

THE PARTICIPATION OF HUNGARIAN SOLDIERS  
IN UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS IN ANGOLA



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Hungary was trying to distance itself from the Soviet Union's sphere of interest even in the period that preceded the regime change and sought opportunities to loosen the tight bonds of earlier dependence. One such opportunity was the participation in the various peace support operations organized by the UN. Primarily experts of the Hungarian Defence Force and the Police participated in them. This essay presents the first Hungarian undertaking in Africa (Angola) which laid the foundation for Hungary's participation in further peace operations.

**Keywords:** Angola, peacekeeping, UNITA, Hungarian Defence Force

**Antecedents, the Angolan civil war:**

As I was preparing this essay I found that the written record (primarily the holdings of the official archives) is very incomplete, therefore I also relied on the recollections of the retired soldiers who had served previously in Angola. Before I address the subject, it will be necessary to discuss the process that led to the UN operation in Angola. Portuguese colonialism differed in many ways from German, French, Belgian, English or Dutch, in that Portugal did not take over and exploit the resources but tried to build a new Portugal in Angola (Chabal and Vidal, 2007, 4). To a certain extent we can consider this a positive effect, because today's cities and industrial infrastructure all originated in the Portuguese era. However, the treatment of the native population, was similar to that in the colonies of the other nations. Although Angola was called an overseas province in the 1950s when some small reforms were started, the previous policy of Portugal changed but little. This attitude implicitly resulted in strengthening the independence groups that were organized ethnically and territorially, and led to the escalation of violence (Besenyő, 2013, 287). The struggle for Angolan independence lasted nearly fifteen years. Finally the army confronted the regime and eliminated the previous Portuguese colonial policy when it precipitated the "Carnation Revolution"

on April 25, 1974. As a result Portugal withdrew from Bissau-Guinea, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe as well as Angola in 1975.

After the elimination of colonial rule the various liberation movements soon confronted each other; however they tried to give an ideological justification to their conflict (Hodges, 2001, 7-9). “Unselfish help” soon appeared in the conflict. The superpowers of the bipolar world contributed indirectly to the continuation of the civil war for years. Cuban troops marched in to support the central government established in Luanda by the MPLA.<sup>1</sup> At the same time the United States (USA), Zaire<sup>2</sup> and South Africa undertook the support of UNITA<sup>3</sup>, the insurgent government and army led by Dr. Jonas Savimbi in the other parts of the country (Chabal and Vidal, 2007, 100). This soon led to the division of Angola and contributed significantly to the outbreak of a bloody civil war that lasted more than a decade. In this war the opposite sides fought with varying success, but even with external help neither side proved to be capable of prevailing over the other. The conflict came to a stalemate at the end of the 1980s. MPLA and UNITA tried to achieve a military victory, but the battle of Cuito Cuanavale (between November 1987 and March 1988) resulted in a standoff. It became clear to military strategists and politicians that the conflict could not be solved by with military force, and they began negotiations (Búr, 2011, 171-172).

Finally Angola, the United States, the Soviet Union, Cuba and South Africa came to an agreement in New York on 22 December 1988, as a result of mediation by the United Nations (UN). The South African and Cuban troops were withdrawn from Angola according to New York Agreement (Besenyő, 2013/3, 303). The concerned parties signed a peace agreement in Bicesse (Portugal) in 1991 with the support of the “Troika” (USA, Russia, Portugal), and entrusted its supervision to the UN (James and Broadhead, 2004, 19-20). The peace-agreement prescribed open and free elections and the establishment of a national army after both UNITA’s and the government’s forces were disbanded. The parties agreed that the “unemployed” soldiers of the opposing forces would be integrated in the national army.<sup>4</sup>

The United Nations Angola Verification Mission I (UNAVEM I) was deployed between January 1989 and May 1991 to enforce the peace agreement. This was the first peace-operation on the African continent since the UN’s operation in Congo (ONUC – United Nations Operation in the Congo) in the 1960s. The UN had to deploy three further operations<sup>5</sup> in the country due to friction between the opposing sides and the frequent clashes between armed groups. Despite

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<sup>1</sup> Movimento Popular para a Libertação de Angola (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola)

<sup>2</sup> Today it known as Democratic Republic of the Congo.

