreword



Once again, our committed World Food Programme (WFP) Alumni have taken the time to share their life stories in this latest Oral History publication, “World Food Programme Cross-Border Operations: Personal Experiences of Alumni.” Providing food assistance in a single country is a challenging and complex process. The complexity multiplies significantly when WFP is called upon to assist across borders. Often, those crossing borders do so at great personal risk. In addition, the capacity of recipient countries may be stretched beyond the capacity to provide adequate support.

This book provides insight to such challenges through anecdotes ranging from cross-border food assistance in Bosnia-Herzegovina to getting food into Afghanistan from Pakistan. There are stories from South and Southeast Asia. Other examples include transboundary support between Cyprus and Iraq, and between Namibia and Angola.

When I first met the WFP Alumni Network, I was impressed with their accumulated experience and knowledge in every sphere of our work. I felt their passion for their work and indeed the compassion in their hearts. The Oral History publications are an indispensable record of the spirit of the WFP family and reflect WFP Alumni’s continued contribution to the organization.

In this regard, I am thankful for the enduring support of WFP Alumni colleagues towards achieving Zero Hunger.

Best wishes,

David Beasley, Executive Director



## Preface

In 2017, the World Food Programme Alumni Network (AN) started to publish its Oral History series based on the personal experiences of alumni, with topics selected through a survey of AN members. The series started with the Southern African Drought Emergencies (2017), followed by Innovations at WFP (2018). This third volume is based on the experiences of alumni who were involved in cross-border operations.

The current volume contains contributions from 13 alumni and is focused on the following regions: Afghanistan-Pakistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus-Iraq, Namibia-Angola, Sri Lanka, and Thailand-Cambodia. Perspectives on cross-border operations have also been extracted from *Bread and Stone: Leadership and the Struggle to Reform the United Nations World Food Programme (2006)*, a book written by former WFP Executive Director, James Ingram, covering his tenure at WFP, especially a page on the United Nations Border Relief Operation, and *Une Vie en Bleu (2018)*, a book written by Jean-Jacques Graisse, a former WFP Deputy Executive Director.

It would not have been possible to produce this volume without contributions from the alumni who cared to share their respective stories. I hope that these experiences and perspectives will be useful to the management and staff of WFP who have come after these alumni.

I would like to thank our editor, Joseph Kaifala, and my colleagues on the Editorial Panel. Joseph has once again woven together a compendium of personal stories with appreciation from the Editorial Panel.

Suresh R. Sharma

President, WFP Alumni Network Steering Committee

## **Introduction**

As a historian, when I heard that this year's volume was going to be about cross-border operations, I was immediately excited. Even though these are stories of World Food Programme (WFP) Alumni who were involved in humanitarian services, providing food to hungry people in complicated border situations, I knew they would include firsthand historical information—narratives not usually available in history books. Guided by humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality, these contributors often had to negotiate with multiple conflicting parties and survive under treacherous natural conditions to reach those in need of relief.

These stories show that cross-border operations often occur in violent conflict zones where humanitarian workers themselves can be targets of violent attacks. The end of colonialism led to identity crises and national self-definition in many regions across the world, pitching racial, religious, ethnic or other revolutionary groups against each other. In these situations, as the Liberian warlord Charles Taylor often said, when elephants fight, the grass suffers—ordinary people fleeing as Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and refugees. Sometimes even feeding vulnerable people is politicized by those responsible for their suffering and these humanitarians are usually the only hope for food and shelter.

The stories in this volume are not only about the intricacies of these operations, but also about the lives of these selfless servants themselves, who have had to relive the pain of losing colleagues and friends in these operations. As a strong supporter of the work of United Nations agencies, I still remember the pain I felt after the 2003 bombing of the Canal Hotel in Baghdad and the humanitarian workers the world lost that day. More than 22 people were killed. But even when other aid workers were evacuated after the bombing, the WFP Fast Information Technology and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team (FITTEST) stayed behind to maintain communication lines. A major part of this volume is contributions from Torben Due, Anette Eriksen, Carlos Veloso and others who were involved in the Iraq Operations.

Unfortunately, humanitarian workers continue to work under dangerous conditions, many still dying in the line of duty across the world. According to the 2018 Aid Worker Security Report, in 2017 there were 158 major incidents of violence against humanitarian operations in 22 countries, affecting 313 aid workers. Of this total, 139 were killed, 102 wounded, and 72 kidnapped. These incidents constitute a 30 percent increase from 2016. I hope those who read these touching stories of courage and service to humanity would apply more efforts towards increasing protection for humanitarian workers.

As with previous volumes of these series, I have learned a lot from these impactful personal accounts. As a former refugee, I am indebted to WFP and all

those who leave their own families at home to serve humanity in faraway places. For these series, I am grateful to Rein Skullerud, who has often gone out of his way to help us find the best images, and Arianna Cepparotti. It is always a delight to work with the Editorial Panel, especially those who assisted with this volume: Dr. Suresh Sharma, Gretchen Bloom, Angela Van Rynbach and Peggy Nelson.

Joseph Kaifala

Editor



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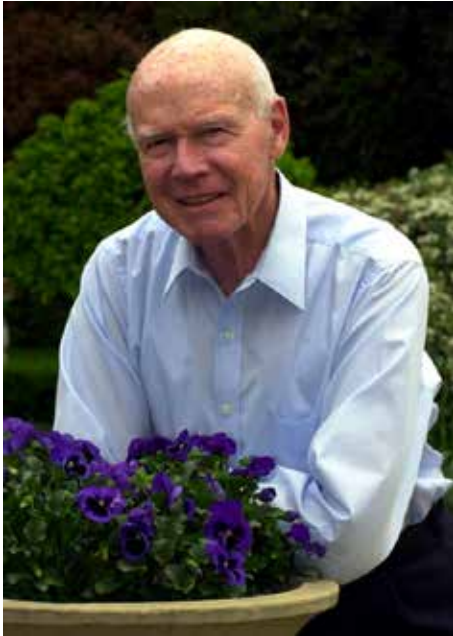
# Asia



## United Nations Border Relief Operation – A Difficult Decision

**James Ingram**

(Excerpt from his book *Bread and Stones: Leadership and the Struggle to Reform the United Nations World Food Programme*)<sup>1</sup>



In 1987 we were still managing the United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO), but I was becoming more and more uneasy about our role and decided that year to relinquish it, though continuing to manage the supply of food to the Kampucheans. I made several visits to the border camps and attended several donor meetings in New York. I came to see that the World Food Programme's (WFP) so-called lead-agency role had little substance. We had no say in relation to policy or even operations, other than responsibility for accounting for the resources provided by the donors. Policy was in the hands of the United Nations Special Representative for Coordinating Kampuchean Humanitarian Assistance and his representative in

Bangkok. As with every WFP country operation the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Representative was the titular head of UNBRO, although the staff on the ground was WFP staff.

Consistent with my policy of critical review of our performance, begun during the great African drought and used to encapsulate lessons to improve future emergency management, in 1986 I commissioned Oxford University's Refugee Studies Centre to evaluate our work. An issue that had been bothering me was the unwillingness of the Thais to agree to higher education of the Khmer children confined to the border camps. This denial of education compounded the denial of the formal status of refugee and the rights, however slender, conferred by that status. Unfortunately, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), under pressure from Thailand, had been complicit in this situation, so undermining its credibility as an apolitical humanitarian institution.

The evaluation revealed a shocking abuse of human rights. I knew it would be impossible for me to submit such a politically charged document to the CFA on my own authority in view of the fact that responsibility rested with the Secretary General's Special Representative, not WFP. I therefore sought clarification from

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<sup>1</sup> *Bread and Stones: Leadership and the Struggle to Reform the United Nations World Food Programme* (pp198-199), 2006, BookSurge LLC, North Charleston, South Carolina, USA.

the Secretary General of WFP's responsibilities as "lead-agency." I was told that New York had neither the time, the inclination nor the intellectual capability to work through the issues. The reality was that, compared with the Foreign Office of a medium-sized power like Australia, the Secretary General made do with just a handful of staff and little formal capacity to analyze issues. Policy was made on the run. This suited major governments, who preferred a weak Secretary General, lacking the resources to challenge their appraisals. Accordingly, I passed decision-making to the Special Representative and sought permission to withdraw WFP from its nominal lead role. That was a difficult decision to make. I knew it was likely to be misinterpreted and it was, with me being said to have created a crisis over the evaluation in order to obtain full control of UNBRO. The UN system is highly competitive and all proposals for rationalization of responsibilities between agencies are thought to be about personal and institutional power. That was a thought far from my mind. WFP lacked the staff with the experience to fulfil such a political role.

## The Thai-Cambodia Border Operation (1981-85)

**David Morton**



David Morton and Catherine Bertini (WFP Executive Director, 1992-2002), WFP/Tom Haskell

Year Zero in Cambodia was the Khmer Rouge takeover of Phnom Penh in April 1975, following the Vietnam war and the start of the Cambodian genocide. In 1979, Vietnamese forces entered Cambodia and drove the Khmer Rouge to the western forests and mountains of Cambodia bordering Thailand. There was very little harvest that year and the interior of Cambodia was in turmoil owing to the war. Many Cambodians and some Khmer Rouge fled to the 250-mile frontier with Thailand. Some crossed over to Thailand. Most of those people were starving, making press reports of “walking skeletons” common.

Initially those people were accommodated in refugee camps administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) near the Thai border. However, as the flow of people increased, Thai authorities started to hold them in camps along the border, technically still inside Cambodia. They were described by Thai authorities as displaced persons, not refugees, because they had not entered Thailand.

Thailand established Task Force 80, staffed by military officers, as the agency responsible for aid and interacting with the United Nations and Nongovernmental Organizations (NGO) along the border.

In 1980, a joint border operation was established by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on the Thai side to provide assistance to displaced people. The World Food Programme (WFP) provided basic food rations for UNICEF and ICRC to distribute, and also provided rice seed under a Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) programme, which was collected by Cambodians at the border and taken into Cambodia by ox cart, in an effort to restart rice production.

Food aid was also provided in Cambodia by a WFP operation run by Werner Schleiffer in Phnom Penh. That food was shipped directly to the Cambodian port of Kompong Som.

I was the senior WFP officer for the operation from 1981 to the end of 1985. Initially, WFP's role was to provide food for approximately 260,000 displaced Cambodians living in camps along the Thai-Cambodian border. The distribution was organized by UNICEF/ICRC. From 1982, with a month's notice, WFP was requested to take over the responsibility of providing all assistance to displaced Cambodians from ICRC/UNICEF. This included not only food, but water, shelter, sanitation, healthcare, Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services, education, and a radio-based security system for United Nations and NGO staff.

WFP became fully operational in its new role, using its staff to distribute food, water, and shelter-building materials directly to beneficiaries, and coordinating and funding about 22 NGOs to provide services such as healthcare, sanitation, and mother and child healthcare. WFP had three field offices to cover activities along the 250-mile border. Apart from me, the only other WFP regular professional staff member was Julian Lefevre, my deputy, who headed the main field office near the border at Aranyaprathet.

This operation may have been the first time that WFP became fully operational, using its own staff to distribute food and other aid directly to beneficiaries, rather than following the previous traditional approach of providing food for governments to distribute.

There was ongoing turmoil in Cambodia and food was very scarce. Many Cambodians fled to the border with Thailand to seek safety and to find food. Food aid was only provided to non-military persons who were actually present at the border—no aid was provided to be taken back into Cambodia. Those inside Cambodia were assisted with aid delivered directly to the authorities in Phnom Penh.

The approximately 260,000 displaced Cambodians in 14 camps along the 250 mile border were either located in a no-man's land or in Cambodia. In many areas the actual border was not clearly defined, and border markers were inclined to "move." The camps were established and organized by Cambodians

themselves, and were open on the Cambodian side, but the inhabitants were not permitted to cross over to Thailand.

The camps were also politicized. Some camps, mainly in the mountainous and heavily forested parts of the border, were under the control of Khmer Rouge; others were under the control of the Khmer Serei or Free Khmer movement, an anti-Communist and anti-Monarchist group that eventually became the basis of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) under Son Sann. One camp was run by pro-Sihanouk supporters.

The border was heavily militarized on the Thai side. On the Cambodian side, the border areas were more or less under the control of armed elements of the Khmer Rouge, Khmer Serei and Sihanouk supporters, and conflict among them was common. Also, increasingly, Vietnamese forces began to approach the border.

The camps were organized and managed by Cambodians, but Thai irregular armed guards were posted to provide a semblance of security. Thai authorities tried to discourage smuggling and black market activities.

As with the UNICEF/ICRC joint operation, WFP drew heavily on the support of about 22 Thai and international NGOs. WFP coordinated and largely funded their activities. The division of labour was that WFP provided and distributed food, water and shelter materials, such as bamboo and tools, while NGOs provided healthcare, MCH services and supplementary food for young children, sanitation and special care for abandoned babies. One NGO set up workshops for the manufacture of prosthetic limbs for amputees, of whom there were many because of the prevalence of landmines. WFP ran a border pharmacy that provided most of the medical supplies to health agencies, which resulted in economies of scale. WFP also provided NGOs with four-wheel-drive pickup trucks purchased under a bulk order from Japan. Each pick-up was equipped with a VHF radio set. And hand-held radios were issued to NGO field staff, essential for security and communication. WFP and NGO staff only entered the camps during daylight hours.

WFP provided a radio-based security system to all United Nations and NGO staff working in the camps. A security coordinator was identified for each camp—who was either from WFP or an NGO. The role of the security coordinator was to open the camp to WFP and NGO staff in the morning, if it was safe to do so, and to close the camp in the evening. The security coordinator monitored the security situation in the camp and surrounding countryside. He or she set security levels for the camp during the day, according to the following levels: 0 - calm; 1 - be alert; 2 - prepare to evacuate; 3 - evacuate the camp; and 4 - seek shelter. The radio base at the WFP field office ensured that low-level radio signals from handsets were repeated at high power and audible to all in the area.

Difficulties were both “structural” (because of the unique organizational arrangement) and “operational” at the beneficiary level. Structurally, this operation took place before WFP obtained autonomy from FAO. Personnel services for professional staff were provided by FAO in Rome. At WFP field offices throughout the world, financial services and personnel services for locally recruited staff were provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The UNDP Resident Representative was deemed as the WFP Representative.

In those days, WFP’s provision of food aid was in the form of aid supplied to government agencies, which arranged for its distribution. A WFP field office typically consisted of only one, two or three professional officers, with locally recruited secretaries, administrative assistants, and drivers.

In January 1982, faced with the need to take over the joint UNICEF/ICRC border operation, and to become fully operational, WFP suddenly needed to massively increase its staff and support structures.

WFP’s mandate was the provision of food aid only; not water, shelter, or health services. The solution to the mandate problem was that my office undertook the non-food aspects of the operation under the nominal authority of the UNDP Resident Representative who had no mandate restriction. The title United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) was given to the operation. UNBRO (then) had no legal status. The name WFP-UNBRO was used in the early years to reflect WFP’s provision of the main support for the operation.

I drafted a position paper that set out the parameters of the operation, emphasizing that the level of aid provided to the border areas should not act as a magnet to attract Cambodians to the border. Aid was to be provided at a level commensurate with conditions within Cambodia itself.

### **Political Aspects**

Sir Robert Jackson was the Secretary General’s Special Representative for Kampuchea, liaising closely with authorities in Phnom Penh, Hanoi, Bangkok, Moscow, Washington and other capitals. Apart from dealing with the political aspects of the situation, Sir Robert organized donor conferences in New York to raise funds for the humanitarian operations both from Thailand and within Cambodia, which were held in the Kampuchea Trust Fund.

There was no WFP project for the operation and no WFP resources were used. All funds were raised by voluntary donations through a series of donor conferences organized by Sir Robert. This included funds for operations to provide assistance in Cambodia itself, organized from Phnom Penh. Donor funds were held in a Kampuchea Trust Fund administered by Sir Robert’s office. Most of the food aid was provided by local/regional procurement.

## **Coordination**

Coordination between United Nations agencies present along the border, including WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR, and ICRC, was achieved through weekly interagency meetings chaired by Sir Robert or his deputy.

Coordination at the operational level was facilitated by the Coordination Committee for Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT), chaired by NGOs, which met weekly. WFP-UNBRO worked very closely with NGOs and coordinated non-food services at the border through sector committees dealing with health, sanitation, and supplementary feeding. These were chaired by WFP-UNBRO, in the case of health, or by an NGO chairperson selected by the committee. A general principle was established that only one NGO would provide services - say health or supplementary feeding - in any one camp. WFP-UNBRO recruited a medical coordinator, a respected and experienced doctor, who initially worked for an NGO there, for the whole border.

A notable feature of the border operation was that, in the main, donors chose to provide funds for NGOs through the Kampuchea Trust Fund rather than directly to NGOs. This facilitated coordination by WFP-UNBRO, which negotiated funding agreements for services with NGOs.

Coordination with Thai authorities was through Task Force 80, with whom regular meetings took place both at the border and in Bangkok, with weekly meetings at the Royal Thai Army's Supreme Command Headquarters.

## **Support from Headquarters**

Since the aid was seen by WFP Headquarters, at least initially, as a resource mobilization exercise, it did not fall under the Asia Bureau, but was administered by a small unit within the Resources and Transport Division. WFP maintained an office in Phnom Penh, led by Werner Schleiffer, reporting directly to Rome, which provided food aid in Cambodia.

When WFP took over from the Joint Agency, it had to rapidly recruit a large number of professional and local staff. Many of these were people already in the country, working for UNHCR, UNICEF and NGOs. In those days, working with FAO Personnel Services in Rome to hire professional staff initially proved an insurmountable challenge. An arrangement was thus made where staff were recruited on UNDP contracts. Similarly, recruiting local staff on normal contracts proved impossible, and those recruited were given UNDP Special Service Agreements (SSA), which were unsatisfactory in terms of normal staff benefits such as leave and medical care. United Nations Field Service contracts were used to recruit professional technical staff such as radio technicians and vehicle workshop managers. WFP had about 60-70 professional level staff and about 400 personnel on national level contracts.

## **Operational Difficulties**

The border was heavily militarized and full of landmines. The Royal Thai Army had a regular presence on the Thai side. Vietnamese forces were never far away on the Cambodian side, and there were often artillery exchanges between the two, and sometimes one could hear shells whistling overhead in the border camps. On such occasions, the security system issued radio instructions for staff to evacuate the camp.

The camps were for civilians, but their openness to the Cambodian side meant that small arms and Cambodian militias were never far away. To try to ensure that aid was provided to civilians only, surveys of the camps were undertaken, and it was established that the average family size was 2.5 persons to every woman over the age of 12, using a height minimum of 1.2 meters. For the purposes of issuing food ration cards, only females over 1.2 meters tall would qualify. Regular unannounced headcounts were undertaken in the camps by WFP and NGO staff at which food ration cards were issued to all females who fit the height requirement, using measuring sticks of 1.2 meters.

For most camps in the more easily accessible areas of the border, food rations were issued once a week to women in possession of ration cards. A food packaging centre was set up in a UNHCR refugee camp at Khao I Dang, run by CARE with refugee workers, and funded by WFP-UNBRO. Bulk bags/containers of rice, beans, canned fish and vegetable oil were broken down and repackaged into plastic bags containing a week's supply for 2.5 people. These were loaded onto a WFP fleet of commercially hired cargo trucks and delivered directly to the camps. Water was also delivered to camps in the dry border areas by a WFP fleet of commercially hired water tankers and discharged into galvanized water tanks provided by WFP.

A principle was established that aid would only be provided if the Khmer cooperated in regular head counts at all camps. In some cases there was reluctance to do this, leading to suspicions that actual populations were less than reported. In these instances, aid was cut off until head counts were allowed.

WFP-UNBRO established a general principle that the level of aid at the border should be commensurate with living conditions inside Cambodia, so as not to attract people to the border. The provision of donor funds for NGOs via WFP-UNBRO meant that coordination was made easier and effective. Competition between NGOs for beneficiaries was restrained.

In 1983 and 1984, Vietnamese forces increasingly approached border areas in order to attack Khmer military elements there. Initially, areas controlled by Khmer Rouge forces were attacked, but this later extended to the Khmer Serei and Sihanoukist areas. The intention was apparently to clear the Cambodian side of the border of militias and drive displaced people into Thailand. At first these attacks sometimes occurred during daylight hours when international staff were



in the camps. Fortunately, the security system coped and staff members were not harmed, but Khmer civilians were frequently killed or wounded. Later on, the attacks occurred at night, so that when aid personnel arrived in the morning, they found the camp clearly closed and conflict ongoing.

This deterioration in the security situation along the border led Task Force 80 to restrict the presence of aid staff in the camps to those in possession of a WFP-UNBRO identification card. This actually facilitated coordination by WFP-UNBRO.

WFP-UNBRO was suddenly faced with tens of thousands of Khmer fleeing to farmlands in Thailand as entire camps were displaced by shelling. Negotiations took place with various Royal Thai Army commanders along the border and it was agreed that we could prepare evacuation sites in Thailand where the Khmer could be accommodated. This was an extremely sensitive issue. WFP-UNBRO brought in heavy equipment to layout a grid of camp roads in agreed areas within Thailand, and pit latrines were dug with excavators. If there were indications that any of these evacuation sites would be imminently needed, then stockpiles of bamboo and shelter materials, including plastic sheeting would be brought in, together with tools to enable the Khmer to construct their own shelters. Water tanks were also set up. In some areas, firewood had to be provided. Eventually, all the planned evacuation sites were needed. Food aid was also provided to Thai farmers who were affected by these operations.

In the end, the choice most donors made, that is, to channel their funding for NGOs through WFP-UNBRO, facilitated coordination and the efficiency of the operation.