<sup>3</sup> União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola). South Africa not only “supported” UNITA but it was also active belligerent. Its forces were smaller than those of Cuba, but it provided significant numbers of troops, artillery, armour and air support.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/Missions/unavem1/UnavemIB.htm> (Downloaded: 30. 09. 2014.)

<sup>5</sup> UNAVEM II, UNAVEM III. and MONUA

difficulties, the leaders of the country and UNAVEM found the circumstances adequate for holding free and fair elections where Angolans could decide who would get their mandate to lead the country.

The elections were held on September 29–30, 1992; according to official figures 91 percent of the eligible voters (4.82 million) participated.<sup>6</sup> Jose Eduardo dos Santos got the 49.6 percent of votes while Dr. Jonas Savimbi got 40.07 percent (Hodges, 2001, 14). The MPLA also won the parliamentary elections, with 53.74 percent of the votes, while UNITA won 34.10 percent. So MPLA could delegate 129 representatives while UNITA could send 70 to the National Assembly. Ten other parties got altogether 21 seats. As a consequence of the polls, Dr. Jonas Savimbi called back his generals from the National Army and begun an extraordinarily powerful offensive that resulted the occupation of two thirds of the country (Chabal and Vidal, 2007, 139-145). Speaking of these events, Margaret Anstee (the representative of the Secretary General) said that the international community was not showing sufficient interest in solving Angola's troubles, and consequently Angola became "an Orphan of the Cold War". It was becoming clear for UNAVEM that the few hundred UN observers could not disarm a 150.000 member armed force.

When the Lusaka Agreement was signed in 1994, the UN was willing to finance the expansion of UNAVEM-II's strength from a few hundred to eight thousand and start the UNAVEM-III operation with a stronger mandate, as a result of the lesson learned from the previous failures. They presumed on Lusaka Agreement although Savimbi was not willing to sign it. Finally the USA established diplomatic relations with Luanda in May 1993 when it saw the incomprehensible obstinacy of its previous ally. As a response, the Luanda government announced that it was introducing a market economy.

Since the war had devastated the country, the government requested financial support from the international community. Except for food deliveries and investments in the oil industry, such support was not forthcoming. However, the main problem was that the USA was not bringing pressure on UNITA's armed forces. On the contrary, it continued to support UNITA financially, due to the incitement of observers of "Troika", controlling the adaptation of Lusaka Agreement protocols, and UN. Moreover, they demanded that the government guarantee a special status for Jonas Savimbi. Despite all of these, the opposing sides could not agree and hostilities were renewed (Hodges, 2001, 19).

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/Missions/Unavem2/UnavemIIB.htm> (Downloaded: 30. 09. 2014.)

### **Hungary latch on to Angolan settlement:**

Hungary closely monitored the Angolan settlement from the end of 1980s, as the report (dated September 8, 1988) of Lieutenant General Ferenc Szűcs, chief of the Hungarian People's Army General Staff's 2nd Directorate, to Lieutenant General József Pacsek shows.<sup>7</sup> The very detailed report floated the possibility of Hungarian investment in the settlement, but it rather emphasized the difficulties. A further three years had to pass before Hungarian participation in the Angolan settlement was again considered seriously. The first Angolan mission Hungarian soldiers participated in was UNAVEM-II. They also participated in the subsequent UNAVEM-III and MONUA<sup>8</sup> operations.<sup>9</sup> Ten soldiers and a 15-member police contingent represented Hungary in UNAVEM-II and UNAVEM-III at the request of the UN. In addition, a three-member military and an eight-member police contingent participated in the MONUA mission.<sup>10</sup> Previously the Hungarian police (Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1990, 00377 Hungarian participation in UNTAG)<sup>11</sup> and the Hungarian People's Army had established good relations with the leadership of the MPLA, the Angolan Army and the other armed services of the government. Several Angolan officers attended the various higher education institutions of the Hungarian military for years (Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1988, 00668 Angolan-Hungarian military education agreement plan). For instance, thirty officers and twenty-five warrant officers of the Angolan Army's active component took part in armor, mechanized infantry, radar technician, logistics, signals, and finance courses during the 1988/1989 academic year (Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1988, 003961 Angolan-Hungarian military education agreement). Moreover, Hungary provided components to the Angolan Army's military vehicles (Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1990, 001056 Angolan to buy weapons from Hungary, and XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1990, 00541 Angola buys weapons from Hungary) and the Hungarian embassy oversaw various diplomatic, economic and cultural projects.<sup>12</sup> In its evaluation in the 1990s

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<sup>7</sup> The report includes general information about the country, the military situation and the chances of political settlement. The number of the report is 79/19

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Observer Mission In Angola

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/Missions/Monua/monuab.htm> (Downloaded: 30. 09. 2014.)

<sup>10</sup> I could not ascertain the exact number of Hungarian soldiers who served in Angola. According to my information there could have been about 70 individuals. There were many gaps in the record of the African missions of the Hungarian Defense Forces, due to frequent realignments and reorganisation. Therefore I supplemented the sparse archival record with my interviews with individuals who had served on the African continent.

<sup>11</sup> The Hungarian Police had been training Angolan policemen for years in Hungary. However, the Hungarian Ministry of Interior ceased these courses because the Angolan government failed to pay the expenses for several years' courses.

<sup>12</sup> However, these relations eroded somewhat at the time of regime change in Hungary, because the Hungarian government was not willing to provide supplies on credit. Otherwise, annual Hungarian export was 5–6 million US dollars. While the other socialist countries strove to strengthen their extant positions in expectation of a peace treaty, Hungary closed its commercial bureau in Luanda and gradually reduced its extant interests, instead

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs rated Angola as a “*relation with an emphasized role in our middle- and long-term plans*”. The evaluation continues with “*We consider it necessary to keep abreast of the changes in the country’s internal situation as well as of the emerging new political forces and the opinions of the representatives of other interested countries in the future.*” (Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1990, 0030 Angolan-Hungarian cooperation and future plan) According to another report Angola had played and would continue to play a significant political and economic role in the South African region, therefore Hungary would have to strengthen its participation to gain economic advantages in the future as well as it had to try after continuous presence (Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1990, 002492 Hungarian Embassy annual report from Angola). Understandably, the military (Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Namibia, 1988, 003777 Hungarian participation in UNTAG)<sup>13</sup> and political leadership maintained working relationships and had up-to-date information about Angola and the processes in the region when the idea of the Hungarian participation in UN’s Angolan mission was suggested. The positive decision was facilitated by the supporting attitude of the ruling Angolan leadership as well as by UNITA’s (Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1991, 002042 Meeting with UNITA representatives, and XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1991, 001673 Report on Hungarian-UNITA relationship)<sup>14</sup> willingness to accept Hungarian peace-keepers in the newly established UN peace operation (Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1990, 00541 Angola buys weapons from Hungary, and XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1991, 002083 Annual report of Hungarian Ambassador to Angola). Finally the Hungarian leadership declared that the country would participate in the Angolan settlement with a fifteen-member military group to fulfill the UN’s request (Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1991, 0041 Hungarian participation in the Angolan settlement process).<sup>15</sup>

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of strengthening its positions. The Angolans had even offered opportunities for Hungarian companies in the exploitation of oilfields in Cabinda as well as in the restoration of the country. Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1990, 00379 Angolan – Hungarian economic ties, Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1990, 00381 Angolan – Hungarian economic ties, and , XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1990, 001844 Hungarian economic delegation visit Angola

<sup>13</sup> The Hungarian military leadership kept tabs on UN peace-operations in Africa since 1988 and it also planned on contributing a larger contingent to the Namibian operation. Eventually it was not soldiers but policemen who went to Namibia. However, the leadership of the Hungarian People’s Army and subsequently the Hungarian Defense Force prepared for more possible African operations.

<sup>14</sup> The Hungarian Government made contact with Jonas Malheiro due to Portuguese and South African intercessions during 1990–1991. The opposition leader of the Angolan Socialist Government also supported the participation of Hungarian peace-keepers in the UNAVEM operation.

<sup>15</sup> In addition to the peacekeeper contingent the UN also planned to rent or buy Hungarian helicopters for its Angolan operations. However the Hungarian Chief of Staff rejected the tender of the Canadian Skylink Company due to its unfavorable conditions.