## Lessons from the Thai-Cambodia Border Operation

**Julian Lefevre**



The establishment of the United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) started in January 1982 under World Food Programme (WFP) management. The full Thai-Cambodian operation lasted from mid-1979 to 1993. WFP managed UNBRO until the end of 1987 when it was handed over to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which handed it over to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) prior to the repatriation of the Khmer displaced people in 1993.

The central office was in Bangkok, with a main field office in the Thai border town of Aranyaprathet, along the central Thai-Cambodian border, and two sub-offices in Surin (northeast Thailand) and Trat (southeast Thailand).

From October 1979 to September 1981, I was in the Bangkok Office

as one of two WFP international professional staff involved in the operation (which managed some USD 250 million of resources during this time period, both for use in Thailand and for shipment to Cambodia). I was a P3 Project Officer, serving as deputy to the P4 Director of Operations. (All other heads of agencies were at the D1 or D2 level).

During the period from September to December 1981, I was the WFP Field Coordinator at our main logistics base in Wattana Nakhon, near the Thai-Cambodian border. From January 1982 to June 1983 I served as the first WFP-UNBRO Field Coordinator, based in Aranyaprathet. I oversaw the establishment of UNBRO during its first 18 months.

I did my second tour of duty in Thailand from February 1986 to December 1987 as the WFP Director of Operations and UNBRO Deputy Director. (The UNDP Resident Representative was the Director of UNBRO, under institutional arrangements in place at the field level for WFP Offices at that time.) At the end of 1987, I oversaw the handover of UNBRO to UNDP.

During the initial period (1979-81), WFP assumed its more traditional role, providing food aid to other agencies, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)-International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) joint operation for the central border area, UNHCR refugee camps and the Royal Thai Government/Army, smaller displaced persons camps in the more remote southern and northern Thai-Cambodian border areas, and the affected Thai Village programme. WFP also purchased considerable quantities of food in Thailand for shipment by sea and air to Cambodia for the operation in that country (run separately from an office in Phnom Penh).

When UNICEF pulled out of the border operation at the end of 1981, the United Nations Secretary General asked WFP to take over direct responsibility for the whole Thai-Cambodian border area, from the Laotian border down to the Gulf of Thailand. This led to the establishment of UNBRO under WFP management. To my knowledge, this was the first time that WFP managed a relief operation that covered the whole gamut of humanitarian assistance—not just food aid, but also health, sanitation, Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services, education, vocational training, shelter, security, etc.

In the initial period, the serious lack of experienced WFP international professional staff was a major problem. As noted earlier, there were two WFP professional staff running the operation in the Bangkok office, at a relatively junior level (P4 and P3) as compared to other agencies. For the field offices, WFP depended on a Swedish Disaster Response team of varying experiences and competence. When they withdrew towards the end of 1980, United Nations Volunteers (UNV) worked in the field offices, with help from locally recruited national staff, all of whom had to be trained from scratch. This led to heavy workloads for the two Bangkok international staff, and a subsequent lack of capacity to conduct any serious end-use monitoring of the food aid provided, particularly through the Royal Thai Government/Army in the more remote (but smaller) border camps, where there was a strong suspicion that some of the food was passed to non-civilians. There was less problem with a major part of the food channelled to large border camps under the ICRC-UNICEF joint mission, as they had their own monitoring teams and procedures, as did UNHCR for its refugee camps in Thailand.

With the establishment of UNBRO and the recruitment of experienced staff from other agencies (UNICEF, UNHCR, ICRC, CARE and other Nongovernmental Organizations (NGO), WFP was able to run a more coherent and efficient operation, with better end-use monitoring and control.

Some of the lessons of this operation that might be useful to WFP in future operations are:

- Make sure that operations of this magnitude are adequately staffed, with experienced staff at the appropriate grade level, from the start of the operation.
- Make sure that staff are not overburdened, as they may start to suffer from physical and mental "burn-out," sometimes without realizing it.
- Ensure that proper end-use monitoring systems are in place from the start of the operation. At times there is a tendency (even today) to place a lot

of emphasis on logistics and the volume of food deliveries without paying sufficient attention to the all-important monitoring of the use of the relief supplies, including food aid.

- Ensure that radio and security protocols are in place and understood by all relief workers in a war environment, as was frequently the case along the Thai-Cambodian border. We were fortunate to not lose any relief worker to hostile incidents during the operation, although there were some close calls, with shells and mortars landing near staff as evacuations took place. I felt some of the “shock waves” on several occasions.
- Create a level of delegation, for operational decision-making, to the field. We were fortunate to work in an era before the incessant flow of emails as well as telephone calls and conference calls, which seem to take so much of staff time these days.

UNBRO closed in 1993, when the displaced Khmer people repatriated to Cambodia, following a political settlement. The focus switched to Cambodia and the rebuilding of that country.

## Working with a Non-United Nations-Recognized Government in Cambodia

**Werner H. Schleiffer**



Werner Schleiffer

April 4, 1980, at the peak of the hot season, was an extremely humid day. I landed at Phnom Penh's totally deserted airport to take up my World Food Programme (WFP) assignment. In practice, this implied the setting up and running of WFP's newest Country Office for three months, or "not to exceed five months," according to my marching orders, because of the rather exceptional living conditions in the war-torn country at the time. Most of the country was still under ferocious fighting when I got there. I knew little about many aspects of this assignment - to a country that had been scrupulously closed off to most foreigners since 1975 - and I certainly did not anticipate that I was going to stay there (on my subsequent suggestions) for nearly three years.

Another glance at this new, baffling environment: no other planes in sight (except a few wrecks on the horizon), no travellers, no aircraft servicing crews. The plane I took from Bangkok was a Transall of the Belgian Air Force, chartered on behalf of what was called in those days the "Joint Mission" of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), carrying mostly humanitarian relief supplies for programmes of the United Nations agencies and ICRC. That flight was actually the only direct connection by air between Phnom Penh and Bangkok, Southeast Asia's nearest hub, with passenger use essentially restricted to the staff of humanitarian assistance agencies and their donor agency representatives.

The few people evidently employed at the airport seemed to be Vietnamese military personnel - those coming down from the tower after the aircraft landed, those checking my baggage and my United Nations Laissez Passer, and those guarding the airport's access road. I did not notice a single Cambodian among these officials.

While waiting for that lonely jeep to pick me up (driven by the first Cambodian I saw after my arrival) and take me to a nearly empty ghost town-like Phnom Penh (its population had reportedly been reduced by some 98 percent during the Khmer Rouge regime under its leader, Pol Pot), I kept thinking about these flight arrangements. Why were these humanitarian flights not run in the name of WFP, at a time when WFP had already made its name as the key logistics actor of the United Nations system - worldwide and, in particular, in the context of the Cambodian relief operations?

Making the journey by road from Bangkok was obviously out of the question: intensive bombings throughout the 1970s left innumerable craters and blown-up bridges along "Highway #5" (as I saw during subsequent field trips), making long segments totally unusable. Moreover, units of Khmer Rouge military forces, which still controlled some three quarters of Cambodian territory, obviously had plenty of experts to plant mines at strategic points on roads and around major towns. I was told that, every month, those mines killed several dozen Cambodians who had survived years of nightmare during the previous regime. They also created havoc and fear among those who tried to make a living, albeit a very scant one, by trading mainly between provincial capitals.

My next surprise came at the "hotel" - renamed "Hotel Samaki" (Solidarity) - which years ago was "Hotel Le Royal", and then renamed "Hotel Le Phnom". It used to be one of the finest of its kind in Cambodia. It had subsequently been the place of last refuge for panic-stricken foreigners when Khmer Rouge forces entered Phnom Penh in April 1975. It was again made famous in 1984 by the movie "Killing Fields." The hotel was run by a Vietnamese management with the help of Cambodian waiters and cleaners.

I found out that being a citizen of a country that had not recognized the government operating in Phnom Penh and, on top of that, a United Nations

official, I was not allowed to live in one of the innumerable empty apartments. Only governments of the Warsaw Pact and their allies, and later India, had recognized the Government of (what was called at that time) the People's Republic of Kampuchea. The majority of governments of United Nations member states however - and the United Nations per se - continued to recognize the credentials of the Government of Democratic Kampuchea and maintained diplomatic relations with Cambodia through the Khmer Rouge regime (and its small groups of political allies) that operated essentially out of its headquarters in jungle camps along the Thai-Cambodian border. Thus, a majority of United Nations member states also agreed that the Khmer Rouge Representative to the United Nations could retain his position and continue to exercise his diplomatic functions.

As a consequence of that diplomatic imbroglio, and an acute scarcity of somewhat habitable rooms at Hotel Samaki, most United Nations staff received accommodations that became their offices - and, at the same time, their living rooms, bedrooms and kitchens (with camping gas cookers). The ensuing weeks gradually provided more clarifications and helped me understand this terra incognita and its ramifications for my work.

Although there had obviously been - primarily - military and political considerations, the Vietnamese army also had to compensate for a severe labour shortage that threatened Cambodia's survival as a nation. The Khmer Rouge regime, through one of its first acts after taking over Phnom Penh, pushed almost all of the city's survivors out into concentration camp-like accommodations in faraway provinces. Estimates of those killed or who died from disease or famine during these four years of terror range from one and a half to three million, out of a total population of some nine million—up to a third of the population. The regime had thus committed crimes the proportion of which the international community had hardly experienced anywhere since World War II. It was estimated that about 75 percent of the victims were men, about 85 percent were people who had gone through more than basic education - e.g., people who spoke foreign languages, whose palms were smooth (hence no manual labourers), and people who wore glasses.

Representatives of Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) told me that, at the end of the Khmer Rouge regime, 44 medical doctors and one architect had survived and remained in the country—according to their surveys. In other words, during this genocidal regime, most Cambodians previously employed in the industrial and service sectors, requiring some technical expertise, met a terrible fate or managed to leave the country in time.

It became clear why vacant posts that could not be filled by local expertise were occupied, at least temporarily, by large dispatches of foreign workers. In the high-priority medical sector, these were mainly foreign experts assigned

primarily by governments that recognized the new authorities, and also by UNICEF and ICRC staff.

The mandates of UNICEF and ICRC are unique in the sense that they are allowed to operate in any country, with any government authority, irrespective of whether the governments are recognized or not by the United Nations. Both of these agencies had long-standing expertise in the provision of humanitarian assistance. WFP, on the other hand, had its hands tied in those days by the issue of non-recognition, by the United Nations, of the Phnom Penh-based People's Republic of Kampuchea. It could therefore - officially - operate out of its Phnom Penh office only under the roof of UNICEF and ICRC, under the so-called Joint Mission. Moreover, WFP was not allowed to provide any assistance that could be considered support for socio-economic development.

This state of affairs led to some awkward situations, especially in the case of WFP because, in the early 1980s, some 55 percent of the total value of United Nations system assistance was, in fact, supplied by WFP. The remaining 45 percent was essentially provided by the other three United Nations agencies having offices in Phnom Penh, i.e., the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNICEF, and, a little later, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Because of WFP's key role, the dialogue and cooperation between the local WFP office and its counterpart authorities needed to be direct (without a roundabout routing through other agencies) and, given WFP's de facto lead role in port and domestic transport logistics, exceptionally timely and unbureaucratic.

Initially, establishing a productive and responsive dialogue and cooperation with the authorities was a complicated and drawn-out exercise. Several aid agencies had to share one interpreter cum liaison officer called "guide" in the government's jargon, who was to transmit our messages to the government agencies concerned and make us aware of their views and decisions. However, making this arrangement work effectively took a lot of time, effort and patience.

Our, certainly most willing, guide indicated that he had been a former teacher assigned to a high school located far away from Phnom Penh, close to the Laotian border. His knowledge of the United Nations system was, not surprisingly, extremely limited. Quite some time had to be set aside to explain the set-up and functions of the United Nations system and the types of assistance WFP was in the process of providing to his country—and what it would not provide. A similar familiarization had to be subsequently carried out with officials in other government offices - e.g., the Ministries of Transport and Agriculture, the Port Authority and KAMSAB—the government's shipping agency.

During my first meeting with our guide's supervisor in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Director of the United Nations Affairs Department, I had to focus on the core mandate of the United Nations and how it was different from government agencies of member states—the latter frequently raising suspicion



among my Cambodian counterparts. But, over time, the three of us overcame a certain distance and actually managed to establish a rather cordial, “personalized” working relationship. This evolution was strongly encouraged by our Cambodian driver (on the Ministry’s payroll)—a spontaneous, agile go-getter, who proudly told me that, in the old days, he had driven huge American Mack trucks all over the country.

This initial distance, however, and the absence of formal written agreements with our counterpart government offices as a result of the non-recognition had, at first, repercussions and, sometimes entailed contradictions.

### **Challenges of the Working Environment:**

(1) The approval of each new position in the WFP office (not under UNICEF or ICRC supervision) required lengthy negotiations. The approval of the post for our first secretary to be assigned to Phnom Penh took, for example, nearly six months. Only the second year of my posting brought a certain breakthrough in the form of shorter approval time.

(2) WFP staff - like all other United Nations staff - were not allowed to drive their agency vehicles – in the case of WFP a simple Toyota jeep. Only a Cambodian driver assigned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was authorized to do so. As a result, our mobility was extremely restricted. Fortunately, as a kind of personal favour after discussions stretching over six months, I was allowed to import two bicycles for WFP staff—thus enabling us to go on scouting tours in the Phnom Penh area.

(3) All trips to and out of Phnom Penh had to be approved on an ad hoc basis. Trips taking United Nations staff to Bangkok required exit and entry visas (renewals were not automatic, thus creating uncertainties with regard to the continuation of assignments). The approval of travel within Cambodia, to the ocean port of Kompong Som and to provinces receiving WFP food aid, required simultaneous green lights from various government agencies that also had other considerations on their minds. Moreover, all in-country trips required the presence of our guide and, quite often, also guides from other ministries or provincial authorities—guides who usually did not know one another beforehand. In other words, the absence of an agreement opened the door for ad hoc arrangements that could be easily cancelled or postponed.

(4) As a WFP officer I had to handle the somewhat contradictory task of transferring the title of ownership of imported goods such as WFP’s food aid to the authorities of a government that the United Nations did not recognize. Hence, any kind of follow-up could not be based on a reference to mutually binding contractual obligations that, normally, would have been agreed to earlier by the two parties. Therefore, such follow-up was only possible with the goodwill of the counterpart authorities, and on quite a number of occasions as a result of sustained efforts of persuasion. To be fair, I should also point out that, during

my entire stay, I never encountered any difficulty importing office equipment or personal items such as my own food supplies.

Working out agreements between United Nations agencies and the ICRC on the management of our joint emergency relief programmes was a relatively uncomplicated task. It was evident that all of us, working under one roof in rather small teams (because of the staffing restrictions imposed by our counterparts) and under difficult conditions, wanted to facilitate and enhance our internal cooperation as much as possible. As a result, our periodic reporting on our work to the Kampuchea donor meetings tended to be a rather straightforward assignment.

But, in these reports, we obviously also had to refer to that public entity that hosted us, with which we were working every day, and to which we handed assistance worth, during the first year, some USD 250 million. Obviously, the term "government" was a non-starter as that entity was not recognized by our ultimate bosses, the majority of United Nations member states. After lengthy debates, we finally settled on "Phnom Penh Authorities"— not an ideal description of our counterparts, but at least respecting the fact that: (a) a public entity was located in the country's capital; and (b) its authority had to be acknowledged if we wanted to make our joint operations reasonably successful; an ultimately far-sighted example of pragmatism in the frequently complex and complicated world of humanitarianism.

In summary, the Phnom Penh assignment was probably one of the most difficult, but also most rewarding, of the eight assignments I had with WFP. The daily exposure to death and survival by a narrow margin, in the midst of a hair-raising political situation, made me believe - more than ever - in the irreplaceability of the United Nations system.

## Kampuchea Border Operation

### Adelina Santos Tankia Myrvang



Adelina, Tor and Lars in Pakistan

My life changed dramatically when I joined the World Food Programme (WFP) on November 4, 1984, on a temporary basis, as an accountant for the Kampuchean Border Operation. I was seconded from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as an accountant for the operation for a period of three months, but my contract was eventually extended for another six months, as resources were being pledged by some donors, during the annual December conference at the United Nations in New York. My contract was then extended for a year and later extended under a fixed-term contract of five years as Finance Officer. I subsequently received a continuing contract and retired at the end of 2005 as Manager of the Disbursements and Payroll Branch.

The accounting exercise of the Kampuchea Border Operations was eventually mainstreamed into the Accounts unit of WFP, under the Resources Division, and the unit became the Accounts Branch five years later, under a new Management Services Division (MSD).

Working from the WFP Headquarters in Rome changed many elements in my life. I married an ex-IFAD colleague, Tor Myrvang, whom I had met on my first day at IFAD on June 10, 1978, and we had our son, Lars. I became a Professional Officer of the United Nations system. I had been granted the opportunity to

exercise decision-making to some extent, demonstrating creativity and resourcefulness in handling and managing issues—skills and talent that triggered measures that permitted me to become a successful manager at WFP.

On my first day, due to the irregularity of recruitment of a dedicated person to handle accounts, I found a few pages of written notes and procedures on the analysis of accounts, and about a two feet high stack of accounting documents that had to be reviewed and analyzed for correctness and compliance with the Financial Regulations and Rules of WFP. In fact, I was called for a meeting with the Assistant Executive Director, Salahuddin Ahmed, together with the then Consultant, Mr. Giuseppe Buonaiuti, who had been temporarily hired before my appointment to review the Kampuchea Border Operation, not on a continuing basis because he was hired to oversee some other accounts. The meeting went well and the agenda was highlighted by an assurance of a continuous accounts analysis, management, and updated reporting for the operation, including the certainty of reviewing and analyzing incoming documents from Country Office operations linked to the Kampuchean Border Operation.

Despite my short contract, I humbly accepted the challenge and worked many long hours, including weekends, which helped me comprehend enough, not only about the daily administrative pattern of expenditures, but also the food purchasing system of WFP, because millions of dollars were involved in the operation. This exercise assisted me in finalizing all pending accounting documents for review for compliance, recording, management and reporting.



Beijing during the Tiananmen Square protest

One of the more significant events that I remember dearly was when I was asked to undertake duty travel on the accounts system in Pakistan (since the

WFP Bangkok Office was unable to host me at that time) and the border at Quetta in May 1989, while on my way to the Philippines on a family home leave. I performed a very satisfactory exercise and my report to the Director of Resources, Mr. Dirk Sintobin, was highly appreciated. However, on our way to Manila from Pakistan we had included a visit to Beijing on our travel plans. When, on arrival, we called one of the central hotels that we had reserved, the receptionist informed us that Beijing was engaged in a "civil war," specifically at Tiananmen Square. All transport vehicles from the airport to the centre were suspended. We were forced to stay in a hotel on the outskirts of Beijing.

After a few days of living in fear from rumours of war, electricity cuts, water stoppage and similar incidents, we became very worried. Topping it all, my son caught a slight pulmonary tract infection. We started searching for evacuation options. I called the WFP Beijing Office, but the staff had evacuated to Hong Kong. I contacted the Philippine Embassy who indicated that they could evacuate me and my son - Filipinos with Philippine Passports - but not my Norwegian husband. We called the Norwegian Embassy and they were willing to evacuate all of us back to Europe. Having unsatisfactorily exhausted my options for evacuation, I took the courage to send a telex to the Director of Resources Management Division and explained what had happened. Finally, Mr. Sintobin gave a travel authorization in my favour to continue our home leave from Beijing via Japan—the ticket had been issued at the Philippine Airlines' Tokyo Office for destination Manila. We were completely out of funds and had to stay in a hostel on a one meal deal, feeling lonely in Tokyo with a meagre amount of cash and overused credit cards. I was relieved when we boarded the plane from Tokyo bound for Manila, and I thanked God for having granted us safety and stability on our journey.

One of the main aspects of the WFP accounting system at that time was the input of data into a hard copy format provided by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for eventual submission to the Financial System of FAO. While a hard copy of accounts was submitted back to WFP from FAO on a rather timely basis, we had to go over all the data input to ensure that they were correctly recorded. This put pressure on the production of statistics required by WFP Management when they requested management reports and data up to the current month's accounts. Printouts from the FAO Financial System were always one month behind. Thus, it was almost necessary to develop a stand-alone system to substantiate urgent or more online data requirements.

However, after several years WFP installed its homegrown WFP Information System (WIS), which included the commitments of major transport transactions and food purchases, and the expenditures were then visible against each commitment entry. At this point, more real time data was produced for such areas of expenses, but entries to FINSYS were still operative for those not being included in the WIS system. At the end of the 1990s, however, the WIS system

was made dysfunctional and a new WFP integrated software was put in place—the WFP Integrated Network Global system (WINGS).

Another major difficulty I encountered related to communication, since the beginning of my appointment, I had a desk telephone for internal use, as there were a few numbers allocated by FAO to WFP when we shared Building F at the FAO Rome Headquarters. I found it cumbersome to call colleagues in Country Offices and other locations. However, this situation was alleviated when a restructuring of the organization was pushed through and the Accounts Branch became part of Management Services Division.

The rapid separation of WFP from FAO, especially in terms of the computerized system, comprises an important lesson, since these various elements interplayed to make WFP one of the most respected United Nations agencies. Thanks to WFP leaders for paving the way towards remarkable eras of success. I saw this happen as part of the staff at Building “F” until 1995 when the Italian Government relocated us to the WFP Headquarters in Parco dei Medici, Rome—a move that boosted the morale and character of each staff member.