### **Selection, preparation at home:**

The selection of the first Angolan contingent was conducted at the General Staff's Chief Directorate of Operations by the staff of the International Workgroup.<sup>16</sup> In the spring of 1991 the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General László Borsits informed the commander of the Directorate, Major General József Bíró, that a political decision had been made that the Hungarian Defence Force (HDF) would send an observe contingent of 15 officers to Angola. He also directed the commander to select and prepare the contingent so that it would be ready to deploy within two weeks. Colonel László Hajdú was selected to execute the task. With the help of Human Resources Directorate of the HDF the Colonel and his staff identified the potential candidates for the mission.<sup>17</sup> Ninety-four individuals (excluding the officers of the Military Reconnaissance Office) were identified as having passed intermediate or superior level English proficiency tests. Colonel Hajdú personally tested the applicants' knowledge of English through a short conversation and a special translator task.<sup>18</sup> Preparation was conducted at the Hűvösvölgy institution of the Defense Ministry, with the assistance of the Center and experts. Several members of the HDF had served in the Iraq–Iranian UNIMOG mission between 1988 and 1991, so they had serious experience in peace operations in actual circumstances. Despite all that, the two weeks were too short for selection, preparation, medical examination, equipment issue, administration and other tasks.<sup>19</sup>

The preparation of the second rotation was conducted by the Training Center of Peacekeeping Forces, which had been established Colonel Hajdú's suggestion, to eliminate the deficiencies that had been encountered during the preparation and training of the first contingent. The team was placed in Budapest in an institution on Tünde Street and General János Deák, Chief of the General Staff

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<sup>16</sup> The International Workgroup managed the execution of the Conventional Forces Europe (CFE), Open Skies, Vienna Document treaties and UN matters. At that time CFE programs were the most frequent because local inspections and arms cuts started after the promulgation of the agreement. Among the tasks of the Workgroup was to prepare the 57 Hungarian declared sites (military installations) for inspection. This proved to be a serious challenge, because the Hungarian Defense Force had never performed such tasks in the past.

<sup>17</sup> Participation of Hungarian Defense Force personnel in foreign deployments was strictly voluntary. This applied to the Angola mission as well. The applicants had to get through a very serious professional and medical screening and a language test. That was the reason for the occasional shortage of eligible applicants, although over the number of applications exceeded the available mission billets. As a result several individuals extended their external service or were sent on new missions after a short time.

<sup>18</sup> Personal interview with Colonel (retired) László Hajdú in September 2011.

<sup>19</sup> The contingent did not deploy within the planned two weeks, after all. The configuration of the mission's infrastructure worked more slowly than previously planned. The initial group of five officers travelled to the operational zone after a delay of several weeks, under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel László Török with. Some weeks later the remaining ten officers followed them.



appointed Lieutenant Colonel Zoltán Horváth, then commander of the 52nd Repair Division, as its commander. Lieutenant Colonel Horváth was chosen because he was an experienced troop commander as well as he was member of retractable controlling staff of Disarming Information and Controlling Center.<sup>20</sup> However, the organization was fugitive and the missionary preparations were executed by the Operation Coordination Center after its windup.

Although the preparation of the first group differed from that of the subsequent rotations, a permanent feature was that as the first step every applicant had to prove his proficiency in English through an examination that nowadays seems too demanding.<sup>21</sup> Several applicants failed because not many regular officers have an adequate command of English. So sending enough English speaking peacekeepers to Angola proved to be a serious challenge. That is why both the military and the police often “drafted” diplomats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and gave them military/police ranks for the duration of their deployment (Besenyő, 213/a, 271). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs delegated three individuals for the first rotation. In order to avoid these necessary “drafts” the HDF organized English courses in many garrisons (e.g. Budapest, Debrecen) to have sufficient number of English speaking soldiers for the Angola mission (Besenyő, 213/a, 240, 270 and 286). The UN representatives were also aware of these problems. Due to previous negative experience, the first test after the arrival of Hungarian peacekeepers in the area of operations was a language test. The UN tested for its own language requirements that were more practical than literary. Due to this, many people could get over the difficulties after several attempts. In the beginning most Hungarians did not know that “every nation speaks English with their own language.” There were certain special phrases pronounced in a particular manner that were unintelligible even for native speakers of English (Besenyő, 2010, 134-143). The utility of the intensive language preparation/screening was that there was no difference in communication ability between the commandeered strength and the other countries’ strength with few missionary experiences.

Language testing was followed by physical examination. Although the military physicians had considerable tropical experience,<sup>22</sup> the leaders of the Hungarian medical system could not decide what the most important physical priorities

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<sup>20</sup> <http://hnykszabadszallas.5mp.eu/web.php?a=hnykszabadszallas&o=Xx6rGZx7yn> (Downloaded: 25. 06. 2014.)

<sup>21</sup> According to one peacekeeper, subjecting the participants to the (sometimes quite complicated) proficiency examination was totally useless for the Angolan operation. In his experience knowledge of everyday English was needed, not the literary niceties. It could be more useful to compose reports using the templates the UN provided to help the observers’ work, and training in radio transmission procedures in English (that proved to be the biggest challenge) was needed.

<sup>22</sup> Nearly 600 Hungarians (mainly officers and in a smaller proportion diplomats) served in South Vietnam in tropical conditions between 1973 and 1975. The Hungarian military medical corps still had the valuable experience, collected there.

were. Since they did not want to commit a fatal error, they had all of the possible tests done on the deploying troops. There was a very serious physical and mental condition evaluation before the health and sanitation training took place. According to the opinion of those who served abroad the information provided by the physicians conducting the training, was not always correct or useful. The main problem was that the rules and regulations prescribed at home could not be put into practice during the execution of peace-operations in the operational area. For instance, the peacekeeper could not refuse a friendly handshake even if the proffered hand was covered with several months' mange, or refuse food of unknown origin prepared by this hand. It was impossible not to touch bacteria infected fresh-water when a vehicle was stuck in a river. It was impossible to investigate the circumstances of a clash without grazing anything, particularly if the peacekeepers appointed to execute the survey, were not issued wearing rubber gloves.<sup>23</sup> The Hungarian peacekeepers developed their own methods once these things became clear. One officer used his left hand for his own personal affairs (eat, drink, scratch, urinate, defecate etc.), and "lived his social life" with his right hand. Then he sterilized himself as circumstances allowed when he returned to his workplace. Food of unknown origin made daily "inner sterilization" necessary. For this purpose half deciliter (not more) spirit served perfectly.

The really positive aspect of the health and sanitation preparation was the vaccinations. This elevated the Hungarians over the other nations because they did not need the UN's supplementary vaccinations. For example Lariam (for the prevention of malaria) was considered the most modern medication available. One thing that was not known at home – due to the lack of tropical experience – was how long this product could be used without irreversible damage of the liver. Then the deploying personnel were briefed that they had to start taking it one week prior to departure and stop taking it one week after their arrival at home. According to the doctor of the Portuguese hospital in the operational area, the maximum period was six months. When the personnel returned from the mission, the doctor conducting the returnees' screening at home was also shocked that our officers took the medicine continuously for

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<sup>23</sup> This problem was not unique to Angola. I remember when one member of the Hungarian contingent was on patrol with his African comrade in Western Sahara in 2003. Their vehicle hit a mine and turned over. The African officer was injured and bled profusely, so the Hungarian officer administered first aid. He had to apply the bandage with a bare hand because there was no rubber glove in the first aid package. Shortly afterwards it was learned that the African officer was infected by HIV so, he was returned to his country. The Hungarian officer had to wait for eight weeks for the immediate tests to have sure results. This period must have been hell for him. He lost more than twelve kilograms due to anxiety. Fortunately he was not infected. However as this case shows, medical regulations, prescribed at home, cannot be observed in the operational area on every occasion.



more than a year. Despite this we can emphasize that the Hungarians ascertained the medical fitness of the personnel and prepared them to the highest standard, considering the knowledge and experience available in Hungary.

The first contingent's preparation was on an "ad hoc" basis, because there were no soldiers yet with African experience. So the material for the first Angola contingent's preparation was compiled by experts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as soldiers who gained their experiences in the UN's Iraq–Iranian peace-operation (UNIMOG). The advice of those with Iraqi experience - even if they had not served in a tropical environment - was an invaluable help to soldiers with only minimum information about UN managed missions. In fact, at that time the HDF did not yet have any equipment used by the UN. The training team tried to familiarize the personnel with such equipment (transportation, water-purification, communication etc.) as could prove useful in practice. The Hungarian leadership soon got the first answers to the question of the efficiency of the training and preparation, because the first contingent left for the operational area on 15 July 1991 (Four Years of Defense, 1990-1994, 29).

Two foreign-area experts with provisional military rank, who had participated in the preparation of the contingent, also travelled with the first rotation because they had served previously in Angola. Their local connections as well as their experience helped the team's work a great deal (Besenyő, et al, 2013, 106 and 123). On arrival the soldiers participated in some mission-specific training in the field, organized by the UN. It turned out that although there were shortcomings in the preparations they received at home, the Hungarians still belonged among the best prepared (Besenyő, 2013/a, 271). Despite this, there was an effort made to eliminate the shortcomings in the training program for the second rotation.