I learned that each WFP operation is not self-contained, especially the high profile Kampuchean Border Operation. It was mandatory to comprehend the nuances and elements involved in the operation beyond food purchases. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to visit the actual refugee camps and operation. At that time Accounts was seen almost as an end of the line process and Management did not see the merit of their involvement at the start of any project or operation. However, business and industry have dictated that almost a 360 degree integration of all areas is the norm.

The border operation ceased in 2001. I was able to obtain a longer contract with WFP, and in 1995 the Kampuchean Border Operation accounting exercise was merged with all the accounts groups, specifically a unit called Bilateral and International Emergency Food Reserve (IEFR) Accounts Unit under the Accounts Branch, headed by Ms. Maria Grazia Luri, who was one of the WFP stalwarts.

## Managing Afghan Emergency Operation from the World Food Programme's Regional Office in Pakistan

Piero Terranera



Afghan Food Delivery, WFP/Frank Petrella

This is an account of a regional cross-border operation during my time as Regional Head of Logistics at the World Food Programme's (WFP) Regional Office in Islamabad, Pakistan, where I had transferred from being a desk officer at WFP's Rome headquarters in August 2001, just a few days before the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in New York.

The United Nations immediately evacuated its career staff working in Afghanistan, leaving local staff to do what they could to deal with the Afghan emergency created by the Taliban.

Fortunately, I managed to keep the Afghan operation going because the food dispatch offices of Tehran, Turkmenabat, Karachi via Quetta, Peshawar, Termez and Osh, being out of Afghan territory, were still functioning and food aid supplies still arrived at the various Extended Delivery Points (EDP).

The logistics involved in the movement of food aid included:

- Via vessel (Karachi, then by truck to Peshawar/Quetta and onto Afghanistan, Kabul/Kandahar regions and beyond;

- Via vessel to Iran's Bandar Abbas, then by truck to Tehran where it was consolidated, and onto Mashad, and into Afghanistan by truck to the Herat region;
- Via barge from Europe to Riga, then by train to Termez/Uzbekistan, Dushanbe/Tajikistan, Osh/Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenabat/Turkmenistan and Herat/Afghanistan;
- From Termez by truck to a swath of territory in northern Afghanistan;
- From Dushanbe by truck to the northern part of Afghanistan around Kunduz;
- From Osh by truck along the world's second highest road to supply Badakhshan;
- From Turkmenabat to Andkhoy and any territory that the five-tonners from Kabul could not reach (see below: food to Bamiyan region from Peshawar); and
- From inside Afghan territory, Herat (a former Russian-built site/bridge/rail by truck to the Mazar-e-Sharif region.

The only big problem was to somehow ensure that food aid could be transported to the right EDP, in the right quantity, without the presence of the responsible managers who would have normally ensured that this crucial task was performed.

On October 7, 2011, the US commenced its heavy bombing raids in Afghanistan, hitting Taliban, Islamic Emirate Forces and other militias.

By mid-October, in spite of the fear generated by US attacks (one WFP warehouse had been bombed), I realized that our local staff were fully able to carry on, according to instructions, their excellent work of receiving and distributing food sent by truck. A major problem was crossing conflict lines because, under the pressure of US bombings, the invasion of Afghanistan was degenerating into a guerrilla war between various Afghan militants, beginning September 9, when a covert agency assassination took place against Ahmed Shah Massoud, leader of the strong Northern Alliance. He was killed at his Mazar headquarters by two Algerian freelancers posing as journalists/cameramen.

In order to ensure that food aid reached areas inaccessible due to the conflict, it was decided, for instance, that to reach the Bamiyan area, food aid would be transported across disputed lines by local five-tonner trucks. Therefore, the WFP Peshawar Office would dispatch a number of 35 mt trucks, via the Khyber Pass, to Jalalabad and onto Kabul. There, the trucks would unload onto seven small trucks, with local drivers familiar with the best route to Bamiyan. These trucks would find their individual way to the Bamiyan region, unload their cargo at destination, get the waybills signed by the local WFP staff and return to Kabul with the signed waybills for more loads.

During this period, although waybills eventually reached my desk, brought by truckers returning from Kandahar or Kabul or by couriers from at least five



countries, I still had no way to actually verify that all of the food had been delivered correctly to those in need, because the supervisory structure had been impaired by the evacuation of WFP senior staff. Of course, I talked to every Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) staff member returning to Kabul or Islamabad for meetings (not a very frequent event because of unsafe roads).

In October 2001, Ramiro Lopes da Silva and Amer Daoudi from WFP Rome headquarters arrived in Islamabad. The main component of the mission was for Amer Daoudi to take over the regional logistics post because of Rome's perceived difficulty of mastering an operation plagued by the absence of career officers in the field, serious war activity, and the new US Coalition's sustained bombing of Afghan targets.

By then, I had managed to make it begin to run like clockwork (noisy clockwork) despite the daily horrors that Sheik Omar and his band of Talibani constantly dreamed up in Afghanistan, torn between allowing local people to be fed and their contrary intent to obstruct United Nations work, possibly out of xenophobic ideology. I took the change without flinching, especially since I was asked to remain in the region and take over a new aspect of the operation: Chief of the United Nations Joint Logistics Coordination (UNJLC), in order to coordinate the operation of civilians and military in the region.

I did not mind the substitution. It had taken me the month of September 2001 to modify the operation so it would work well enough to support, remotely, WFP aid to millions of Afghans in need. Now I was asked to realize the first formal embodiment of UNJLC and had the opportunity to make it a stunning success in a really complex emergency. Moreover, I had received a promotion of some sort, no matter how lateral it might have been intended, as I was now de facto Head of Agency for the UNJLC.

I did not understand it at first but it was confirmed to me by the WFP Afghan Country Director who, when I travelled to Kabul, had insisted I stay at No 1 WFP Guest House, which had only four rooms intended for the Country Director and Agency heads. The conversations at dinner weren't altogether pleasurable because they were always about events and never about ideas, but the place was comfortable and the food quite edible. Moreover, Amer had wisely asked me to keep running the Regional Logistics Office on his behalf until he understood the finer aspects of it well enough to take over. So, I had the best of both worlds: create a badly needed coordination entity for the Afghan operation; and keep control and hold together a fragile logistics operation.

Finding the right calibre of UNJLC staff was the greatest difficulty. People, in general, have a varied understanding of what coordination is. I needed people who had a well-founded experience of general humanitarian work to be able to coordinate (rather than direct—a common mistake) a complex emergency situation. My first move was to ask entities like the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the

International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to provide suitable members of their staff to become part of UNJLC.

For some reason, I was offered mostly people who were unprepared for most things, let alone delicate field coordination. I managed to retain one person from UNICEF (Islamabad); one from IOM whom I posted to Mashad first to oversee Herat, and then in Herat itself; and an ex-military Spaniard whom I gave the responsibility of overseeing the Mazar-e-Sharif areas, from across the border initially, and whom I later replaced with someone proposed by WHO Geneva, and who is now a manager at Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

The coordination was also at J-LoC level with the military who, in Afghan operations context, was the US military. After September 11, 2001, it took over a month to put together the Coalition that started their devastating bombing of Taliban and Al-Qaeda targets on October 7. And 12 days later, they managed to land a sizeable invasion force in the country.

I recall that towards the end of October, the local US commander was calling me daily, wanting to know what time the trucks left Peshawar, what time they crossed the Khyber Pass, what time they reached Jalalabad, and when they would be in Kabul. This information was necessary in order for them not to attack/bomb our truck contractors on their way to Kabul. While I understood this to be a necessary act of self-serving concern and kindness towards WFP, I still could only reply that the transports WFP used were contract trucks, and even when we loaded 10-12 trucks a day, those that were loaded first would go first or go back to Peshawar to get fuel (our warehouse/office was at the border with the tribal lands) or go home and stay with their families before leaving at night, trying to avoid ill-advised US bomber planes. Therefore, I could not advise them on the times of the convoys, because the convoy concept just wasn't in the contractors' DNA, and because they left at anytime they liked, or decided to visit a cousin on the way, or even travelled together.

By November 9, 2001, the Taliban had been kicked out of Mazar by forces loyal to Abdul Rashid Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek military leader. Over the next week Taliban strongholds crumbled after US Coalition and Northern Alliance offensives on Taloqan (November 11), Bamiyan (November 11), Herat (November 12), Kabul (November 13) and Jalalabad (November 14).

After the Taliban crumbled, the Northern Alliance went after Al-Qaeda and managed to trap Bin Laden with a sizeable force in the caves of Tora Bora, not far from Jalalabad. Two weeks of ferocious fighting killed a few hundred Al-Qaeda fighters, but Bin Laden got away.

By December 2001, I had some suspicions over the quantities of grain bagged in Turkmenabat (they arrived in bulk via railway). I saw from waybills that

Turkmenabat was trucking quantities of 16,000 mt of grain to Afghanistan (Andkhoy). When I first took over my post as Regional Logistician, I visited all the EDPs I could access and Turkmenabat was one of them.

I remember clearly that they usually sent some 1,600 to 2,000 mt into Afghanistan, and my discussion with staff members revealed that they could not even manage 3,000 mt. The problem wasn't so much one of poor labour or poor loading activity, but mostly one of there being very few truckers who wanted to go into the chaotic Afghan territory. How was it possible, then, that the local Head of Office, Anton (I believe he was from Russia), had suddenly managed to obtain eight times more trucks that accepted to load for the Andkhoy region? At the end of my tenure as temporary stand-in Regional Logistician, I went to Turkmenabat to investigate the matter, as part of a wider tour including Tajikistan and Iran. When I got there, I found that Ramiro and Amer had, coincidentally, just gotten there and that Anton was in bed at home, suddenly taken ill with apparently massive blood pressure problems, and barely coherent.

Without being able to talk to Anton, I spoke to his staff and they assured me that the trucks were loaded and left for Andkhoy. I was still not convinced because they could not satisfactorily explain how they could now get eight times more trucks than before, when the Afghan situation hadn't worsened. At the first opportunity, I asked an official from the WFP Inspector General's Office to investigate the matter, and the response I later received was that there was no proof of any underhand activity. Interestingly, Anton left his job after my visit and returned home.

## Border within a Nation – Sri Lanka

### Suresh Sharma



#### Background

I arrived in Sri Lanka as the first World Food Programme (WFP) Representative<sup>2</sup> in May 1998. At that time, WFP had a relatively moderate level programme in Sri Lanka with four projects—an Irrigation System Rehabilitation Project, an Assistance to Mahaweli Resettlement Project<sup>3</sup>, a bilaterally funded Reforestation Project and a Protracted Relief Operation (PRO) for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP).

The first three projects, considered development projects, were fairly normal food-assistance projects. PRO, however, was a sensitive project, as it entailed feeding a population displaced by the “war” between the Government with a Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority.

I was shocked when I first heard the term “war” from government officials. Gradually, I realized that it was actually a war situation. The Sri Lankan Army had recently “cleared” Jaffna peninsula from LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the rebel Tamil group), but Wannai was still under the control of LTTE. There was a significant displacement of population; first when LTTE had taken control of Wannai and Jaffna, and later when the Sri Lankan Army took Jaffna back from LTTE. The displaced populations were living in camps in several areas – Puttalam, Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Polonnaruwa, and Jaffna. WFP was responsible for providing food rations to IDPs, who numbered about 120,000 at that time. In addition, WFP was also given the role of monitoring the availability of food in the “uncleared” Wannai area.

#### Experiences

I am going to share three experiences I had during my tenure in Sri Lanka. These stories relate to the emotional, tactical and logistical challenges of maintaining access in order to assist beneficiaries amid security challenges in areas that are not easily accessible.

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<sup>2</sup> Earlier, the head of WFP in Country Offices used to be called the Assistant Representative (to UNDP Resident Representative). This was changed to Director of Operations in 1994. WFP Regulations were changed in December 1997 to allow for the appointment of a WFP Representative by the Executive Director, I just happened to be the first one to present my credentials to the Government.

<sup>3</sup> The current President of Sri Lanka, Maitripala Sirasena, was the Minister of Mahaweli Ministry at the time.

**Loss of Acquaintances**

WFP had started giving assistance in Jaffna when the Sri Lankan Army “cleared” the peninsula. The assistance consisted of providing food to marginal farmers who were working in the rehabilitation of irrigation tanks (ponds). The road from Colombo to Jaffna existed, but it was not usable because a part of Wannai (Vavuniya to Elephant Pass) was still “not cleared.” Humanitarian supplies were transported from Trincomalee to Jaffna on a boat operated by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for humanitarian purposes. Humanitarian personnel used the same boat—sleeping overnight in a container on the boat. There was also an air service between Colombo and Jaffna operated by Lion Air. The flights were scheduled, but they operated only when clearance was received from both the Sri Lankan Army and LTTE. I (together with Mohamed Azmey, a WFP colleague, who spoke both Sinhalese and Tamil) took one of those flights soon after I arrived in Sri Lanka. It was a small plane, so there were only a small number of passengers. When the crew – especially the pilot and the hostess – learned about my affiliation with WFP, they came to talk, and I explained what WFP was doing in Jaffna after it was liberated by the Sri Lankan Army. They were appreciative of WFP’s work of providing assistance to the internally displaced population. I also expressed my appreciation of their work—flying across the war zone.



WFP Deputy Executive Director, Dr. Namanga Ngongi, with monitors of the income-generation activities, WFP/Sri Lanka

We arrived in Jaffna, visited project sites, participated in a communal lunch at the municipal office in Jaffna, and returned to Colombo the following day. A week later, the Lion Air plane on the same route was shot down (allegedly by

LTTE) over Wannai. It was quite an emotional shock for me; those kind and innocent faces of the pilot and the young hostess on the flight I had taken a week before would vividly come back to me. The conflict took the lives of some other people I had come in contact with or worked with.

### **Tactical Balance**

As mentioned earlier, one of the responsibilities of WFP in Sri Lanka at that time was to monitor the availability of food supply in the Wannai region, which was "uncleared" or under the control of LTTE. WFP was doing this on behalf of the international humanitarian community in the country. The Sri Lankan Government itself supplied food to the Wannai region. WFP received reports from the relevant ministry, triangulated them with reports from other sources, and issued a monthly status report of the availability of food in Wannai.

A week after I arrived in Sri Lanka, when I had not even paid courtesy calls to all relevant government officials, bilateral and multilateral missions, I received a call from an ambassador from a donor country, asking for my view on the reduction in shipment of food by the Sri Lankan Government. Frankly, at first, I didn't even understand what WFP had to do with the situation. I told him I would speak to the concerned government official and get back to him.

Subsequently, I found out that the government had reduced the volume of food sent to the Wannai region that month by 40 percent based on a report that there were not enough people in the "uncleared" Wannai area, and that a majority of the population had already left the area.

The "uncleared" area was under the control of LTTE. There was no access to the area. Some humanitarian personnel visited the area from time to time on humanitarian missions, after getting permission from both the Sri Lankan Army and LTTE. However, no survey was conducted during those years to confirm the size of population.

After discussing the situation with my WFP colleagues and taking into account the sensitivities of the government as well as the humanitarian community, we followed a three-pronged approach:

- To the government, we challenged them privately, noting that they were likely to lose the goodwill they had in the international community by being the supplier of food for the population in an area outside their control. They could not seek credit for such action if they were to unilaterally reduce the volume of food based on an arbitrary assumption of a lower population size. We also assured them that WFP would undertake a survey to determine the population size as well as their nutritional status. Obviously, the government did not withdraw their decision, but we noticed that they modified their methodology, which increased the food provided about half-way between the earlier volume and the new volume.

- We informed the humanitarian community that while WFP was negotiating with the government not to reduce the food supply, we also needed to be cognizant of the fact that the nutritional status of the population in some other parts of the country (Estate Area and Southern Dry Zone) was worse than those of Wannu as seen a few years before; that as humanitarians, we could not concentrate only on the population in the area controlled by LTTE. There was some sympathy to this logic, and other humanitarian agencies offered their support for a nutrition survey of the Wannu region.
- We approached LTTE with a proposal that WFP needed access to conduct a nutritional survey to determine the actual food and nutrition status of the population in the area under their control in order to be able to influence the government to maintain or adjust the food supply. LTTE agreed to the proposal.

### **Logistics and Security**

While Wannu was not accessible officially, humanitarian workers were allowed to go across the border. The usual point of border crossing was Vavuniya. Heads of some other United Nations agencies had been to Vavuniya and met LTTE senior leaders. When LTTE indicated that they would be open to a nutrition survey by WFP, I wanted to visit Wannu and meet their senior leaders. We approached the government and obtained their consent. Then we approached LTTE with the message that I (WFP Representative) would like to visit the Wannu area and discuss the nutritional survey. Accordingly, a programme was created.

Unfortunately, I could not make a single trip to Wannu, despite three attempts in about 18 months. The first time, we received a message in Colombo the night before we were supposed to travel, warning us not to come. We did not know why, but there was no point in going if they were not available. Later we heard news of a major offensive the next day.

The second time, a colleague and I had already travelled to Anuradhapura, the capital of North West Province, and were visiting the Chief Minister of the Province, who was formerly a Minister of Social Service, a WFP counterpart. My colleague received a call to inform us that the meeting would not be possible. We learned later that there was a major fight in another part of the "uncleared" area around that time.

The third time, I had reached Vavuniya, and again we received a message that the meeting was postponed. Later, we learned of a major battle at Elephant Pass around that time. Not only was my visit cancelled, the nutrition survey could not take place while I was there. We had external experts ready for the survey mission, but we had to cancel two times. The mission of humanitarian agencies to Wannu used to be considered a normal matter, but the war situation affected my scheduled visit three times.

## **Epilogue**

I contacted Mohamed Azmey to review the facts. He confirmed the events and wanted to contribute the following from his experience:

After the plane was shot down, we had to undertake a monitoring visit to the north by using an ICRC ship. We had to travel to Trincomalee by road to board the ICRC ship that took rations and doctors to the north. The ship used to leave in the evening from Trincomalee and sail overnight through the Indian Ocean to reach Jaffna the following morning. We were picked up after a security check to visit welfare centres that were assisted by WFP.

Monitoring was a very tiresome and challenging job. We had to keep our balance with both LTTE and the government in assisting beneficiaries who were displaced in Wanni and the north as well as Puttalam and the East. WFP conducted the operations for ten years (1990-2000). Azmey was the Programme Officer. Later, WFP introduced food-for-work (FFW) as an exit strategy leading to resettlement. About 64,000 internally displaced beneficiaries were targeted for resettlement, and some were relocated to new areas. At that point we developed soft FFW norms in order to help with the resettling of beneficiaries. The work included the construction of access roads, the rehabilitation of minor irrigation tanks and water ponds, and other small infrastructure projects for speedy settlement. It worked very well. We worked with the Social Service Department. This was well appreciated by visiting headquarters officials and the Country Director.

Azmey feels proud that he was able to introduce soft FFW as a tool prior to going to regular FFW with the guidance and support of the Country Director and Project Officer. It was a good tool for beneficiaries who participated in this activity to construct assets for speedy settlement.



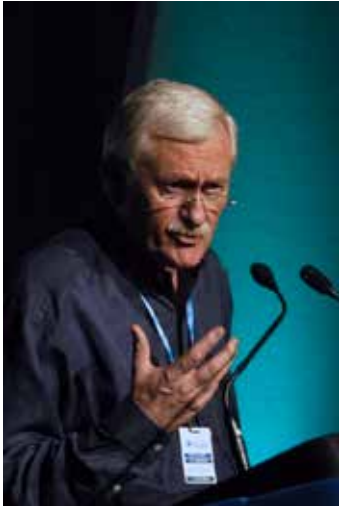
# Africa

## Discouragement

**Jean-Jacques Graisse**

(Excerpt from *Une Vie en Bleu*)<sup>4</sup>

Translated by Gretchen Bloom



In 1998, war was raging in the south of Sudan between the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), an armed branch of the Movement for the Liberation of South Sudan, and the Khartoum Army. We had no access to the populations of Bahr El Ghazal, a region of Sudan located south of Darfur, for many months. The Government had forbidden flights of our airplanes based in Lokichoggio in the north of Kenya. Khartoum pretended that the World Food Programme (WFP) and other Nongovernmental Organizations' (NGO) planes were being utilized to transport arms belonging to the Liberation Army, and not food rations.

The poor region of Bahr del Ghazal was being deprived of external aid during the civil war and was suffering from severe famine. In the summer of 1998, after months of negotiations with the Government in Khartoum, President Omar al-Bashir decided to authorize flights by a C130 WFP plane from Loki. Given the severe famine in the South, this was clearly insufficient. We needed to use smaller planes to drop our teams on the ground, and several C130 planes to drop sacks of maize and pulses from the sky. Smaller planes were also needed to deliver vegetable oil to landing strips in numerous locations in the province. Finally, President Bashir authorized us to mount a huge air operation because there were insufficient safe land routes for us to use trucks.

At the beginning of September, I flew from Nairobi to Loki where we had an impressive fleet of small planes and C130s to supply the South. Loki was a village in the north of Kenya where an important base housed the planes, WFP food and personnel, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and international NGOs. Many staff members were living in makeshift houses or tents. The little airport was very animated. After a night in Loki, a single engine plane dropped me and three other passengers at a base that we had just established in Bahr el Ghazal. There were a dozen tents set up for our staff and visitors on this little runway.

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<sup>4</sup> *Une Vie en Bleu*, 2018, NomBre 7 Editions, Nîmes, France.

Our Information Officer in Nairobi, taking advantage of my visit and our logistics, arranged for a team of BBC journalists and reporters to accompany me. They were thrilled. These correspondents were in South Sudan for the first time. During our first evening in the camp, we had the chance to renew ties that I had established with the media during my previous stays in Nairobi when I was working for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and later as Resident Coordinator of the United Nations. We spent a long evening chatting about Sudan and also about my years in Nairobi.

It wasn't until the following day that we returned in three little planes to a camp where two courageous WFP personnel worked with several international NGOs: Médecins Sans Frontières / Doctors without Borders (MSF), Action contre la Faim (Action against Hunger), CARE and World Vision, to nourish and care for the thousands of skeletal-looking human beings who had survived months of a terrible famine. This was the first time that I encountered a famine of this magnitude. The babies and infants seemed to make it, but the old women and men would without doubt not make it. I was shocked, but I didn't want to show it too much to my colleagues and staff of NGOs who expected a lot from WFP and its logistics team.

Rumour had spread that WFP had decided to cut its aid. My presence reassured them that we were not leaving. Our two colleagues had prepared the ground for dropping food rations. The population had been evacuated from the field; they were in radio communication with the two planes that were going to drop their cargo. The journalists accompanying me wanted to film two drops. It was pretty impressive to see 30 tons of sacks weighing 50 kilos each crash on the ground. Only a few got ripped. Our teams stacked these precious sacks carefully in a big tent that was impeccably clean. As soon as a signal indicating the end of drops was given, groups of kids immediately threw themselves at grains that had fallen out of some sacks.

During the year when deliveries were massive – some 17,000 tons per month – only one small boy was killed by a sack that crushed him. The ground had been cleared, and our teams did not notice him, because he hid in a bush. We had four big Ilyushins based in Nairobi and Khartoum at the time and ten C130s in Lokichoggio and El Obeid in Sudan. They took off loaded in the morning and afternoon. Hundreds of thousands of sacks of food were transported on long semi-trailers, from Port Sudan to El Obeid, passing by Khartoum, and from Mombasa via Nairobi to Lokichoggio. Each sack was then put into two other empty sacks to cushion the drop and thus avoid losses. During the rainy season these were limited to two layers because the soft ground lessened the impact of the fall. We had proved that with big logistical efforts we could prevent famine as long as governments and armed groups let us operate.

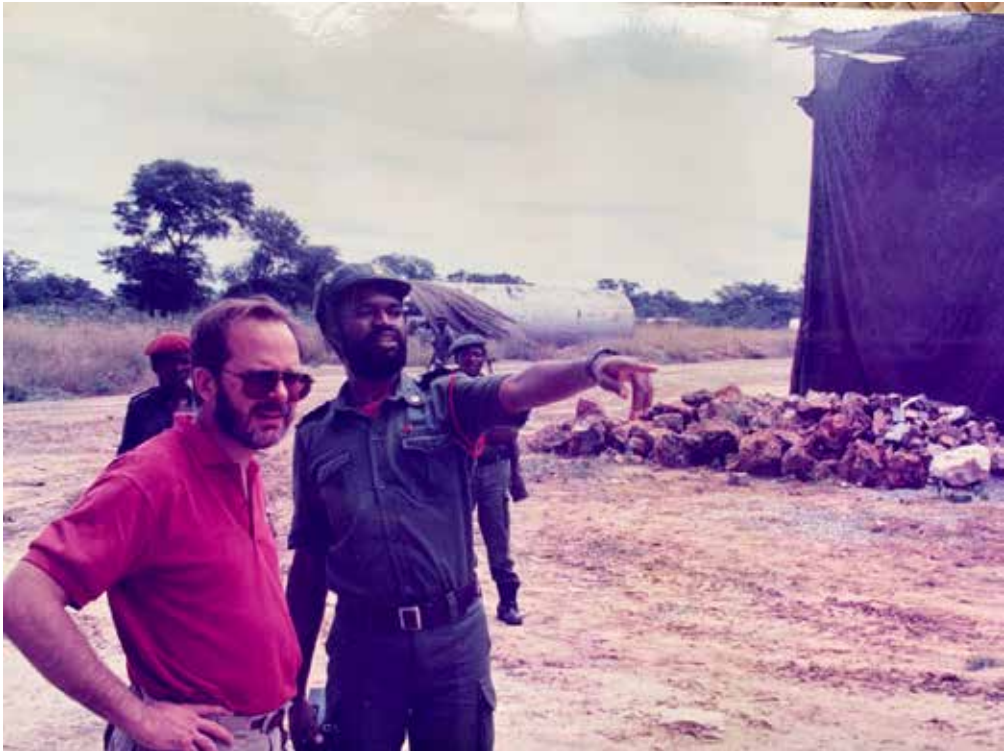
Having saved millions of South Sudanese, WFP faced a possible new famine in South Sudan (independent since 2005) in 2014. This time it was not as a result

of a war with Sudan, but because the two big ethnic groups, Nuer and Dinka, had engaged in a terrible war in their own country. WFP's donors ended up, alas, getting tired of saving millions of people who would readily agree with each other if their leaders, in their thirst for power, did not succeed in pitting them against each other.

In the nineties we had constructed the only routes in the country, had expanded landing strips, and even tolerated the whining of the Dutch Ministry of Development that reproached us for doing what they believed was the work of the World Bank. But why hadn't the World Bank, the African Development Bank or the European Union constructed routes that were so indispensable to transporting hundreds of thousands tons of food rations by truck rather than by plane?

## Special Relief Programme in Angola

Douglas Casson Coutts



Mancusso, Angola - reviewing border crossing and security procedures with Colonel Jahulo (UNITA), 1991

I received a call from Rome in the early part of 1990. The World Food Programme (WFP) Senior Management in Rome wanted to know whether the Country Office in Windhoek, Namibia, could help the WFP team in Angola access the south of that country through Namibia. My first reaction was, "Of course." And then I thought, "Oh my, the new Namibian Government and the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) are not going to like this."

A civil war had been raging for years between the central Government in Luanda, led by the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) rebel force led by Jonas Savimbi. The Angola/Namibia border area was a war zone until the year before. In what was one of the most vicious examples of a "proxy war" during the Cold War, South Africa fought a long and bitter war along the border of South West Africa (SWA – later Namibia), a former German colony, and Angola. The League of Nations gave SWA to the British in trusteeship after World War I, and the British in turn authorized South Africa, their colony at the time, to manage it on their behalf. The problem developed after World War II when

South Africa essentially annexed SWA and imposed an apartheid system that was stricter than the version in South Africa.



South West Africa Government Office (South African Colonial Office), Windhoek (with the three official languages of the territory, Afrikaans, English and German)

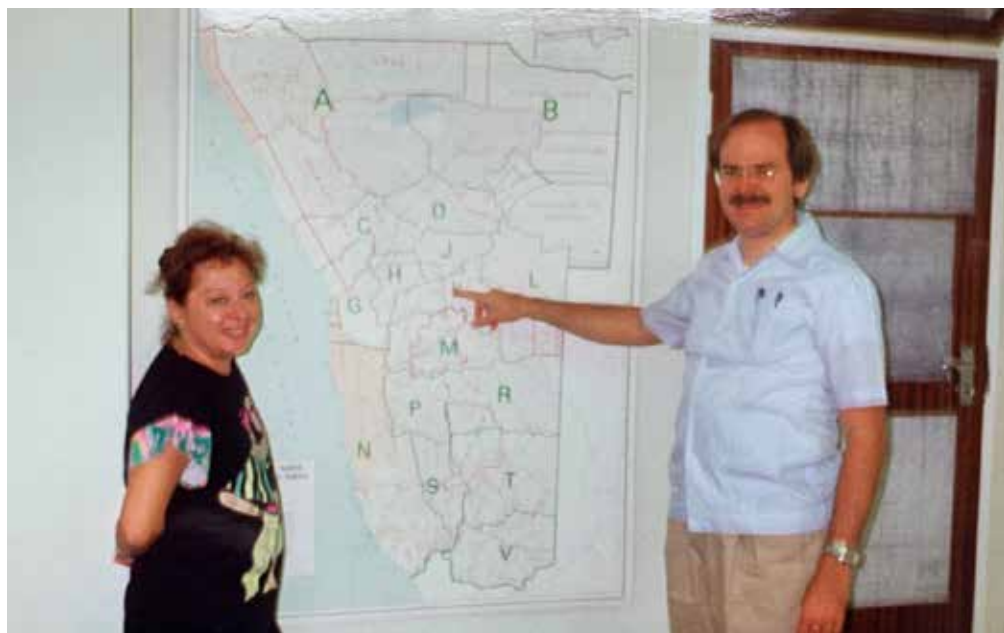
Similar to the liberation struggle between the South African Government and the African National Congress (ANC), SWAPO fought the SWA colonial government that was imposed by South Africa and considered an illegal occupation by the United Nations. A guerrilla war raged in the northern border area for 30 years, with SWAPO insurgents based in Angola fighting the South African Defence Force (SADF) and the SWA Territorial Army. Cuban troops fought alongside the Angolan Army (MPLA) and SWAPO against South Africans who were fighting in alliance with UNITA who controlled most of southeastern Angola at the time. There were also a number of irregular SADF battalions made up of anti-SWAPO Namibians, disaffected Angolans, and mercenaries plus "Bushmen" or San soldiers who were excellent trackers and the bane of SWAPO troops (known as PLAN – People's Liberation Army of Namibia). Their former border base, known as the Buffalo Base, was ideally situated to become our WFP Operations Centre for cross-border operations.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Namibian refugees had been living in exile since the 1960s, in United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) camps in Angola and Zambia, sponsored by SWAPO with food rations provided by WFP. By the 1980s, the border proxy war was at a stalemate and South Africa finally accepted United Nations Resolution 435, which was to lead to a United Nations-mandated transition of SWA to independence as Namibia and the withdrawal of

SADF. The peacekeeping mission was known as the United Nations Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG). UNHCR and WFP were included as key parts of UNTAG as we organized the repatriation, rehabilitation and resettlement of refugees from our camps back to Namibia to ensure that they would be able to participate in the first “free and fair” elections in the autumn of 1989 that led to the election of a SWAPO-led Government at independence in March 1990.

Once it became clear that United Nations Resolution 435 was actually to be implemented after many years of false starts, and the last colony in Africa was finally on the road to independence, UNHCR, WFP and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) scrambled to pull together a repatriation plan for SWAPO refugees. Charlie Rutledge from WFP’s Emergency Service walked into my office at WFP Headquarters in Rome early in 1989 and asked me to join the mission on behalf of WFP. The relationships and goodwill established with SWAPO leadership during that Angola mission later helped tremendously to convince the newly elected independent Government of Namibia to allow us to run our convoys to Angola.

I was later asked to join UNTAG as “Chargé de Mission” (a title that didn’t exist at WFP). Tesema Negash, Country Director in Gambia, went on temporary detail to UNTAG over the summer of 1989, and I took over in September. Loredana Fraternali-Donati, Senior Secretary with Jack Ritchie, who was the Asia Bureau head at WFP Headquarters, volunteered to join me as “International Secretary” for our UNTAG Mission Office. In addition, WFP was also approached by the United Nations Personnel Office in New York to contribute staff to UNTAG. WFP assigned four international secretaries and administrative staff to UNTAG.



Loredana Fraternali-Donati with Douglas Coutts – with a map of the new Namibia, Windhoek, 1989



When the call came from WFP Headquarters on the Special Relief Programme for Angola (SRPA) support, Namibia had just become independent and UNTAG was withdrawing. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was not yet on the scene and WFP and UNICEF were in the process of designing a Country Programme with the expectation that we would open a longer-term office and establish an in-country presence, requested by the new SWAPO Government.

The WFP Logistics Office in Rome sent David Kaatrud to help us come up with a logistics plan for the SRPA support. John Prout came over from Mozambique where he had been working with CARE on a WFP project. Hiroyuki Matsumura, Loredana and I were in the process of hiring local staff from the departing UNTAG to establish a regular WFP Country Office.

Ramiro Lopes da Silva was head of the WFP Angola Office (WFP Director of Operations in those days since we were technically under UNDP). Ramiro and his team, including our NGO partners, e.g., CARE, World Vision, Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and International Medical Corps (IMC), needed us to transport food rations and medical supplies overland to vast areas on the southern border areas of Angola as part of the SRPA. We also had to work through UNITA who controlled these areas and was at war with the central government of Angola. We only had a few sandy tracks to work with and no proper roads.



David Kaatrud (WFP), Ulrich Olesen (LWF), John Prout (WFP), Douglas Coutts (WFP) – in front of one of the convoy vehicles, former Buffalo Base, 32<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (SADF), Bagani, Namibia, 1991



As part of our peace and reconciliation work, WFP was in the process of setting up a game guard training programme in this border area for demobilized San soldiers/trackers (known as "Bushmen") who had fought with SADF and UNITA in the border war. This "Bushmen" battalion was disbanded at independence and San ex-soldiers remained behind as Namibians when other SADF battalions were withdrawn to South Africa. The group of indigenous San tribes living in this area are known as the Khwe. The new SWAPO Government planned to expel them to Angola, even though they were Namibians, because they had fought against SWAPO during the border war. After I made a personal appeal to President Sam Nujoma, the new Government relented and allowed us to retrain them to work in our newly created "anti-poaching squads" in what would become Namibia's first National Park in the Caprivi strip.

The point here is that WFP already had a modest presence in this section of the Caprivi strip (on the border) and we had come across the now abandoned and dismantled military base of the Buffalo and Bushmen SADF battalions (Omega Base). The base still had a few simple facilities for food storage, warehouses and motor pool shelters, which President Nujoma agreed to let WFP use for cross-border operations—but only with my personal assurance that we would not cause him any political embarrassment. He anticipated criticism because Namibia would not only be assisting its most recent enemies but also sending out of Namibia food and supplies that should have been used at home.



Ready to proceed over the border, awaiting final clearance from Luanda – 1<sup>st</sup> WFP convoy, March 1991

The nascent Namibian Army and Police forces were not yet in control and were barely present on the border, but the president instructed the army not to interfere with our operations but rather to support us where they could and provide for our security. David Kaatrud and I camped for an extended period in the bush near the base and survived on hot dogs and beans while trying to

figure out a workable operational plan. As he was a master logistics planner, even in those earlier days, I learned much from David Kaatrud.

We purchased food in South Africa or shipped it through the South African port of Walvis Bay. The food and medical supplies from our NGO partners in Namibia were stored at the Buffalo base. For transportation, we found ten heavy duty, well-used, six-by-six all-wheel-drive trucks in Cape Town, and a team of drivers and mechanics who were ex-SADF soldiers who had fought in the border war and knew the back routes and difficult road conditions in the border region. They were all white Afrikaners (who held a very dim view of the role of the United Nations in their region), which further complicated our lives with SWAPO and the Namibian Army. While their expertise and back country knowledge was critical to our success in navigating the bush, there were tense moments in the personal and working relationships among this disparate group that we had to manage—it felt like the “Wild West” at times.



Interviews with the skeptical Namibian press were useful to building awareness and appreciation for the cross-border operation – here with NBC (Namibian Broadcasting Corporation TV) at Buffalo Base, Bagani, on the border, March 1991

Then we had to assure staff and convoy safety with a “security umbrella” on both sides of the border, which had been a no-man’s land during the war and sealed as a “no-go area” after independence. There were no border posts anywhere on the border at that time because the new Namibian SWAPO Government essentially wanted nothing to do with the central Government of

Angola. The Namibian Military and Police supported us locally but would not approach the border as they did not want to risk any encounters with UNITA, who controlled the entire Angolan border in that area. It took quite some time to negotiate operating procedures, logistics protocols and understandings on the border, especially with UNITA.



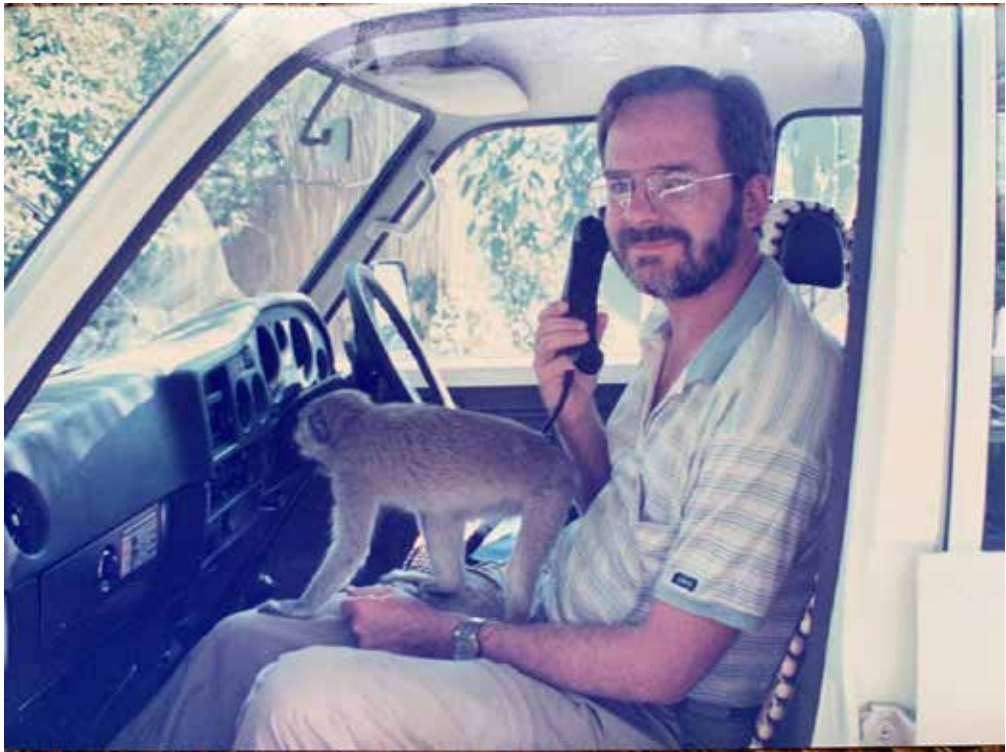
Border – Mancusso, Angola and Bagani, Namibia – safe passage discussion for 1<sup>st</sup> WFP relief convoy, 1991



Former SADF Buffalo base, Bagani – inspection of 1<sup>st</sup> WFP convoy by Namibian military, police, Embassy of Angola diplomats from Windhoek, March 1991



For our first encounters with UNITA to discuss and agree on the logistics and modalities of crossing the border, Ramiro Lopes da Silva and I communicated on a VHF radio channel—I sat in our WFP Land Cruiser at the Buffalo base and Ramiro was in his office in Luanda. Ramiro had a key UNITA diplomatic connection based in Washington, D.C., who was in direct contact with UNITA Headquarters in Jamba (Angola), on the telephone. They in turn would communicate and confirm our agreements for safe passage with field commanders operating in the bush near the border. We would receive clearance (and a safety guarantee) to approach the border and, seemingly out of nowhere, deep in the bush, UNITA troops would appear as soon as we started waving a white flag and a United Nations flag on the border.



On the VHF radio working on our border crossing clearance with Ramiro Lopes da Silva – with a visit from Bonnie Bagani, LWF mascot

Once we had an agreement, we started running regular convoys from the former SADF Buffalo base to Likuwa and later Jamba (UNITA Headquarters). In the beginning, UNITA insisted that I lead the first convoys over the border with the local UNITA commander because we had signed the agreement and they held us personally accountable. John Prout later led and managed the convoys in Angola for the entire trip. Conditions were most difficult—distances were not long; i.e., a few hundred kilometres, but convoys could take up to ten days because there were usually long delays, more often than not caused by bad road conditions,

marauding elephants and torrential rains. Despite these challenges and setbacks, John and his team did a stellar job in very tough circumstances.

Once we started running the convoys on a regular basis and established a suitable, respectable level of trust and faith in our abilities to pull off these convoys, Ramiro flew down to meet us at the Buffalo base in a WFP plane with senior MPLA Government officials from Luanda. We met with the Namibian Military at the border to lessen tensions and cement a working relationship between Luanda and the SWAPO Government, who had only ceased their vicious war as bitter enemies within Angola the previous year.



With WFP international secretaries assigned to UNTAG visiting the WFP office, UNTAG HQ, Windhoek, 1990

As the SRPA expanded and our overland capacity became restrained due to logistic constraints, we began airlifts with leased C-130 aircraft from the former SADF Air Force base at Rundu in north-central Namibia. Clive Spencer, WFP Logistics Officer, ran those operations in a highly professional and organized manner. By now we had earned the trust of the new SWAPO Government in an independent Namibia. The negative attitudes started to decisively change as more Namibians, through the press, began to understand our role in the operation, which we presented as comparable to the years of support they had received from WFP when they were refugees. The new government eventually realized that they were being called to rise above the tragic circumstances of the border war and liberation struggle in order to support others who were suffering just as they had, even though these aid recipients were previously their sworn enemies. What began as pretty much a personal favour to me (representing the agency that had fed SWAPO refugees for decades) from the Namibian President turned into a large-scale road convoy and airlift relief operation. Those efforts saved countless lives and helped stabilize the southern half of Angola. WFP

played a key role during this period in facilitating and helping to usher in an entirely new constructive and peaceful relationship between two countries that were previously at war.

### **Dedication**

This story is dedicated to the memory of Loredana Fraternali-Donati,  
International Secretary, WFP Namibia.

# Europe

## Food Deliveries Across Enemy Lines in Bosnia-Herzegovina

**Martin Ohlsen**



### **Introduction**

In August 1994 I was reassigned from Rome as Logistics Coordinator to the World Food Programme (WFP) operation in the Former Yugoslavia. Jean-Marie Boucher was the WFP Country Director and Peter Scott-Bowden was the Emergency Programme Officer. I replaced Piero Terranera who was the Senior Logistics Officer. Charles Vincent, later followed by Douglas Broderick, was the Head of the Belgrade Office in Serbia.

After an initial stay of four months in Zagreb and weekly missions to Bosnia, the office moved to Sarajevo in spring 1995. Jean-Marie had already installed a small antenna-office with one international staff member there. With the move to Sarajevo, the number of staff and

office structure were heavily expanded to staff all positions in the sub-offices in Bihac, Zenica, Tuzla, Mostar and Banja-Luca, and all key functions in Sarajevo. By the end of the year, WFP was installed side by side with UNHCR in all major towns.