Officers who had returned home from Angola in the interim served as instructors the second group's training program which was carried out by the recently established HDF Peace-force Training Center (Four Years of Defense, 1990-1994, 183-185). These officers tried to hand down as much of their experience as possible to the new contingent (Besenyő, 2013/a, 241). They emphasized those ordinary mission tasks that they had had to deal with regularly (controlling the cease-fire, separating armed groups, disarmament as well as organizing elections).

By this time the HDF's organization for peace-keeping had evolved into the structure that still functions today, albeit with some changes. Of course, the briefings conducted by the returned officers were not always useful, because Angola was divided into six regions, in which forty camps were operating with different specifics and in varying circumstances. The member of the small Hungarian contingent were not present in each camp, so the briefing about the experiences in the Bungo camp had to serve for peace-keepers who had to travel to Mavinga (Besenyő, et al, 2013, 132-133). Despite this, employing returning officers as instructors had considerable advantages. The

Operation Coordinating Center, which took over the tasks of peace-training after the HDF Peace-force Training Center was disbanded, tried to use more practical experience in the preparation. Of course, such military skills as radio communications, map reading and land navigation, driving, marksmanship, and survival were part of the training. Most of the soldiers already possessed these skills at an acceptable level. In most cases, the aim was to refresh their knowledge as well as to learn different UN process.<sup>24</sup>

Organizational experience (confirmed by individual recollections) shows that the preparation could not be 100 percent unless the training program draws on the experience gained in the field. The prime minister could declare that the contingent sent abroad was prepared for any eventuality – but that was only to ease public concern about the safety of the deploying soldiers. In reality, life produces new and unexpected situations – all the more so, because the HDF had no models to follow, and the soldiers on the spot had to resolve the unexpected challenges as best they could under the circumstances.

### **The equipment of the peace-keepers:**

In the beginning the officers sent to Angola were issued many items of clothing and equipment that were useful in cold or temperate zones, but not in a tropical environment, due to the lack of experience. But this was discovered only when they were already in the field. For instance the 70M fatigue-uniform and the 70M boots in use at the time were clearly useless in the tropical environment. Several participants mentioned that the sole of the boot simply separated due to the frequent rains. Many people got serious foot infections and fungus due to the lack of ventilation. Many bought jungle boots from other peacekeepers or purchased shoes that were more appropriate in the Angolan environment from local shops. However, sometimes they also drove the patrol-vehicles in sandals or slippers (Besenyő, 2013/a, 241-242). The sleeping bag was practical in -15 or -20 degrees Centigrade, but no one use it in +40 degrees. Another example was the sunglasses issued to the observers. They were so dark that no one could see through them, they did not filter UV radiation. Using them was more dangerous for the eyes than going without eye protection. The issue duffle bag was very practical during travel, but it was less so for everyday use in the field: (its contents were accessible only through a narrow opening at the top). A footlocker, adapted to the “mission wardrobe” would have been far more practical.

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<sup>24</sup> Despite of this tendency, there was a case when a Hungarian soldier was unable to drive a land rover, got from UN. The simply explanation of the event was that he only drove Trabant car at home. Because he could not succeed the requirements of the driving test so he was sent back.

Aside from the above shortcomings, the equipment was generally suitable for the requirements of the situation. Moreover, certain items (e.g. underwear, socks etc.) were issued in larger quantity than needed. Of course, there were some items that were superior to those of other nations. The insect screen proved to be particularly good. It was produced by the Clothing Supplying Center according to its own design, and it was suitable for an approximately 3–3,5 sq meter “canopy bed”. Other nations envied the Hungarians for this. The issued equipment also contained a medical kit provided by the medical corps. It included those instruments (all up to date), that would be useful in the field.