Tun Myat, who was Director of WFP's Transport Division, must have anticipated the upcoming massive change in the organizational set-up in Bosnia and the transfer of responsibility for food assistance from UNHCR to WFP in 1996. He gave me clear directions before I left: "With the upcoming transfer, and within one year, introduce commercial transport for all deliveries into Bosnia, take over the entire UNHCR transport activity, reduce and finally eliminate the need for any international convoys, and reduce the transport costs as much as possible."

### **Country Background**

Bosnia-Herzegovina comprises two autonomous entities: The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republica Srpska. As specified in the constitution, three distinguished groups live in the country: Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. The



“internal” lines are also reflected in a three-member presidency composed of a member from each major group.

The war in Bosnia (1992-1995) encompassed all three groups, fighting each other over territories, enclaves, and regions as well as along ethnic and faith-based lines. The war ended in December 1995 with a negotiated settlement known as the Dayton Agreement. The economic and political division of the country and the three mentioned groups remain until today.

### **The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as the Lead-Agency for the Relief Operation in Bosnia**

With the collapse of the Yugoslav Federal State and the establishment of new borders, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had been involved in the unfolding crisis since 1991. It became the lead-agency for all United Nations relief efforts. Many Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) had actually become refugees. Consequently, UNHCR's traditional mandate was automatically extended to all displaced persons in the countries of the Former Yugoslavia. It is interesting to note that the extended mandate was formally confirmed for refugees and IDPs in Africa under the so called Kampala Agreement (2009) between UNHCR and the African Union with wide operational consequences for WFPs operation on the continent.

Within the relief effort, UNHCR operated since several years a commercial trucking fleet out of Belgrade and an international trucking fleet of trucks out of Metkovic in Croatia. The international trucking fleet in Croatia consisted of a number of convoys with about 90 cargo trucks. The convoys were either directly seconded to UNHCR (like the Norwegian/Norwegian Refugee Council convoy) or funded by governments like the UK, Denmark and Germany. Each convoy team operated with international drivers.

The fleet out of Belgrade was a dedicated, commercially contracted, white-painted Serbian trucking fleet, exclusively delivering assistance to destinations in the Republica Srpska (the Serbian part of Bosnia-Herzegovina).

### **WFP's First Europe-Based Large-Scale Relief Operation**

WFP's initial reticence to get involved in a full-scale food assistance programme was based on a corporate understanding not to engage in a middle-income European country, well outside WFP's usual focus area—intervening only in crises involving low-income countries. WFP's intervention in the Former Yugoslavia was therefore its first large-scale emergency relief operation based in Europe.

WFP food shipments had started in November 1992, when the above-mentioned international trucking fleets managed by UNHCR, had already been operational for some time. At this time during the ongoing war and until mid 1995, WFP undertook a limited responsibility for mobilizing food and delivering it to UNHCR warehouse locations outside Bosnia-Herzegovina. From there, UNHCR would

take over and distribute the food assistance. WFP offices had been opened in Zagreb and Belgrade, and a Port Captain was assigned to Ploce, on the Adriatic coast of Croatia. Other shipments were made through the port of Constanza, Romania.



Staff meeting in Sarajevo with Country Director Jean-Marie Boucher

With WFP's move to Sarajevo in January 1995, and nearly a year before the Dayton Agreement was signed in December 1995, WFP also established a wide network of warehouses, ready to start managing all of the food supply. By end 1995 the rather "tedious" operational transfer was nearly completed and WFP had assumed full responsibility for the entire food assistance programme in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The programme scale was to deliver an average of 18,000 mt of various food items to some 65 delivery points in the country monthly.

### **Challenges and Dangers of Delivery Beyond "Enemy lines"**

Our first objective was to "break through" the four Serbian checkpoints that were still active at the entry of besieged Sarajevo, coming from the South. Since 1993, the checkpoints were used to control UNHCR convoys requesting passage into besieged Sarajevo. At all times, some 300,000 people were living in Sarajevo. There had not been any commercial transport entering Sarajevo, but tunnels had been dug to supply the town from outside. Due to the siege, a very large part of the population depended on assistance from the outside, mainly on bread produced and distributed in town daily, with wheat flour provided by UNHCR through WFP.

Our second objective was to ensure a regular supply to some of the isolated, government-held Muslim enclaves in eastern Bosnia, the territory of Republica

Srpska, like Srebrenica and Gorazde. Both enclaves had been under siege and shelling for years. The horrible massacre of some 8,000 men in Srebrenica in July 1995 was on everybody's mind, and it brought significant changes of attitude in the international community, vis-à-vis the Serbian military forces. NATO forces launched important air strikes, destroying large parts of the infrastructure in the hinterland, forcing the Serbian Government to conclude the Dayton Agreement. By this time, Gorazde, which is only 35 km away from Sarajevo, with a population of 60,000, had remained somehow isolated, badly damaged, with people exhausted by years of siege and continuous Serbian military /militia presence on the outskirts of the town.

### **Convoy Operation into Sarajevo and Eastern Bosnia**

Before and even after the Dayton Agreement was signed at the end of 1995, it was quite normal for any relief convoy, United Nations or commercial, to be blocked "en route" and held back for no reason. Military authorities levied "taxes" on people, vehicles and cargo, and stones were thrown at vehicles, particularly by children and youngsters. There was always an atmosphere of insecurity on the roads and high pressure at checkpoints. Negotiation with authorities had become a part of the reality of war and post war operations. Convoy leaders were very exposed in the lead-vehicle and during negotiations. They held important responsibility for the security of national drivers, vehicles, and cargo.

### **Civil Military Liaison and Convoy Clearance**



Discharging wheat flour in Sarajevo, 1995

From January 1995, Peter Scott-Bowden, WFP Programme Officer and Dale Skoric, the later assigned Sarajevo based Military Liaison Officer, both with

experience in military and cross-border/cross enemy line operations, used their expertise and contacts to arrange clearance of WFP commercial truck movements through various territories and into isolated locations in eastern Bosnia and to Sarajevo. Although each convoy was well prepared and monitored, we were not always able to ensure that all trucks were unloaded at the right warehouse in Sarajevo or in the enclave. A usual occurrence was a diversion of the last or several truck(s) at the end of the convoy while entering a town. By the time it was noticed, the truck would have already been unloaded and returned to the convoy. This happened also occasionally with trucks entering Sarajevo.

We had no other means but to report the incident to our office and the United Nations Military Police, or as in the case of "Serb Sarajevo," to follow up with authorities on our beneficiaries and distribution lists, which was a tedious and to some extent dangerous undertaking, because it forced WFP staff to cross over the "Snipers Alley" into the heavily damaged "Serb Sarajevo." Serb Sarajevo authorities regularly asked us to divert 30 percent or three truckloads out of ten to their side. I did not experience any direct, personal threats from these authorities, but there were hostilities towards the United Nations and other relief organizations. I experienced this twice while accompanying a convoy to Gorazde. When I confronted the Serb authorities who had diverted a truck on the outskirts of town, it was made clear, with a Kalashnikov pointed at me, that I should move on with my "own business."

### **First Trial Run into Sarajevo and Gradual "Takeover"**

After the summer of 1995, we decided to start the "transfer" from UNHCR with a regular number of small commercial food convoys to Sarajevo. The first seven trucks with Croatian plates were loaded by WFP Ploce with wheat flour for unloading at the famous bakery in the center of Sarajevo. Contractors had provided WFP with an acceptable price per mt and selected experienced drivers. Jens Baekholm, the WFP Port Captain in Ploce and his assistant, Snjezna had done a great deal of preparation and accompanied the trucks up to the first Serb checkpoint before Sarajevo. We had informed UNPROFOR, the United Nations Protection Force, but they purposefully had not made other direct pre-arrangements with Serbian checkpoints at the entry of Sarajevo. Trucks were supposed to arrive in convoy fashion, enter Sarajevo for discharge and departure on the same day. To our surprise, all trucks drove straight past the checkpoints, arrived at the mill and were safely discharged. After that, WFP Logistics Staff accompanied the empty trucks back to the checkpoints to facilitate their passage. Later, I became convinced that the commercial operators were making their own arrangements along the routes and the checkpoints to guarantee smooth delivery. They had understood from the very beginning that a shift to commercial transport would provide an important boost to the local transport economy.

We were encouraged by this experience and increased the deliveries to Sarajevo. We also started deliveries to Mostar, very close to Ploce and to Zenica and Tuzla, in central Bosnia. UNHCR had not anticipated the fast pace of our implementation. Jean-Marie had to hear and reply to a lot of criticism during interagency meetings relating to "breaking up the good routine and practice," and our logistics team was openly criticized, even internally. Rumours were spread about our incapacity to keep the delivery path during the winter without the deployment of specialized trucks later in the year. We kept insisting, and Jean-Marie supported us in his typical, diplomatic way. During the spring of 1996, the German Representative in Sarajevo called me to ask whether Germany should extend its funding of the German convoy for six more months. I told him, WFP was capable of doubling deliveries using commercial trucks with the same funding and Germany should allocate the funds directly to WFP. As a consequence, the German convoy was not extended and we were no longer "welcomed" in the UNHCR Croatian-based truck-convoy base.

### **WFP Deliveries to the Bosnian Enclave**

A new challenge arose when we were asked to provide regular transport services to the Bosnian enclave in Gorazde. The enclave was in the territory of the Republika Srpska, only 35 km from Sarajevo. For political reasons, food deliveries to these nearby enclaves were not part of WFP-Belgrade's operation. For the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, deliveries to Gorazde from Sarajevo presented a test of the agreed free passage and actual implementation of the Dayton Agreement. Throughout the Bosnian Civil War, Serb rebel and military forces had frequently stopped and prevented United Nations convoys from reaching the enclaves. A regular convoy of commercial trucks was new and a practical test.

We decided to organize and plan for a weekly convoy of up to six commercial trucks with Bosnian plates and drivers. The convoy was led by a WFP vehicle. The quantities to be delivered were packed on palettes and planned in such a way that we were able to guarantee quick discharge and return to Sarajevo during the day. The preparation went well and I was asked to lead the first convoy, followed by many others. Clearances were obtained. Very early in the morning we set off with the convoy through the tunnel separating Bosnian Sarajevo from Serb Sarajevo. Shortly after crossing the tunnel, we came across a checkpoint and were asked to stop. I was called into the guard post. A discussion ensued, translated by the driver of the lead vehicle. We were offered coffee and Slivovitz and all looked at the driver, a Muslim, to see whether he would drink. He apologized, "I am the driver," and I had to swallow two Slivovitzs on an empty stomach around 7 a. m. We were released, but had to promise to bring some "souvenirs" from Sarajevo next time. After that, we made it to Gorazde without any incident, passing through an Italian UNPROFOR-controlled road intersection and without any kids throwing stones. It is on one such transfers that a truck loaded with vegetable oil was diverted from the convoy entering Gorazde. I continued leading convoys into Gorazde, each time

carrying “souvenirs” in the form of cigarettes, coffee, brandy, and football - or car magazines for distribution to Serbian soldiers. Over time, WFP’s weekly deliveries by convoy to Gorazde had become a normal operation and the soldiers had withdrawn.

### **The Breakthrough**

By spring 1996, our office had nearly achieved the “mission objectives” formulated by Tun Myat, when one afternoon, on short notice, Rome offered us a US Charter Vessel with 30,000 mt of bulk wheat grain. Jean-Marie was excited and gave the logistics team until the next day to provide him with an operations concept. We had never received loose grain in Croatia, had no milling arrangements with any of the local mills in place, and were not sure whether we would be able to identify and contract sufficient trucks to carry the grain in bulk to the mills.

The following day, a logistics mission was sent to the Port of Split where the required discharge equipment was available. The port management agreed immediately to receive the shipment and we gave our “go-ahead” to Jean-Marie. We also worked day and night to set up milling agreements with four Bosnian mills in Tuzla, Mostar, Bugojno and Sarajevo. A Dutch milling expert, identified by Joop Menkveld, WFP Procurement Officer based in Rome, came as a volunteer to Bosnia and helped us with the negotiations and agreements. None of the mills had actually operated during the last four years and the owners were very keen on collaborating with WFP. We had, however, not yet decided whether we were going to bag the grain upon discharge or deliver the loose grain directly to the mills.

In Split, we heard about a large transport company in Bugojno. Before the war, the company frequently performed bulk transportation services to the mills in Bosnia. However, Bugojno town and its surroundings were where Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks fought bitterly during their 1993-1994 war and ethnic relations in Bugojno remained strained.

The town was still divided between the two groups when we arrived there for freight negotiations. The truck fleet was dispersed on both sides of the town and individual drivers offered transport services. Our team literally had to cross the main street several times, going from one coffee shop to the other, until both parties finally agreed to sit together in the meeting room at the nearby grain mill to discuss. Once the two groups understood that we were proposing a commercial transport agreement under the condition that they were able to reinstate the company and agree to provide the necessary number of trucks for the direct discharge of some 2,500 mt daily, we signed a transport agreement within two weeks, just in time for the arrival of the vessel. All grain was transported in bulk directly to the mills. The operation was a success.

## **Lessons Learned and Personal Opinion About the Situation**

WFP became increasingly known in the country. We were offering a number of service contracts in transport, storage, distribution and milling, thus providing a large number of business opportunities to the local economy. This substantially facilitated access to all locations and areas in Bosnia for WFP contractors, irrespective of truck registration or origin of the driver.

From there on, we were no longer tracking every vehicle, nor did we provide any support in the form of pre-clearance and information to the United Nations Peacekeeping Force. WFP had become a recognized business partner to the extent that sometimes, when we were travelling through Bosnia with the logistics team and stopped for a break, random customers offered us free coffee.

WFP has frequently applied cross-border deliveries through enemy lines in many countries, favouring commercial solutions before establishing WFP trucking fleets. To a certain extent, even WFP Aviation, which started chartering cargo aircraft in the 90s, became during the years the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS). WFP was able to build a strong and professional reputation in the transportation of passenger and relief cargo by air worldwide. The United Nations reform and establishment of the Global Logistics Cluster enforced WFP's Transport and Logistics role in all United Nations relief operations. With the decentralization of many Logistics Officer positions to the field, the Transport Division in Rome and Country Offices were able to offer "all-in" logistic services to the humanitarian community, whether by air, sea, river or land following the simple slogan, "we deliver!"

## Delivering Food in a Complicated Region – The Balkans

Charles Vincent



Charles Vincent

In 1993 I was head of the World Food Programme (WFP) Belgrade, Serbia office, in charge of Serbia, Montenegro, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Eastern Bosnia, including Muslim enclaves being tightly besieged by Bosnian Serbs. I reported to David Morton, who was Director of the Yugoslavia operation based in Zagreb. Francesco Strippoli was the headquarters coordinator for Yugoslavia.

Eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina, mostly Bosnian-Serb territory, had a substantial number of displaced people, and Muslim enclaves (I believe totalling about 80,000 people, but it could have been fewer), could not be reached from Croatia; therefore, humanitarian cargo had to go through Serbia.

Almost all WFP humanitarian relief for this corridor was offloaded in Burgas, Bulgaria, and transported by trucks to Belgrade, offloaded into United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) warehouses (until WFP started operation), and later into a WFP-leased warehouse in Pancevo (on the outskirts of Belgrade). By getting its own warehouse and repackaging operation, WFP was able to drastically cut down on the cost of logistics.

From Pancevo, convoys were organized by UNHCR through a fleet of commercial operators for Serb-controlled territories, together with a dedicated fleet of trucks managed by UNHCR, to reach Muslim enclaves inside Bosnia-Herzegovina. WFP



was later able to do direct deliveries right into Serb-controlled territories, speeding up deliveries and reducing costs (no offloading-reloading).

Remember, the winter is brutal in that region, and "Yugoslav" and "Bosnian" Serb authorities were not always helpful with getting cargo to Muslim enclaves. They argued that there were a lot of poor, displaced Serbs who needed help (true enough, but the situation in the enclaves was really dire). Permits to go in and out were often given, but yet trucks were blocked at the border for a lot of bad reasons.



Kosovo displaced people, WFP/Tom Haskell



WFP convoy, Yugoslavia, WFP/Tom Haskell

At one point, I received a call from Francesco Strippoli who informed me that after consulting David Morton, we (Belgrade Office) would receive, through the port of Burgas, Bulgaria, about 30,000 mt of wheat flour—a gift from the US. But there was a catch:

- The donor wanted all of the cargo to go to Bosnia
- The flour's validity for consumption would soon come to an end and we had two weeks to offload and transport it to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Note: this meant engaging about 1,000 trucks in winter conditions.

When the ship arrived, a WFP Port Officer was sent to Burgas to coordinate. The tender had resulted in an amazingly low price of around USD 35/mt from Burgas to Belgrade and a bit more for direct delivery to various Bosnian towns as Extended Delivery Points (EDP).

One major difficulty was getting a transporter who had sufficient trucks to do the rotations at a pace of 65 trucks of 30 mt each day, and willing to go into Bosnia. We were able to get reasonable prices because Serbia/Montenegro and Serbian Bosnia were under strict economic sanctions...i.e., no fuel. The truckers had to mount huge belly tanks under the trailers and fill them up with cheap Bulgarian gasoline and diesel, reselling the fuel after crossing the border at a huge profit. This is why WFP received cheap rates for transporting food cargo. But we did not know it at the time.

Another difficulty was getting into Serbia and driving all the way to Bosnia. At the outset of the operation, Serb Customs Authorities blocked trucks from entering Serbia through the Bulgarian border. Politicians in Belgrade were upset that none of the 30,000 mt of flour was going to Serbia and Montenegro proper. After three days, we had nearly 200 trucks waiting at the border, incurring demurrage. I called headquarters and advised to stop all shipments to displaced Serbs in Serbia and Bosnia. Not more than 20 minutes later, the border magically reopened. Could it have been that our phones were monitored? You can bet on it. The 200 trucks were allowed to proceed, some to UNHCR warehouses for transshipment on the designated fleet, and some directly to the Bosnian border into Serb-controlled territories where no issues were raised.

We had an issue with the poor quality of the wheat flour on delivery. After spending weeks on the Mediterranean sea, and in light of the proximity of its expiry date, some of the flour was definitely not in good shape. We had our Logistic Officers review and advise authorities to put the bad stuff aside, have local health officials analyze it, and sell it for cattle feed as needed, and per WFP regulations.

Would beneficiaries accept the flour? Yes indeed, because the situation was dire for hundreds of thousands of people in Bosnia-Herzegovina and wheat flour was needed to make bread. It might not have been the highest quality bread they

ever made; nevertheless, they knew WFP was trying its very best. I remember an old woman, near Dobož, crying with joy when the flour was handed to her.

Here is another story about the Balkans and the mixed Serb-Muslim brigade stationed in Dobož, a town with a Jewish mayor. The mayor was going to stay to the bitter end (the town was basically destroyed) because Serbs had protected Jewish families in Dobož during World War II. You cannot invent this stuff. It is the Balkans!

The last trucks entered Bosnia on the very last day before the flour was due to expire...and you can bet that the authorities would have blocked any truck with expired food.

In the end, it was another amazing WFP job, thanks to a team of dedicated and great colleagues who crossed borders in conflict zones to get incredible amounts of food to people who needed it...and they did it with pride and total dedication. We also had some good moments around rakia, with beneficiaries who only had rakia to share.

If I were to suggest ideas for success from our experience, I would say:

- First and foremost, recruit the best people possible and create a real team, whether you are distributing food or cash.
- Secondly, it is important to have a strong network with transporters, government authorities, etc.
- Thirdly, it is crucial to tell beneficiaries the truth about what, when, how (especially in emergency situations) and where things can get bad very quickly. If things do not go right, be upfront; this can literally save your life (based on similar personal experiences in Afghanistan, Haiti, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burundi two years ago). Sure, people do not like to hear bad news, but if you have established trust, it will, for the most part, be alright.
- Finally, do not promise what you are not sure you can deliver. And, if possible, have presence when things go right or not. This applies, again, for food, non-food, or cash.

WFP staff have always done a great job feeding hungry people around the world. One key issue from the mid-90s onward was security restrictions imposed on WFP and UNHCR, particularly by security officers, which prevented us from doing more when we could have. Yes, we did some crazy stuff back in the 80s and 90s, which, looking back, were really overboard in terms of risk. But the "cover your back" approach of the years 2000 and increased bureaucracy brought about by the internet and spreadsheets were not a positive development for helping people in need. It is a real conundrum. I understand that the world is definitely not the way it was up into the 90s. Humanitarianism is definitely more difficult today than it was; at least that is my feeling.

# **Middle East - Iraq**

## World Food Programme Involvement in Iraq (2002-2005)

Torben Due



Torben Due

### A. The International Context and Background

Iraq invaded and occupied Kuwait in August 1990 with the purpose of annexing it. This was immediately condemned by the United Nations Security Council, calling for a withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. However, the Government of Iraq did not respond, and within a week the Security Council approved Resolution 661, which included very comprehensive sanctions against Iraq. All imports, exports, financial services, flight connections and other exchanges between Iraq and other United Nations member states and their nationals were prohibited under Resolution 661. Overview of compliance was done by the Sanctions Committee, which was also established under Resolution 661. Humanitarian supplies such as food and medicine were not part of the sanctions, but they were still under the supervision of the Resolution 661 Sanctions Committee.

In January-February 1991, Iraqi forces were driven out of Kuwait by a broad coalition led by the US in a military operation code named "Desert Storm." Regime change was not part of the agenda and Coalition forces soon left Iraq. Widespread uprisings in the then Shia dominated south and Kurdish north

followed, but the regime managed to regain control of the south while the Kurdish north retained a de facto autonomy, and the central government had no presence in the Kurdish areas (the governorates Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaimaniyah).

The sanctions remained in force as the Iraqi government did not collaborate or fully comply with numerous other Security Council Resolutions that followed. In addition, subsidiary organs were established such as the Border Demarcation Commission, the Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM), the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) and the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) for issues related to Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), including chemical, biological and nuclear issues. Other special commissions were set up to deal with damages caused by Iraqi forces in Kuwait, for property, missing persons, etc. The issues dealt with by these commissions ensured that Iraq was very high on the international agenda for many years to come.

The sanctions had a serious negative impact on the economy that was exacerbated by damages to infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and transport equipment, caused by the war. The Iraqi economy was based on oil export, and the import of almost anything else, including food. Consequently, the economy collapsed as nothing could be exported or imported. Import of medicines and food for humanitarian purposes were the only exceptions. Nevertheless, widespread human suffering followed, caused by lack of medicine and food, and aggravated by a lack of spare parts for electricity plants, equipment for hospitals, transport equipment, etc. The humanitarian crisis prompted the international community to provide funding for emergency programmes addressing this situation. The US was the largest donor, but all traditional donors contributed with substantial support to alleviate the humanitarian crisis.

The World Food Programme (WFP) was the largest player implementing humanitarian assistance on the ground, because food security was the most critical issue. In order to deal with this challenge, a large WFP office was established in Baghdad together with sub-offices in the governorates. WFP programmes were traditional emergency responses to provide assistance to large parts of the population, with special feeding programmes for vulnerable groups like infants, small children and pregnant women.

### **The Oil for Food Programme**

Humanitarian assistance was delivered effectively but it did not solve the problem it was supposed to address. There were two main problems: 1) the assistance was too small in scale compared to the magnitude of the problems, which meant the humanitarian crisis was not solved, and 2) the cost of assistance was very high and even higher if the humanitarian issues were addressed in a comprehensive manner. At the same time, large-scale humanitarian crises in West Africa, the Great Lakes region in East Africa, and

other parts of the world required substantial funding. Donor attention and funding shifted to some extent to those areas. There were also some doubts about whether the humanitarian assistance to Iraq was delivered fully in accordance with humanitarian principles, or, to be more specific, if the Government of Iraq favoured specific groups over others when defining those who needed assistance.

An important part of the considerations was that Iraq had very large oil reserves that could easily be used to finance the humanitarian assistance needed. These considerations led to the approval of Security Council Resolution 986 or the Oil for Food Programme in 1995. The use of the Iraqi oil reserves had already been considered for servicing Iraqi foreign debt, war reparations to Kuwait, and other purposes that would make it possible for Iraq to meet its international obligations.

### **How Did the Oil for Food Programme Function?**

The programme was based on the sale of Iraqi oil and the proceeds were used for funding the import of allowed humanitarian items, i.e., medicine, food, health items and other supplies and materials for essential civilian needs. There was a Goods Review List of items allowed. More Goods were gradually included over time as a result of the run-down of essential civilian facilities.

Countries interested in importing oil from Iraq were required to submit a request with all relevant details such as quantity, price export route and timing, endorsed by the Government of Iraq before forwarding the request to the Resolution 661 Sanctions Committee for approval. Once approved the buyer deposited the agreed amount into an escrow account established by the United Nations Secretary General. The Government of Iraq had no control over proceeds from the sale of oil. Independent inspection agents were deployed to Iraq to verify that the exports took place in accordance with the contract. Export only took place via the Kirkuk pipeline to Turkey or from the oil terminal of Mina al-Bakra in southern Iraq.

The Security Council approved oil exports up to one billion dollars for a 180-day period and reports were submitted to the Security Council after 90 days. The amount was increased over the years as more items were allowed. The programme was extended by the Security Council every 180 days until it decided to phase it out after the second Gulf War. Proceeds from the sale of oil covered all costs, including the cost to the United Nations for administering the programme. Exports to Iraq of food, medicine and other essential items for civilian use was in accordance with procedures already defined in Resolutions 661 and 687. The Government of Iraq requested import of commodities to Iraq based on the Goods Review List of allowed items. The Sanctions Committee approved the request after a review. Iraq guaranteed the equitable distribution of items based on a plan submitted and approved by the Secretary General. Description of the goods to be purchased was also included. The supplier was

paid directly by the United Nations with oil export proceeds held in an escrow account. The delivery of goods was monitored by a team of inspectors at the border crossing points and the port of Umm Qasr. The end use of imported items was verified by a team of observers.

### **The Role of WFP Under the Oil for Food programme**

WFP's role was limited to observing the end use of imported goods. It was, of course, mainly food, but equipment/spare parts for hospitals, the transport sector, wheat mills, etc., were also included. The food component was the largest of the Oil for Food Programme. The Government of Iraq had established a public distribution system covering the whole population with all basic food items (wheat flour, beans, oil, sugar, tea and milk powder for infants). Soap and washing powder were also provided. The monthly ration was almost 20 kg per person.

The Oil for Food Programme had a special provision and budget allocations for the three Kurdish governorates where the Iraqi Government had no presence. The monthly allocation was 60,000 mt and WFP arranged transport and managed warehouses, which meant performing functions taken care of by the Iraqi Government in the rest of the country.

The observation task was to verify if food items were distributed equally to the whole population on time. This required tracking the food imports from the border-crossing points to central warehouses in Baghdad and further to warehouses in the governorates. The final distribution took place from some 45,000 small shops. Each family had a ration card indicating members of their household, by age and gender. It also involved frequent visits to warehouses and shops to verify if the families listed received their allocated food rations. More importantly, a very large number of household visits were also carried out. In March 2003, when the second Gulf War started, more than a million visits had been carried out over the years and it showed that food supplied under the Oil for Food Programme reached the intended population. WFP only performed the observation function, but there were attempts by the government to involve WFP in the politics surrounding the sanctions.

I had a meeting with the Minister of Health in June 2002. We had a constructive conversation about the nutrition problems in Iraq. When we were finishing the meeting, a TV crew entered the room, and the minister suddenly asked, "What do you think of the sanctions affecting Iraq?" He clearly tried to get a condemnation of the sanctions but he got a bland answer instead. The exchange was on TV the same evening.

### **The Second Gulf War**

International tensions with Iraq continued after the first Gulf War. The main issue was the WMDs that were to be destroyed, according to Security Council Resolution 687. The first few years after the war, large quantities of missiles and other war materials were destroyed, and others were accounted for. However,



there were frequent problems preventing inspectors from gaining unhindered access to all sites where weapons could have been hidden. These issues continued and new allegations were made that Iraq still possessed WMD, and, furthermore, it had the capability to produce them. The tensions were high and occasional airstrikes were carried out against Iraqi targets. The September 2001 terrorist attacks on the US and subsequent military intervention in Afghanistan also increased US awareness or suspicion of potential threats from Iraq. It was clear that US policy shifted in 2002 towards regime change in Iraq, by military means if necessary.

The issue was discussed at Security Council meetings where the US Secretary of State claimed to have proof of Iraq possessing WMDs. At the same time, the United Nations inspection team declared that there was no proof of the existence of WMD in Iraq. However, a coalition led by the US gave Saddam Hussein an ultimatum to leave Iraq or face military action. Under these circumstances, Iraq was declared to be in Phase Five of the Secretary General's Security plan – meaning evacuation – and all staff left Iraq on March 18, 2003.

The war started on March 19 with heavy bombardments, and the Iraqi regime collapsed within a few weeks. This created a new reality as the regime was replaced by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), which took over all government functions in accordance with the Geneva Convention for occupied countries. This means, among other things, that the occupying power is responsible for the supply of food, medicine and other articles as needed for the population. The Ministry of Trade, in charge of the public food distribution system and WFP's main counterpart, was now headed by Robin Raphel, a US diplomat.

Also, as the political situation had changed, there was no longer a need for the Oil for Food Programme as designed under Resolution 986. Security Council Resolution 1472 of March 28, 2003 introduced important changes to the operating modality of the Oil for Food Programme. It authorized the United Nations Secretary General to take over the programme in order to ensure that the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people were met. The United Nations Secretary General through the Oil for Food Programme Secretariat and together with the relevant United Nations agencies now decided on delivery points for contracts already being shipped and redirected shipments when needed. They also reviewed the list of approved funded and non-funded contracts, and prioritized delivery based on the needs of the population. They accelerated or delayed shipments if necessary and negotiated/agreed with suppliers on necessary adjustments in the terms and conditions of the contracts being modified. The resolution also allowed the Secretary General flexibility in using the escrow account to meet the humanitarian needs of the population. The resolution gave WFP a very different role from being an observer of delivery, distribution, and use of the goods delivered under the Oil for Food Programme to

managing the pipeline of the food supply as well as a large number of other non-food supplies for the whole population.

Resolution 1483 of May 22<sup>nd</sup> started the phase-out and handover of the Oil for Food Programme to the CPA and the interim Iraqi administration. It granted 180 days to close ongoing operations and transfer remaining responsibilities to the CPA. The Development Fund for Iraq (DFI) had already been established for humanitarian and development/ reconstruction activities and remaining money from the escrow account and other Iraqi Trust Funds were transferred to the DFI. In addition, further proceeds from the sale of Iraqi oil were also deposited with the DFI. Disbursement of funds was decided by the CPA in consultation with the Iraqi interim administration.

The resolution also mandated the Secretary General to appoint a Special Representative to coordinate all United Nations activities in Iraq. While humanitarian needs were still high on the list of priorities, the scope of activities was broader than before, because it included promoting economic reconstruction, support to civil administration, promote legal and judicial reforms, facilitate reconstruction of infrastructure, and support the establishment of an internationally recognized and representative government of Iraq. The intentions and hope were that Iraq would return to normality through economic and social development, with a representative government supported by the United Nations, and in collaboration with the international community. This, however, proved to be more difficult than anticipated.

In the next section we will look more closely at the role and activities of WFP from late 2002 to the end of 2004.

## **B. The WFP Response**

### **The Pre-War Planning (2002)**

The second Gulf War started in March 2003, but WFP preparations for it were initiated in 2002. There were already speculations about an eventual US military intervention in early 2002. Political tensions were rising and a military conflict was considered a possibility by most observers. It was evidenced by statements of the US Government and replies from the Government of Iraq. Iraq was also a frequent item on the agenda of the United Nations Security Council. It was clear that an eventual military conflict would interrupt food supply to Iraq with dramatic humanitarian consequences. At that time there was no private sector involvement in the import of basic foods due to the sanctions and the Oil for Food Programme that supplied all basic food items to Iraq.

We had several basic questions: 1) How many people should WFP assist? 2) From where would we get the food? 3) How to deliver the food to the country? 4) How to distribute it to the population? Iraq had a population of around 25 million at the time, meaning a caseload substantially higher than any other emergency operation in the history of WFP. There were two schools of thoughts

regarding the caseload: 1) the first was a traditional Emergency Operation (EMOP) covering the most vulnerable people estimated to be around five million based on scenario planning, or 2) the second was to accept that the whole country would become food insecure within two months after the outbreak of war—meaning provide food supply for the whole population. It was decided that WFP should aim at assisting the whole population. It was also agreed that WFP should make an attempt to take over the Oil for Food Programme because it was considered unrealistic that donors would provide sufficient funding for such a large operation. Also, given the lead-time for procurement, shipment and overland transport, donor-funded food might not have arrived in time. It was, however, decided that WFP should appeal to donors, in case the Oil for Food Programme option did not materialize.

A Logistic Country Assessment was carried out in Iraq and neighbouring countries, which included roads, transport equipment/capacity, capacity of the ports and congestion times, etc. Setting up a distribution system for 24 million people was considered unrealistic and also not needed. The public distribution system was in place, covering the whole population with central and regional warehouses, plus around 45,000 small shops that distributed food. The only concern was what to do if the physical infrastructure was destroyed or if the staff were to leave.

It was also clear that WFP would need another structure in Iraq. Before the war, WFP had a very small logistics capacity, very little presence outside Baghdad and the Kurdish areas, a large team of national and international observers, but limited programme skills. We therefore designed an overall organigram of WFP Baghdad, and the Regional Offices in Basra, Mosul and Erbil. Organigrams were also developed for the sub-offices in the governorates. All functions were included, i.e., Logistics, Information Technology, Security, Programme and Finance/Admin, Reporting, Donor Relations, and Public Information. The structure or organigram was created so that we could cope with the workload we expected. The 800 staff we already had in Iraq turned out to be too few for the task facing us.

We did not have the skills in the Iraq Office for such an undertaking, and therefore we embarked on a massive training programme. Training sessions were held in Amman for local staff around programme and monitoring issues. Training on how to operate in the absence of the international staff was also conducted. International staff were sent to Sweden for emergency training. Last, but not least, a number of meetings were held in Baghdad with key staff where scenarios and challenges were discussed and solutions identified. A big planning meeting was held in Egypt with the participation of the heads of functional areas in Iraq, Country Directors from neighbouring countries, Regional Directors, and other staff from Regional Offices, as well as staff from headquarters and other places who were expected to play important roles in a crisis. This meeting was

very useful for creating a common understanding of the challenges we were expected to face.

We also realized that WFP did not have sufficient staff to send on TDY or transfer to Iraq. Consequently, we would have a large number of consultants and standby partners from bilateral agencies with limited or no experience in working for WFP. Furthermore, they would come at different times and to different places, making it impossible to organize training for large groups. We found a solution by creating Just-in-Time training modules on three CD ROMs. The idea was that consultants/secondedes could go through the CD ROMs, which would provide sufficient knowledge about the operation, the organigram, their function, and a security briefing.

In the months before the outbreak of war, a global logistics plan was developed, defining which ports we would be using, the overland transport corridors, and final destinations. Northern Iraq was to be supplied from Turkey and Syria/Lebanon; the central part, including Baghdad, from Jordan through Aqaba, while the south would be supplied from Kuwait or directly from the Iraqi port of Basra. Supply through Iran was also considered. The plan included how much to be delivered through each of the different corridors, and the total monthly requirement was 450,000 mt—the equivalent of the rest of WFP combined.

### **From Plan to Action, March to May (2003)**

Most staff were evacuated to Larnaca, Cyprus, where a temporary Iraq Office was set up for United Nations agencies previously based in Iraq. WFP was based in a hotel where rooms were converted into offices. Credit goes to all those who had worked intensively to ensure that every staff member had a functioning office with internet and communication equipment in addition to furniture, etc. There were already many WFP staff working there when the Iraq staff arrived and it was also the place where the fusion between the old Iraq Office and all other WFP staff on TDY to Iraq took place, forming a new office with a different mandate and capacity.

Much time was spent on fine-tuning the organizational structure, ensuring that everything was in place. The office of Internal Audit conducted a pre-audit of the structure/organigram, job descriptions, delegations of authority, etc., to verify if the proposed set-up was in line with rules and regulations. Adjustments were in line with the recommendations made by auditors led by Tony Tyrrell. This was indeed a very useful exercise, because it created awareness of various issues and limited the risk of mistakes.

The Security Council Resolution 1472 of March 28 effectively authorized the United Nations to take over the Oil for Food Programme contracts, as mentioned above. A taskforce headed by Treena Huang was immediately formed in Rome to deal with this, and very soon a picture emerged of the pipeline, with a breakdown of how much was on ships on their way, how much was in transit overland, contracts funded but not yet delivered, and contracts not yet funded.

In addition, the Iraq Office took a survey in February of the food reserves at the household level in Iraq. This was done without informing the government and it caused a very negative reaction from the Ministry of Trade, the WFP counterpart. We were instructed to stop collecting such information, but we already had what we needed. Most households had food only until mid-May. This implied that massive amounts of food needed to be shipped without delay if a humanitarian crisis was to be avoided. The monthly requirement was 450,000 mt.

Amer Daoudi, Head of Operations, set up a plan for delivering food and took immediate action to ensure that it happened. It required close coordination between the team renegotiating the Oil for Food Programme contract, the shipping service, and overland transport. With this immense effort, a "food train" was set in motion. We were in contact with the national staff in Baghdad and received confirmation that the infrastructure and staff of the public distribution system were still in place. This was a critical element because we then knew that not only would the food arrive, the system to distribute it was intact.

The Human Resource team played a key role in identifying WFP staff for TDY, consultants, and standby partners. An excellent job was done, because we got the staff needed for the job. Most of them came to Larnaca for briefing and training, where the Just-in-Time training modules were used. This turned out to be a success factor. Before the war, Iraq was constantly in the media, but the attention now reached a new height. Luckily, we had Public Relations Officers who made sure that the WFP version of stories was distributed to the media. Donors were absent from Baghdad, but in Larnaca, we had an unusual situation where donors came to WFP and offered assistance. All these contributions were included in the overall pipeline, and by the end of April, we were in a comfortable situation, meaning sufficient food was in the pipeline for the next months.

All United Nations humanitarian agencies were present in Larnaca and an extensive coordination took place under the leadership of Ramiro Lopes da Silva. This was very useful as information regarding security issues was shared, as well as plans for re-entry, and political developments/thinking at the Secretary General and Iraq Task Force level in New York.

Some countries reopened their embassies in Baghdad in April, putting the United Nations under pressure to reopen its offices as well. The Secretary General decided that the United Nations should return to Baghdad. The United Nations offices in Kurdish areas had already been reopened as the security situation there was much better than the rest of Iraq.

### **May - August (2003)**

The travel back to Baghdad by car from Amman in early May was without incident. From the car, I could see that most of the damage caused by the war was to ministerial buildings. The housing areas were not affected. Another big change was all the satellite antennas installed on rooftops. It was forbidden

before the war, but after our five-week absence, it was suddenly common. The Iraqi population, for the first time in many years, now had access to uncensored international news. The United Nations office at the Canal Hotel had been looted and destroyed; there was no secure place that could be used as living quarters. The only option was, therefore, to arrange temporary accommodation at the Canal Hotel where we worked, had our meals, and slept. The first task was to make the office functional again with communication equipment, computers, etc. It was very basic and the food was always the same, chicken and rice or rice and chicken, 2-3 times a day. However, soon the Swedish Rescue Service set up a tent city next to the Canal Hotel. WFP also put up many prefabs to be used as living quarters and extra office space. Many more staff could now be accommodated and WFP was fully staffed in Baghdad by the end of May.

In the beginning we were only a few WFP staff and the focus was on coordinating with the operations centre in Larnaca and establishing contacts with the Ministry of Trade, ensuring that the Public Distribution System (PDS) was ready to receive and distribute the food to the 45,000 small shops throughout the country. During the month of June, some 750,000 mt of food were delivered to Iraq. On average one truckload of food was dispatched per minute, day and night, for more than 30 days. The food was distributed through the PDS in a timely and orderly manner. This is how a food crisis was averted. This was a major achievement that showed that the strategy chosen was correct. Over the following months, a steady flow of food was delivered and the WFP set-up functioned very well.



WFP Iraq Warehouse, WFP/Daniel Pepper

Many challenges persisted but we managed to open the regional hubs in Basra, Babil, and Mosul. The Erbil hub was already functioning. Sub-offices were gradually opened in most governorates, depending on the security situation. A team composed of Security, Information Technology, and Logistics verified conditions at locations before the green light was given to open an office. A common problem during this first period was widespread looting of warehouses and government buildings. Even crash fences along the highways were dismantled and sold to looters. This called for protection of the warehouses. We had a number of meetings with the CPA and the US military, and initially protection was provided. However, there were too few troops to protect key infrastructure and ensure security in general. For instance, the main warehouse in Basra, called the "food basket," was under the protection of the British military. Due to other priorities, it was announced that the protection force would be pulled out. Somehow this became known to the population and a huge crowd gathered outside the gate ready to move in and loot as soon as the British Military moved out. We managed to persuade the commanding officer to keep the troops at the warehouse and the food was secured.

Explosives and weapons hidden in the warehouses was another problem. We found around 120,000 pieces from a four-meter long missile to small arms, ammunition, and cluster bombs on the roofs of warehouses. It was all disposed of by a Swiss demining group. An ammunition depot was discovered some 30 meters from the WFP part of the Canal Hotel. The military decided to make a "safe" explosion, but there was an even bigger depot next to the one discovered. All the windows of the WFP building facing the two explosions were blown out. Nobody was hurt, but it was scary. Within two months we also established well-functioning communication and internet connections in all areas and sub-offices. The Information Technology staff did a fantastic job in ensuring full connectivity for all staff in all offices, which was critical for a successful implementation of the operation.

Relations with the CPA and the Ministry of Trade were very good, in particular with the American de facto head and her British advisor. However, relations with Iraqi staff who had been managing the PDS for years were more complex. They obviously felt it was humiliating that the direction and overall management were now in the hands of foreigners. We wanted to integrate them and they kindly responded to invitations to attend coordination meetings. It turned out that most senior people did not speak English and needed translation. Iraqi officials were clearly keen on taking back control. The changed political and operational circumstances made this ambition impossible. WFP controlled funds for procurement and transport, so there was no scope for large-scale illicit activities by government officials. The anger and frustration of senior Iraqi officials were clearly expressed at a meeting in Amman involving senior US officials, Jean-Jacques Graise and Amer Daoudi.

The WFP Executive Director, Jim Morris, was the first head of an agency to visit Baghdad in May. It was a one-day visit that proved very useful, because he left Iraq with a clear understanding of the issues and challenges facing WFP. He always provided 100 percent support to the Iraq office, which was critical in many aspects. The purchase of harvested wheat was another adventure. Iraq was and is a food-deficit country, but with a substantial production of wheat and some other grains. By April it was already clear that a solution had to be found for the procurement of the harvest. It was agreed between the CPA and the United Nations that WFP would buy the wheat harvest and FAO would buy the barley harvest. The rationale was that the wheat could be channelled to the PDS, while the barley was used for animal feed. The operation was completed successfully and the more than one million tons of locally produced wheat was important for the PDS food pipeline. It was also a useful injection of money into the Iraqi economy – 150 million dollars in total.