### **The activity of the peace-keepers**

After UN training and examinations, the Hungarian soldiers went to various camps according to a schedule determined partly by an equal rotation principle and partly by the influence a particular nation had. The year was divided into for four three-month periods, and the participants had to serve in a different camp in each period. This rotation schedule was necessary because the camps were classified as category A, B or C. Category “A” camps were “first class:” the cities where infrastructure existed and everything was available. Category “B” camps were near functioning towns and villages, where everyday life was much harder. Category “C” camps were located in the most remote areas – desert or jungle – without any kind of infrastructure. Here the soldiers served isolated from the world and had to live in grass huts or tents, and their only connection to the outside world was by radio. The rotation schedule ensured that everyone would spend some time in each category during his tour (Besenyő, et al, 2013, 108). The Hungarian officers had a serious advantage: most of them spoke Russian, so they were placed at the better supplied district-commands where they served as liaison to the Russian and Ukrainian staff of the UN transport helicopters (Besenyő, et al, 2013, 134). However, the others begun their tour in category “C” camps, often in very difficult circumstances.<sup>25</sup>

The peacekeepers performed classic observer tasks. Their main functions were to monitor the parties in the confrontation, checking and recording their numbers and arms, documenting and reporting their findings (Besenyő 2013/a, 245). Later they participated in the disarmament of the parties, in the collection of arms, in escorting

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<sup>25</sup> Most participants of UNAVEM-II lived in grass huts like the natives, because the UN didn't built up its own bases. The working and living conditions improved by the end of UNAVEM-II, when UN repaired and furnished houses, abandoned by the Portuguese and damaged during the war (these served both as workplaces and living quarters ). In the latter operations (UNAVEM-III and MONUA), billeting conditions improved as containers and tents were put up in the camps.

convoys and in the supervision of parliamentary elections. In addition, they monitored the various cease-fire violations, when armed clashes erupted between the executors of demobilizing. Their daily activity also included housekeeping work in camp: organizing everyday life, cooking, cleaning, fetching water, washing etc., that needed considerable time. Several people told me that obtaining food was a serious problem in the remote camps. They had to buy everything on their own salary and they could count upon only themselves. However, money was of no use when they could not find enough food in adequate quantity and of acceptable quality. They could not just go to the market and buy everything in one place. Several times they had to buy the ingredients for dinner in six villages. On some occasions the peacekeepers did not eat a real meal for weeks and subsisted on a vegetable dish made from roots, cabbage and some unknown plants and fruits (Besenyő, et al, 2013, 144). At the headquarters in the largest cities the situation was better, but the Hungarian soldiers faced various supplying problems there as well. They tried to overcome these with special methods. Every Hungarian checked in on the mission radio net at a prearranged time, when they could talk freely. On these occasions those serving in the remote areas dictated their requests for envelopes, stamps, soap, mineral water, chocolate, and other items they could not get locally to those in the Luanda headquarters. The latter consolidated the requests, bought the provisions and sent them by helicopter the following week or perhaps two weeks later. The residents of the camps would then send the money for the supplies with the return flight. The reliability of this system was proved by the fact that no one knew a case when there was an argument about payment. Everyone met their debts fairly (Besenyő, 2013/a, 246-247).

Hungarian soldiers often had to deal with unforeseen, and many times dangerous, situations, created by the instability of the country and the mission requirements. On one occasion the originally planned rotation had to be extended by more than two months for five Hungarian peacekeepers. This request was granted by the HDF and accepted by the soldiers, after some arm-twisting by the UN headquarters in New York (Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, ENSZ BT, 1991, 003159 Relief of Hungarian peacekeepers in UNAVEM). Another time an Angolan policeman wanted to shoot a Hungarian soldier for turning the moot question (Besenyő, 2013/a, 223-224). Others were mistreated by UNITA fighters when clashes broke out again in 1993. On another occasion they were robbed. Despite these emergencies, no Hungarian soldier abandoned his post. They worked until their withdrawal. As his camp was being closed down, one officer took the time to rescue some nuns who had stayed behind in life threatening circumstances (Besenyő, et al, 2013, 141). Another one unknowingly drove his jeep for months over mines with defective detonators that had been planted in the road used by peacekeepers. If he had driven over them with a truck he could have “gone to dine with Saint Peter,” according to the leader of the bomb-disposal squad (Besenyő, 2013/a, 324). Wartime conditions, the monitoring of armed conflict, the sight of casualties, death, blood and destruction elicit unexpected

reactions from people. The Hungarian peace-keepers did not lose their head and executed their tasks scrupulously, many times risking their own lives.<sup>26</sup> Of course, everyone was fully aware of the fact that such duties could lead to tragedy. They realized it and accepted the risks.