The United Nations coordination of operational and security issues included daily meetings at the Canal Hotel with donors as well as internal coordination meetings. There was updating of operational aspects as well as security issues. The environment became more and more tense from June onwards. The Security Council asked the Secretary General to appoint a United Nations Special Representative in May (Resolution 1483) with a broad mandate to coordinate the humanitarian and reconstruction assistance provided by the United Nations and NGOs, work with the CPA to restore public institutions, promote economic reconstruction, facilitate reconstruction of key infrastructure, and, last but not least, support the formation of an interim Iraqi administration until an internationally recognized representative was established by the people of Iraq. This marked a major political shift for the United Nations, from primarily providing humanitarian assistance to becoming an active player in shaping the future of Iraq at the economic and political level.

The Sunnis, who had been the dominant group in Iraq for generations, saw these efforts as a threat to their power and there was increasing backlash against Coalition forces in Sunni dominated areas, and also attacks on Shia Muslims in Baghdad and elsewhere. This situation escalated from June onwards. A rocket-propelled grenade was fired at the WFP office in Mosul, but luckily it did not explode. During a Country Director's visit to Mosul shortly after, a shootout took place in front of the gate to the office, leaving two dead and one wounded. Based on these incidents and guided by a security risk assessment, we started scaling staff numbers down to a minimum. The Embassy of Jordan and the Red Cross Office in Baghdad were targeted with bombings and the atmosphere was nerve-racking. On August 19, the United Nations offices at the Canal Hotel were the next target of a terrorist attack, just five days after the creation of the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI). This was probably not a coincidence.





Aftermath of the Canal Hotel bombing

### **The Bombing of the Canal Hotel (2003)**

A truck loaded with explosives tried to enter the Canal Hotel compound late in the afternoon of August 19, but was not allowed to enter, so it drove to the western side of the compound where the explosion took place, close to the office of the United Nations Special Representative, Sergio Viera de Mello. He died together with 21 other United Nations staff visitors.

Several security measures had been put in place, including a bomb shelter, walls around the compound, a heavily fortified entrance, procedures for who could enter the compound, using unmarked cars, two cars always travelling together, frequent reporting back to the radio room on location, and situation when travelling. The US military also had a presence to protect the United Nations. However, the wall to the west of the compound was not blast proof and part of the building collapsed.

The explosion took place around 16:30 and the scene that followed was one of confusion. Many were wounded and traumatized (obviously needing help), while others spontaneously started rescuing those trapped inside the building. It was horrible and probably the worst experience in our lives. Luckily, US Helicopters arrived quickly and the wounded were transported to a US Military Hospital for treatment. All WFP staff were accounted for, but we could not locate Darlene Bisson. She was airlifted to the US Military Hospital and from there to another hospital in Kuwait, and finally to a military hospital in Germany. Later, we all

returned to our respective living quarters and stayed there for a few days until we were authorized to return to work.



Helping the wounded after the Canal Hotel bombing

The following day, the WFP Information Technology team managed to restore communication links to Rome and elsewhere. Our offices were destroyed, but we managed to convert some prefabs into offices, and within a few days we were fully operational again. Consequently, the supply of food was not interrupted by the incident. It was, however, not considered safe to keep operating from inside Iraq, and most WFP and other United Nations staff were gradually evacuated within the following weeks. This proved to be a wise decision because there was a second attack on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, after which all United Nations staff were evacuated.

It was, however, also clear that WFP and the United Nations were not prepared for such an attack. It was the first of its kind in the history of the United Nations. The perception at WFP before the bombing was that we were less exposed because we were providing humanitarian assistance. The United Nations was clearly considered an enemy by Al Qaeda and other radical Islamic groups. The experience therefore had a profound impact on how security issues were managed thereafter.

Two other aspects also became very clear. First, there was now a need to have capacity within the United Nations to handle a situation involving evacuation and provide support to affected staff and their families (United Nations was not prepared for the task). Business continuity under such circumstances was also an issue. Second, there was no Plan B in case the United Nations offices had been more affected than it was. There is no need to go into details on these

issues, but the bombing of the Canal Hotel changed the mindset of the United Nations forever.



Torben's office at the Canal Hotel after the bombing

### **The Second Phase (2004-2005)**

The Iraq Office relocated to Amman, Jordan, where an office was set up in record time. The work to deliver food in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1483 continued uninterrupted. This was the first challenge we faced. The second and more serious one was how we could avoid another terrorist attack and at the same time continue to deliver the food required for the PDS. The solution was to operate with no visibility and with a skeleton staff only. This meant not using WFP offices, not using anything that could be linked to WFP, such as United Nations vehicles, bag markings and WFP signs on trucks, etc. It proved to be effective because we did not have any more incidents. Also, in the very tense political situation in Iraq, with increased violence between Sunni and Shia groups, the measure protected national staff from becoming a target for attacks.

A 180-day time limit was given in Resolution 1483 to provide much needed assistance to the Iraqi people and hand over the programme to CPA/Iraqi authorities by the end of November. We had been discussing this issue with the CPA and high-level meetings were held in Amman, including meetings with proposed US counterparts who would take over from WFP. It soon became clear

that none of the proposals were viable as the proposed new partners/contractors did not seem to have the relevant experience or capacity to take on such a task. On the other side, the Iraqi officials at the Ministry of Trade were arguing for the return of control and management of the PDS to them. The CPA clearly preferred an option that would guarantee that the flow of food to Iraq would not be interrupted and were not convinced that the Ministry of Trade could do the job. We were contacted on several occasions in November for WFP support. The senior management of the Iraq office discussed the issue and agreed that we could do the job. Jean-Jacques Graisse gave us the authority to negotiate further with the CPA. The meeting took place at the WFP office in New York. Jim Morris, WFP Executive Director, who was in New York, passed by and gave his full support to an agreement with the CPA. There was a long discussion of the operational issues before we came to the issue of money. We asked how much money CPA had available and the answer was 910 million dollars. We then proposed an agreement for 910 million dollars. Before signing an agreement we consulted Jean-Jacques Graisse for a green light. He agreed and suggested that we copy the Auditor's Office, which objected on the ground that we were not authorized to sign such an agreement. However, actually we were. There was nothing in WFP rules to the contrary.

We were then facing the task of continuing the large operation in 2004. I flew to Baghdad in January for meetings with the CPA and the Ministry of Trade to arrange for implementation. Under this agreement, WFP delivered food to regional hubs and held a monitoring function to certify that delivery had taken place. Iraqi officials were very unhappy with the arrangement, since procurement and transport were managed by WFP, which also included contracting and payment. There was corruption at the Ministry of Trade, but under the agreement there was limited possibility for corrupt deals. However, attempts were made as we discovered food in Turkey that had been delivered to Iraq by WFP. Some Iraqi officials had simply started exporting PDS food to make money.

We also decided to relocate and reorganize the office, which was moved to Rome. The close coordination between procurement, shipping and logistics already established under the previous phase was now consolidated into a single management unit. This proved to be very effective, from an operational point of view, and also cost-effective when compared to WFP in general. Of course, having 910 million dollars gives room for economy of scale throughout the supply chain.

At the end of 2004 and early 2005 there was fatigue as many staff had been on TDY for almost two years, but the job was done and it was now up to the new Iraqi Government to assume responsibility. For WFP, it was time to scale down and dismantle its very large structure. At the peak of the operation, we were around 2,000 staff and by early 2005 we were down to some 90 international and national staff.

There were many allegations of corruption in the Oil for Food Programme and the Secretary General appointed an Independent Inquiry Committee, better known as the Volcker Committee, after the chair Paul Volcker, former US Federal Reserve Chairman. The committee uncovered corruption within the Oil for Food Programme, mainly in the form of kickback to the Iraqi regime from suppliers. There was also corruption within the United Nations, mainly in New York where contracts were approved. WFP was also investigated, but WFP staff were not involved in corruption or misuse of funds. There were only very positive references to WFP in a few footnotes. This marked the end of a period.

### **Lessons Learned and Concluding Remarks**

The Iraq office did an after-action review with a large number of recommendations, of which many were specific and technical. It was posted on WFPgo and is probably available in the archives. However, looking back it is mostly the main features that stand out, i.e., what made WFP's role and response to the Iraq crisis special?

The conflict itself was special because it was initially a conflict between two states, both members of the United Nations. It was no doubt one of the most important conflicts since World War II, and it gave the United Nations an important role in accordance with the United Nations Charter. Most other conflicts had been civil wars or liberation wars in the context of decolonization, often with superpower countries supporting different sides of the conflict.

WFP had a unique role in Iraq (1991-2005); first as a provider of emergency assistance in the early 90s, followed by the Oil for Food Programme, and later as a provider of all basic foods to the whole population for a two-year period following the second Gulf War. Focusing on the period 2003-2005, Iraq would have faced a serious food crisis in mid-2003 if WFP had not provided assistance. The prospect of a humanitarian crisis was often used in the media to raise awareness about how serious it would have been if food supply to Iraq were interrupted. In late 2003, we were sometimes criticized for having "cried wolf" and the crisis did not materialize. However, our critics did not understand that the work of WFP was a very successful preventive operation without which there would have been a large-scale humanitarian crisis in Iraq.

Our successes came from the fact that, when planning for the operation, we carefully analyzed all available after-action reports from previous operations. The one from the Kosovo crisis was by far the best and was used extensively in our planning. We had, unlike in the Kosovo crisis, the benefit of having time to analyze, think and plan. That made a big difference. The planning was based on the assumption that we had to secure food supply for the whole population, which proved to be correct.

All aspects of the operation were consequently analyzed and solutions applied systematically. We established an overall operational plan with defined supply corridors based on the findings of the logistics country assessment, port

capacities in the region, as well as securing the final distribution of food to the population. We instituted an integrated operational planning, including donor forecasts, resource programming, Oil for Food Programme food, procurement, shipping and overland transport. This was the first example of integrated supply chain management at WFP and it was critical to the timely delivery of food to all parts of Iraq.

There was a close coordination between Logistics, Security and Information Technology to minimize the risks of operating in an insecure/dangerous environment. Human Resources, Administrative and Financial Services were also calibrated to deal with the size of the operation. A pre-audit was conducted in April-May 2003 to ensure that the set-up complied with rules and regulations. Offices were set-up in Kuwait, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Cyprus and Iran in time. Support from the WFP Fast Information Technology and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team (FITTEST) in Dubai was also very important as it made communication possible for staff in all offices.

Initially, WFP did not have the staff required. The staffing strategy was therefore based on having a mix of experienced WFP staff in senior positions together with consultants and standby partners. A Just-in-Time training programme was developed for all non-WFP staff, including information on their role, structure of the operation, and security issues.

The support from headquarters, spearheaded by Jean-Jacques Graisse and the Regional Bureau headed by Khaled Adly, was critical to achieving the operational goals, by coordinating WFP globally as well as dealing successfully with the political and humanitarian aspects of the Iraq crisis at the United Nations in New York. The WFP response was, thanks to these efforts, a truly corporate one.

The above can be summarized as comprehensive analysis, rigorous planning, and forceful implementation. Some of the Iraq lessons were applied to the review of the emergency response capacity in 2005-2006, when the concept of Level 3 emergencies was introduced together with standard procedures for activating a corporate emergency. Integrated Supply Chain Management was also mainstreamed years later.

Finally, the bombing of the Canal Hotel in August 2003 changed perceptions about security issues and business continuity forever at WFP and the rest of the United Nations. All these aspects made the Iraq crisis unique and hopefully a source of inspiration for current and future WFP staff.

## On My Visit with the Generals in June 2003

### Jean-Jacques Graisse



Jean-Jacques Graisse (left) during his visit to Iraq

During my June 2003 mission to Iraq, Torben Due and Ramiro Lopes Da Silva suggested that a visit to Erbil and Mosul would be most useful because many other visitors from headquarters had focused on Baghdad and Basra.

Our local office manager in Mosul gave me a comprehensive tour of the office, depots, mills, etc., and arranged a visit to the office of General David Petraeus of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division who was in charge of the Mosul region. I was intrigued and impressed with the detailed PowerPoint presentation he gave us in front of his senior officers, explaining his counterinsurgency methods, public works and reconstruction projects. He was full of praise for World Food Programme (WFP) operations in his region and offered his full support to guarantee our safety.

Later that evening I had the pleasure of attending a nice dinner on the river with General Petraeus and a few of his aides together with our small team. I was sitting next to him on a long table facing the river. I remembered the advice I had received a few days earlier at a security briefing on my arrival at the Canal Hotel in Baghdad where I was told to make sure never to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The beautiful restaurant was on the outskirts of Mosul, facing the river, with high vegetation on all sides. Then it crossed my mind that, if anybody had organized an ambush to kill the General and his people, I would have been precisely in the wrong place at the wrong time. He arrived in two

Humvees with five or six officers carrying handguns. No heavy security was visible.

My visit to Erbil gave me the opportunity to meet with our excellent staff and see the impressive WFP operations, and also to have cordial meetings with Kurdish authorities. I had an appointment at the US Command post, which was located in a large deserted tourist hotel on the outskirts of town. Security looked very relaxed, with a few Peshmergas apparently in control. A retired US Two Star General received me and my small team for breakfast. He wore civilian clothes – sports shirt and jeans – avoiding any of the strict military impressions of Mosul. The room had very large windows, with a beautiful view of the surrounding mountains. The General, with his hands on my shoulder, told me of an incredible sight on a bright morning when he looked out of the window and saw, for the first time, an endless convoy of large trucks, flying WFP flags, winding down the road to the valley. He told me he had worried, day after day, about how the US would meet its obligations to feed the entire population. The day he saw our trucks arriving from Turkey was the day he could finally say, “ We have won the war.”



## Reporting and Life in Cyprus

### Jane Pearce



Jane Pearce (front center), Torben Due (right) and others in Baghdad

I started working on the Iraq war operation well before the invasion. I started in 2003 as a Special Assistant to Khaled Adly, the Regional Director, during the planning phase of the operation. Many of us had been part of the team that was deployed to Pakistan in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the US, so we knew each other and worked well together. The understanding was that once the operation “really began” I would move to the office of the Iraq Country Director as Regional Reports Officer.

A couple of days after the “Shock and Awe,” the small Rome team joined the Country Office staff who had been evacuated from Baghdad to Cyprus to set in motion everything we had been planning. Two hotels were rented and converted into offices for the Iraq response. The offices faced the blue Mediterranean sea. A lasting image that remains with me is that of being in full “emergency mode,” with long days, full of adrenalin, and a sense that it was all going to begin very soon, and then looking out the window and seeing holiday makers calmly sunbathing on the beach.

What awaited us in Iraq was unknown, and so in order to be prepared for any eventuality, those of us who were expected to deploy to Iraq were “NBC-trained”

by the Swedish Rescue Services. They taught us how to quickly don clothing and masks that would protect us from Nuclear, Biological and Chemical weapons. Fortunately, we didn't need this equipment, but my navy backpack with its gas mask and boiler suit still sit in my attic—a reminder of how unsettled that period really was.

The reporting system we had devised during the planning phase, using lessons from the Afghan response, was quickly put in place. Each day the Reports team attended meetings, listened to plans being made, talked to key staff members, read reports coming from Iraq and neighbouring countries, and synthesized them into daily reports to keep our colleagues in Rome, the Regional Bureau and neighbouring countries informed. A shorter version was sent to the donor community and other partners.

The amount of information and activity during this period was overwhelming, and it seemed the world was fixated on the situation in Iraq. Nongovernmental Organizations (NGO) and Think Tanks were doing studies, US forces were releasing information and the media was rife with speculations on what would happen next, what the state of the population was, which Iraqi exile would return as part of the transition team, how long the war would last, etc.

Therefore, in order to get all of this information into a digestible format for our busy bosses, we pioneered a second daily report that we called the Main Daily Developments (MDD). This synthesized everything happening outside World Food Programme (WFP) operations that was relevant or of interest to us, from political developments to information coming from other agencies and NGOs, and discussions at the United Nations Security Council. It started off just as an internal report for Larnaca staff, but soon enough we started receiving requests from others who wanted to be added to the mailing list. Eventually, we attached the MDD to the daily operational report on WFP activities used for teleconferences with Rome. It was a lot of work, and as it often happens, the reporting staff were often the first to arrive at the office in the morning and the last to leave at night.

## **"M." – Requiem for Baghdad**

*"The horror...The horror..."*  
(From the movie *Apocalypse Now*)

**Peter Casier**



Peter Casier (right) on "TV Hill" in Kabul

### **Dubai, December 2004**

All our World Food Programme (WFP) Dubai staff are standing in the reception of our office in silence. We put up the plaque our headquarters gave us: "WFP FITTEST team – Dubai. Award for Merit 2004. For their outstanding global achievement and particularly for the critical support of the UN humanitarian effort in Iraq." Each of us is deep in thought. It seems weird how in a split second zillions of thoughts and images can flash through one's mind.

Robert Kasca was a bit angry with me that week. He rightfully said, "this plaque is something to be proud of, how come we still have not put it up? We received the plaque several months ago." I did not really have an answer for him. In my defence, though, there was a spelling mistake on the plaque, so they had to re-do it. Then we had a problem finding a suitable spot, etc. A major issue was that it brought back a lot of painful memories for me. I did not want to remember that period. I didn't want to remember the pain. But that is not the right way. Robert was right; the team had done well. The team he had coordinated did well

in the Iraq Emergency Operation and the people involved had to be remembered for their excellent work. We also had to remember how we stuck together as a team despite the pressure and challenges.

*As we are standing in front of the plaque, I think of M. Her face appears in my mind's eye. I hear her laugh. Did she feel pain? Fear? Regrets? Or did it all go in a flash like a switch?*

### **Belgium, August 2001**

If you live through a number of humanitarian emergencies, work long enough in relief operations, you start to develop a sixth sense. It was this sixth sense that helped us decide to move our intervention team from Kosovo to Islamabad a few years ago. We sensed that at any moment the US might retaliate against the Taliban. Our speculation was that basing our team in the middle of Central Asia would allow us to prepare the region for a possible humanitarian emergency if the US were to take military action in Afghanistan.

I told Tine just before I left home, "I do not have a good feeling. The stars are not right. Something is up." That feeling was in sharp contrast to the one month holiday we had just had off the beaten track in Hawaii. But the sixth sense was there, with huge warning signs.

### **Islamabad, Pakistan, September 11, 2001**

We were working in our office in Islamabad when Jalal, one of our staff, said "Hey, a plane just flew into the New York World Trade Center!" And a few minutes later, we heard a second plane had crashed into the Towers. We stopped all work. I knew it was not an accident. This was an act of terrorism. In a flash, I saw what would happen. The world was going to fundamentally change. I foresaw the US attacking Afghanistan. I foresaw the polarization of the world into Muslim and non-Muslim. I also foresaw the invasion of Iraq. I just knew we were entering a very rough period, with a lot of human suffering to go with it. I felt very sad. When I returned to my guesthouse, very late that night (9/11), I could not stop looking at the video replay on TV, showing what happened in New York. It was so violent; so many people were lost at one go. But above all, I felt it was all coming our way. "Within here and a few weeks, the world's attention is going to be focused on our region," I thought.

It took less than a week for us to start seeing international camera crews, with their equipment loaded onto rental cars, arriving at hotels in Islamabad. They began to set up shop on the roofs of hotels. Well-known anchors from renowned broadcast stations started reporting from Islamabad. The media is often one step ahead of the military.

### **Kabul, Afghanistan, January 2002**

Several months later, the Taliban was defeated, Bin Laden was on the run, and Afghanistan was "liberated." I knew Iraq was going to be next. No matter what

the world's opinions were on the subject, I felt the US was going to attack Iraq too.

### **Baghdad, Iraq, November 2002**

Richard Egwangu and I spent a nice evening in one of the open-air restaurants in Baghdad. Even though it was close to midnight and pretty cold outside, there were plenty of people still walking around. I loved the people there and the feeling the setting gave me. They were friendly, helpful, hospitable, and many of them were well educated. As we were walking the streets that night, people smiled at us, often saying, "Hey, Habibi, how are you? Where do you come from? What do you do?" When we talked to them, the subject of children and family always came up. No matter where people come from, love for their close ones always seems to be the main thing on their minds. We felt safe, almost at home, without the slightest sense of fear or insecurity. We were among good people.

The first United Nations Weapons Inspectors had arrived earlier that day. We saw them dragging boxes carrying their equipment into the Canal Hotel, the United Nations Headquarters in Baghdad. Somehow I felt it was all going to be in vain. The US had already made up its mind: "Saddam had to go." Even if the Weapons Inspectors did not find any Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). However, I could see all the human misery a US invasion of Iraq would cause, and the anarchy and violence that would follow. I imagined those peaceful streets of Baghdad in flames.

### **Dubai, United Arab Emirates, March 20, 2003**

As I closed the door to my apartment, on my way to work, I stopped for a moment. Something was not right. Something was different that morning. I could hear my neighbours' TVs. There were different languages and the reporters sounded agitated. My heart started to beat really fast. I went back into my apartment, switched on the TV, and sat down. There were images of helicopters, tanks, and military convoys crossing the border from Kuwait to Iraq. I picked up the phone and called Gianluca Bruni at our Rome Headquarters. It was still early in Europe, so he was asleep when I called. I said "Gianluca, switch on your TV. It has begun. The invasion has begun."

### **June 2003**

I met M. in Cyprus several times. She was working for another United Nations agency. By coincidence, we had the same travel itinerary, so we spent several days on the road together—flying from Cyprus to Jordan, then driving to Erbil in North Iraq, and flying to Baghdad a few days later. We talked a lot about work, people we had met, our hobbies, adventure travelling, what appealed to us in the world, and in people. The last time I saw her was one evening in the Canal Hotel, Baghdad. For security reasons, the movement of our staff in town was restricted, and we all lived in the large office compound. A couple of guys had put together a barbeque in the parking lot, which by then was filled with

sleeping and storage tents. As I was walking back to my room, M. was walking toward the barbeque area. She had a strange look in her eyes. She hesitated for a moment as we were passing each other. I stood still for a moment, wondering what her look was about. I told her I was leaving for Dubai the next day. I cannot remember if she said anything, as we exchanged three kisses on the cheeks. Maybe we said a pleasantry like "See you whenever I see you again."

A few weeks later, I received a message from her. Some stuff about work. She had decided the Iraq mission was going to be her last. She wanted to quit in September and do something different. She had had enough of that type of work. It was a good road, but that road had come to an end.

### **Belgium, August 18, 2003**

I had a long chat with Robert, our Project Coordinator in Baghdad. He ran the large WFP Fast Information Technology and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team (FITTEST), installing the technical infrastructure for most of the United Nations relief agencies. Most of the conversation was about his main worry: security. He felt something was going to happen. The "tension in the air" was just too much. He felt some of our staff or some of our offices were going to be attacked. "Something bad is about to happen," he said. I shared his feeling. I did not sleep much that night. I had a lot of "my" staff in Iraq and I felt responsible for them.



FITTEST at work in Iraq, WFP/Photolibrary

### **Belgium, August 19, 2003**

This was one of the saddest days of my life. Mats Persson called to inform me, "our headquarters in Baghdad was bombed a few minutes ago. A truck full of

explosives flattened most of the building.” Mats and I spoke with Robert in a conference call later that day. It was bad. Robert said most of our staff members were accounted for, but several of them were badly injured by debris, shrapnel or glass. A window frame hit Ghis Penny’s head. Michael Dirksen’s face was badly cut by glass. Diya Al Asadi was evacuated with severe cuts in his arm and hands. Dozens of people had died. The pictures on TV looked horrific. I was shocked, and I felt an endless guilt. These were people I had recruited. I had sent them in harm’s way. I felt guilty because no matter how good the security precautions we had taken, no matter how many times we had stressed that they be careful, they got hurt. It cut deep inside me. I also felt guilty because I was not there to help. I should have been there with them.



FITTEST was able to restore communication within 24 hours after the bombing

### **Belgium, August 20, 2003**

As more details of the bombing arrived, a provisional list was circulated—names of those not accounted for and those confirmed dead. I could not believe my eyes when I saw M.’s name on the list. M. was no more.

### **Dubai, December 2004**

These thoughts and images fly - no, they scream - through my head as we stand in front of our plaque. It takes a few seconds for it to come through. All of the hurt, the immense sadness and senselessness, the guilt of not having done enough, the guilt of not having said things that should have been said. So often



we forget that when we say "goodbye," it might really mean "goodbye." We might never see that person again in this life. I see M.'s face in front of me as we talked for a brief moment in time, passing each other in the Canal Hotel that evening of the barbeque.

I should have taken the time to sit and talk with her. I should have known that might have been the last time ever that we had the chance to talk. I did not. I was tired and wanted to go to sleep, because I had an early start the next day.

*In 2002/2003, Peter Casier headed FITTEST and the WFP Support Office in Dubai, which became one of the main procurement and supply bases during the Iraq crisis. During 2002-2003, FITTEST was mandated to prepare the technical infrastructure in Iraq and all neighbouring countries. During the war, FITTEST had already gone into Iraq together with UNSECOORD (the United Nations Security Department) to prepare the telecoms, electricity and IT infrastructure for all United Nations offices, before the rest of the United Nations staff was allowed in. With a large team of over 200 staff in Iraq, FITTEST coordinated the interagency security communications and common IT/electricity infrastructure, providing services to United Nations agencies and NGOs. After the Canal Hotel was bombed on August 19, 2003, UNSECOORD and core FITTEST staff remained onsite, while all other staff were evacuated from the compound.*



## Observations of Food Distribution to Families in Iraq

Anette Eriksen



WFP food for school children in Iraq, WFP/Daniel Pepper

International food monitors visited all 15 Iraqi Administrative Districts on a weekly basis, and were responsible for verifying the monitoring of food commodities purchased under the United Nations Food for Oil Programme.

Daily monitoring of food supplies, evaluated by quantity and quality at the household level, was carried out by a national team of World Food Programme (WFP) food monitors.

The objectives of food monitoring were:

1. To collect and analyze data on food imports under the Oil for Food Programme, related to specific food items (oil, milk, flour, chickpeas, lentils, soap, washing powder, infant milk, rice, etc.).
2. To verify that the agreed quantity and quality of food items reached each member of a family—end-users defined as an Iraqi household.
3. To sample and analyze irregularities in the food distribution system to the United Nations Security Council on a weekly basis.

The entire set-up consisted of an agreed set of questions that the monitors could ask the head of a household. In order to ensure that International Food Monitors only asked agreed questions, each International Food Monitor was accompanied

by a security staff member from the Iraqi Government. The security staff also controlled conversations between national staff, food monitors, national drivers and international staff.

It was a rather stiff and unpleasant psychological working environment. Everybody reported on everybody. The selection of an individual household was carried out as a random spot-check. International staff members were not allowed to have knowledge about city plans and city maps, and they were driven around "blindfolded."

When the United Nations was re-entering Iraq, the monitoring process needed to be redesigned in order to allow WFP staff to monitor food supplies, while protecting staff as much as possible. The overall security situation was volatile; stray bullets fell from the sky over the United Nations tent city in Baghdad. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Red Cross reported incidents of direct attacks on vehicles around the Babel area. Not all areas of the cities were under sufficient US military control. WFP monitored food distribution from the warehouse in order to verify that all local food agents managed to collect food for their specific areas, anticipating that those who did not collect their food for redistribution would create a situation in which there were pockets of areas without food supplies.

## A Visit to Iraqi Railways

**Carlos Veloso**



Carlos Veloso, WFP/Marco Frattini

I first visited the Railway Headquarters in Baghdad in early March 2001. It is a British colonial building that was well kept, with signs here and there, indicating ongoing maintenance. I went with Ibrahim, an engineer who had worked on railways in the past, and had been involved in the construction of railroads with foreign companies. The first meeting with the Operations Director of the national railways and other officials was for a common “study” and to define the modus operandi for the future. The Director of Procurement, Anwar, was appointed as my focal point. He was a mechanical engineer—a graduate of (West) Germany with a sense of humour.

I had authority to visit any railway installation in Baghdad without being escorted by anybody from the Railways. As a matter of respect and courtesy, I asked Ibrahim to inform the authorities of our plans at least four days in advance. When our visit was outside Baghdad, I always asked to be accompanied by somebody from the Railway Headquarters. Most of the times it was Anwar who went with us.

Long hours in the car allowed us to get to know each other better—talking about families, the war with Iran, football, his experience of studying in Germany, and sharing many jokes. It was interesting for me to learn that most of his Iraqi jokes were in certain cases very similar to Portuguese ones.

We developed confidence and trust in each other to a point that my Iraqi counterpart was asking me for technical advice on railway issues. One day we were observing an equipment that had arrived some months earlier and was used in rehabilitating the railway lines when he asked for my opinion on the equipment. I told him that the equipment was too expensive for a second-hand. "You could have gotten a new and good brand for that price." The surprise on his face was evident. "But this equipment is brand new," he replied. I smiled and asked him to watch some aspects of it closely, especially areas under the platform. He was surprised, not because of the price, but because it was indeed a reconditioned equipment.

In mid-2002 I went with Anwar and Ibrahim to observe some very sophisticated equipment at a quarry producing ballast for the railways. It was the first time that a United Nations Observer visited that location on the Syrian border—one of the unofficial border crossings. The equipment was top quality and new, but the work organization was a mess. After an hour on location Anwar asked what I thought. I asked him to come with me to the top of a 10-meter high pile of ballast. We could see the whole quarry from up there. I offered him some suggestions, explaining the reasons and impact it would have on output. Anwar looked at me and said, "why have we not thought about it before?" I smiled, and he immediately started to give instructions based on my observations.

Our job was difficult, but one of the things I reconfirmed was that being respectful and trustful can make the hardest work easier.

## Iraq Operation After the War

**Carlos Veloso**



Carlos Veloso (right) and EU Commission President, José Barroso, WFP/Simon Crittle

It was the second half of January 2003 when Torben told me to go to Amman for a meeting on logistics planning, following a meeting in an Egyptian Red Sea resort in November 2002. When I arrived at the hotel in Amman, I saw Amer Daoudi who pulled me aside after check-in and told me, "I just had a call from Torben Due and Ramiro Lopes da Silva. Your son has been admitted to hospital. Barbara is driving tonight from Bagdad." My son had had leukemia for the last three years and this information meant he had a relapse. I walked to my room listening, faraway in my mind, to the last words of Amer, inviting me (admonishing, not "ordering") to go out for a drink. At this time I had met Amer only once, during the Red Sea retreat, and we drove for two hours - only the two of us - from Cairo to the Red Sea resort without talking too much, not to say "at all."

The following day, Barbara took care of the flights while I participated in the meeting all day. The group was composed, as far as I remember, of Amer and myself, Jacques Collignon (Regional Logistics Officer), John Katsaros (Logistics Officer for Iraq), Brain Gray (Logistics Officer for Kurdistan), and Peter Scott-

Bowden from headquarters. The brainstorming was mainly to have all of us in line with the concept, determine the challenges, and be ready to start at any moment. It was also decided that a headquarters team would start to make preliminary contacts in all neighbouring countries to determine ports and road transport capacity, and establish contracts. That day I received a call from Adrian Van der Knapp, who worked at the time with David Kaatrud at the United Nations Joint Logistics Coordination (UNJLC), informing me that I would be appointed as Head of UNJLC when the Iraq operation started. I thanked Adrian for the consideration and informed him that they should first inform Torben and have his consent. I immediately informed Amer about the offer. At the end of the meeting, and before going to the airport, Amer told me that he wanted me to be his deputy of operations and Torben was in agreement with that. I thanked Amer and told him that I would do what the organization thought was better, and of course, with the consent of my Country Director.

I left Baghdad in March, some two to three days before the complete withdrawal of United Nations staff. I saw Amer and Laura Turner when checking-in at my hotel in Amman. Two days later we were all in Cyprus, meeting in a hotel by the sea in Larnaca that was transformed into WFP offices. Every day new people arrived from all over the world. The third floor was "declared" Operations Floor and Amer took the only room with a sea view. John Aylieff and Matthew Hollingsworth were on the other side of the corridor dealing with all specialized staff (demining) and support equipment that would be needed. Laura Turner and Walid Ibrahim were writing the sitreps and later collecting all dispatches from different corridors. John Katsaros and I dealt with readiness inside the country and arrangements in all corridors. Next to our room were Didier Frisch and Daniel Stolke who dealt with shipping. In other rooms were Iane Suvanto with the Pipeline team, and Michelle Barrett, Jean-Pierre de Margerie and Praveen Agrawal dealt with resources and budget revisions. Calum Gardner later joined this group. At the end of the corridor were Bekin and Salamawitt "cracking" Landside Transport Shipping and Handling numbers.

Treena Huang was in Rome leading a team to re-negotiate all the food contracts under the Oil for Food programme that were approved and/or in transit. The main corridors already had the basic staff to start operations. Every morning there was a meeting in Amer's office, sometimes cramped with as many as 20 people. It was during those meetings that we learned about the therapeutic properties of chilli pepper when administered through unconventional means, the vast abilities of Amer's mother, especially driving trucks, and how smart his daughter was.

The concept of the operation was straightforward: supply all the mills and warehouses of the Public Distribution System (PDS) in the governorate capitals. The Ministry of Trade under the Transitional Government was responsible for what happened between these places and shops. The plan was designed with redundancies to allow for flexibility. The South Corridor included the Kuwait,

Umm Qasr (in Iraq) and Iranian ports. The Central Corridor included Aqaba in Jordan, Tartus and Latakia in Syria, and eventually the Lebanese and Iranian ports. The North Corridor included the Turkish and Syrian ports.

At the beginning there was an almost daily meeting between Didier, Treena and me to decide where to send the ships that were already on their way and also start making plans about where to send ships arriving in four to eight weeks. There were many disagreements on various options. In those cases the decision was often scaled up to Amer. Based on WFP experience of ports in the region, there was a fair idea of their capacities in the beginning. We also had some ideas about road transport capacities, but those were not very consistent. There was a good knowledge of administrative procedures and forwarding agents for some countries. The biggest unknown was the after-effect of the invasion in terms of banditry, destruction, and capacity at receiving end.

The first shipment arrived in Aqaba at the beginning of April. Communication with Ayad Nannan (Logistic Officer and the most senior national officer) in Baghdad, was at first impossible and thereafter irregular. We decided to send the first trucks from Aqaba to an agreed mill in Baghdad. The operation started slowly and we immediately started to see where challenges could arise. The most reliable entry point in the South Corridor, considering the security situation, was Umm Qasr. The Iranian option was very bureaucratic—every step had to be authorized by a higher authority in Teheran. Aqaba, Syria and Turkey were responding to those needs. Muahannad in Syria and David Schaad in Turkey informed us that they could do more than what was planned for their corridors. I had daily conversations with the head of each corridor. We had a “positive” challenge with Turkey because we could only call via satellite phone (there is no phone connection between Cyprus and Turkey). I used to climb to the terrace of the hotel/office from where I could see the sea. It was my daily relaxation. We were working almost 12 hours a day, seven days a week.

By end of April Torben told me that after his re-entry I should go immediately to Baghdad to manage the Iraq side of the operation. In May WFP started receiving staff to fill positions in nine established sub-offices. I knew most of the Operations colleagues from other operations and I had heard of the others I did not know. Conditions were hard, but we were a strong team. There was a push/pull where ports started to increase delivery, which obliged the receiving end to increase their capacity, sometimes employing unconventional solutions. The political objective was to deliver 1.8 million mt to Iraq between April and September 2003.

There was a conference call between Baghdad with the team in Larnaca three times a week to plan the weeks ahead, analyze the performance of different corridors, and adjust when necessary.

In April, around 100,000 mt were dispatched by all corridors. In May, that volume was around 300,000 mt and they received the highest one of 710,000 mt in June.

There was a conference call with the Larnaca team and Heads of Corridors in early June, when I briefed everyone about reception conditions inside the country and the lack of capacity experienced at some mills and warehouses due to sabotages or local tribes fighting for power. I asked them to slow down a little, at least for a week, in order to give time to clear a backlog of trucks and keep flow at a lower rate. There was a brief silence followed by a typical Amer shout: "nobody slows down; increase the delivery. If you guys are not able to handle it I will send my mother with a bunch of chilli peppers."

In July, we started to experience some problems in the Aqaba corridor due to the underperformance of a transporter. It was necessary to immediately use the additional road capacity on offer from Syria and Turkey at very competitive prices. Around 500,000 mt were dispatched to Iraq, which meant that in four months 89% of the target was reached. The remaining 200,000 mt took up to December to be completely delivered due to the deterioration of security in Iraq and the incapacity of some of the suppliers of manufactured products (soap, vegetable oil and milk) to deliver under the conditions of our contracts.

The Iraq office moved to Amman in September and the Larnaca office was discontinued. It was necessary to reduce the manpower in different corridors, close the books, but keep a response capacity in case new support was requested by the Transitional Government.

In September, I started a tour to the remaining corridors in operation (Jordan where I was based, Syria and Turkey) to discuss the way ahead.

On October 1st, I was at Dragica Pajevic's apartment in Ankara for a dinner with colleagues who had worked for the Iraq operation in Turkey. We were about to start eating when my phone rang. It was Barbara calling from Amman to inform me that my son died that day.

Thanks to the support of the Turkey Office, I landed in Lisbon the following day at 10:30 in the morning, meeting Barbara at Schiphol Airport, just in time to attend the cremation.



## Conclusion

Delivering food to hungry people around the world is already a complicated undertaking, but as we have learned from the stories in this volume, cross-border operations present even greater difficulties and risks both for beneficiaries and the humanitarian workers involved. Many of the contributors in this volume had to serve as World Food Programme (WFP) employees cum diplomats in order to reach vulnerable people across enemy lines, needing to use both their professional and personal relationships to succeed in reaching the hungry.

**Fighting Hunger in Dangerous Places** - WFP staff fought hunger in dangerous places such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Martin Ohlsen and Charles Vincent employed skilful actions to deliver food to various ethnic territories and enclaves, or Angola where Douglas Casson Coutts and others used both their professional and personal relationships to garner support from Namibia in order to serve their previous adversary, Angola, navigating through dangerous guerrilla territories at the time. Jean-Jacques Graisse recalls a similar situation using C-130 planes to airdrop food for vulnerable people in the south of Sudan. Sometimes humanitarian workers are caught in the middle of an unexpected conflict such as when Adelina Santos Tankia Myrvang and her family arrived at the airport in Beijing, China, 30 years ago, as the Tiananmen Square protest was unfolding.

**Creating New Institutions for Specific Operations** – Certain operations require the creation of new institutions to facilitate innovative approaches to new situations for efficiency or simply to circumvent hurdles. David Morton offers an insight into the creation of the United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) to serve Cambodians along a 250-mile frontier with Thailand. One of the greatest achievements of UNBRO was the establishment of a central fund for all NGOs and agencies involved in the operation, leading to an effective management of the operation. WFP managed UNBRO until the end of 1987 when it was handed over to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which handed it over to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) before the repatriation of the displaced Khmer people. Ingram believed it was time for WFP to relinquish what he considered a nominal lead-role and pass decision-making to the United Nations Special Representative.

**Working with Unrecognized Governments** – Political situations sometimes require working with disagreeable governments in order to serve hungry people. United Nations agencies are often caught in situations that require working with regimes not recognized by the United Nations in order to provide assistance to

vulnerable people. In the Cambodian operation, Werner Schleiffer has given us an idea of what it was like to work with the government of what was at the time the People's Republic of Kampuchea, when the United Nations and a majority of its member states only recognized the Government of Democratic Kampuchea. As a result of this complication, for example, WFP was not allowed to operate under its own mandate, and the approval of each new WFP staff position required lengthy negotiations. Unfortunately, navigating these political complexities often add to bureaucratic perceptions about United Nations agencies.

**Agony and Humanity in the Line of Duty** – War zones are places of horror, but even in tragic situations of war, one sometimes encounters genuine humanity that makes one forget, for a moment, the surrounding horrors. This is evident when Suresh Sharma meets a young airplane captain and his crew and the agony he felt after hearing about the downing of that plane, knowing the captain and crew he had met were dead. The reality of the situation was that it could have been him on that plane or anywhere in the various war zones. One feels the same distress in Peter Casier's emotional piece about "M." who died in the Canal Hotel bombing in Baghdad. When these humanitarian workers depart, they also say goodbye to family and friends they might never see again. Carlos Veloso's son went into cancer relapse just before he deployed and died just after he completed his deployment – there was no proper goodbye.

But in these often dangerous and complicated situations, there are also light moments of humour and humanity such as when Carlos Veloso and Anwar travelled together, realizing that many jokes from their countries are similar, or when Martin Ohlsen shared coffee and Slivovitz at a guard post in Bosnia. We all cry and laugh, so humour can sometimes be the best method of dealing with complicated situations.

**Remote Controlled Management of Delivery in a War Zone** – There are times when it is impossible even to meet the people WFP is feeding. The US invasion of Afghanistan meant that Piero Terranera had to manage an Afghan emergency operation from Pakistan, dealing with both logistics and personnel issues. A major problem was to ensure that food aid could be transported to the right Extended Delivery Point (EDP), in the right quantity, without the presence of responsible managers who would have usually overseen the operations. It is sometimes necessary to employ innovative delivery methods to reach vulnerable people behind enemy lines, such as using local truckers or planes to airdrop.

**Unconventional Humanitarian Funding Mechanism** – Some countries in turmoil are not necessarily poor. But sometimes sanctions or a halt to economic activities collide with the need to serve vulnerable people in these countries. Reprimanding a country for bad behaviour can have terrible consequences on ordinary people who are often already victims of the leaders of such countries. During the first Gulf War the US found a way to circumvent sanctions on Iraq by

using revenue from the sale of Iraqi oil to provide food for vulnerable people. When the US invaded Iraq in 2003, creating a new humanitarian situation, United Nations Resolution 1472 (2003) authorized the United Nations to take over contracts of the Iraq Oil for Food Programme in order to feed hungry Iraqis, reducing dependence on conventional donor funding. The multiplicity of global emergencies and disasters has made it difficult to attract humanitarian funding. The Oil for Food Programme was one way of using Iraqi resources to serve its vulnerable people.

Finally, what all these contributions sum up to are the resilience of those involved and the need for more protection for humanitarian workers engaged in operations around the world. Though it is fair to state that security mechanisms have improved in organizations such as WFP subsequent to many of these experiences, international humanitarian laws concerning protection for humanitarian relief personnel and objects must be upheld and enforced in order to create deterrence and save aid workers. Parties in conflicts must be encouraged to respect international humanitarian principles and norms protecting humanitarian personnel and emblems. Moreover, many scenarios in this volume indicate that humanitarian organizations must also invest in more security for personnel serving in violent conflict regions.

Sincerely,

Joseph Kaifala

**Editorial Panel**



Joseph Kaifala, Editor



Dr. Suresh Sharma, Chair



Angela Van Rynbach, Member



Gretchen Bloom, Member



Peggy Nelson, Member



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