It was a serious challenge to the peacekeepers to remain neutral in accordance with UN principles. According to research and my own experience, sooner or later the peace-keepers developed positive or negative attitudes towards the inhabitants as well as the opposing sides during the operations. However, our soldiers did not show this to the outside world. Several documents prove that the opposing sides never questioned the impartiality of Hungarian peacekeepers, and always considered them neutrals (Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1992, 001325 Report on Hungarian-Angolan relationship).

Keeping contact with the family also affected the mental condition of the peacekeepers. They maintained contact mainly through letters, which usually took eight weeks. There was no telephone in the field, so the Hungarian soldiers could call home only when they went to Luanda for something. There was a telephone box at the headquarters, where they could initiate the call and pay for it on the spot, or have the charges deducted from their salary. Although there was a Hungarian embassy in the country, it provided only limited help for the soldiers, due to the continuously cut-backs and steadily deteriorating security conditions (Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1992, 0085 Hungarian-Angolan military cooperation). Even this limited support ceased when the embassy was evacuated, due to renewed fighting after the unsuccessful elections in 1992 (Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1992, 002913 Angolan election 1992 and temporary closing of the Hungarian Embassy). The embassy was re-opened with a reduced staff in 1993, but it was permanently closed in the same year as a result of a government decision.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> A Hungarian officer told me that he got into dangerous situations several times when he negotiated with the leaders of anti-government groups, who seriously threatened him. The situation deteriorated to such an extent that he believed he would be killed. The most he could do was to keep the talk switch of the radio secretly pressed down. His comrades, who had remained at the base camp, heard everything that happened with him and his companions. This officer served seven months in the southern part of the country, called the "Death-zone" by the UN soldiers, where only robbers, other armed groups and peace-keepers lived among the belligerents. – Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (retired) István Solti, December 2010.

<sup>27</sup> According to the final report of the embassy: *"Also proved to be positive element the Hungarian military observers continuously presence in UNAVEM-II mission when certain countries withdrew their representatives, as the conflict deteriorated ... The concerned Angolan sites appreciated highly our involvement in UNAVEM-II mission. The Hungarian military observers seized prestige in the international strength with their commitment in critical situations."* Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1993, 4310 closing the Hungarian Embassy in Luanda Otherwise, several member of the Foreign Ministry didn't agree with the closure of Angolan and other African embassies. Dr. Tamás Horváth, ambassador in Alger, drafted the follows in relation with this: *"The amputation of our external representative system will render more difficult our move in the future and the resurrection of previous relations ... In the case of our country, it would be not favored to give up our seized positions and relations in Africa despite our financial problems."* - Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Afrika, 1994, 00160 Hungarian policy in Africa

In that year many Hungarian soldiers were withdrawn from the operation because the UN could not guarantee their safety (Besenyő, 2013/a, 306-307). The UN tried to create peace for two further years but the mandate of UNAVEM-II was terminated in February 1995 due to the steadily deteriorating security situation. They created UNAVEM-III with a stronger mandate and the MONUA operation two years later. To these missions Hungary delegated fewer personnel the previously (Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1995, 00779 perspectives of the Angolan Peace Plan).<sup>28</sup> The Hungarian involvement in Angola ceased when MONUA permanently left the country after a modest ceremony on 20 March 1999. MONUA withdrew at the request of the Luanda government, because clashes erupted again between the Angolan authorities and the Jonas Savimbi's UNITA guerrilla-organization in December 1998. This time UNITA's offensive was bloodier and more intensive than in the past. As result MONUA was unable to carry out its tasks in the areas occupied by UNITA units. The Luanda leadership therefore requested termination of the UN mission (James and Broadhead, 2004, 100). Several years had to elapse before the conflict would be successfully terminated. However, the peacekeepers did not return to the country after the withdrawal of MONUA.

The UN recognized the Hungarians' highly professional performance and offered leadership positions to Hungary in the Ruanda-Uganda Border Controlling Mission (UNOMUR) and in the Liberian mission (UNOMIL) (Hungarian National Archives, XIX-J-1-j, Angola, 1993, 4310 Closing the Hungarian Embassy in Luanda). However, the Angolan operation was considered unimportant at home, perhaps due to the low membership of these missions. The experience gained was used to a limited extent only, mainly to train the new rotations for Angola. A significant proportion of the collected information was lost. Now, when peace-operations in Africa have again become a priority, it has again become important to analyze the experience gained in the Angolan and other peacekeeping missions, and apply it in training. The recently reestablished Scientific Research Center of the Hungarian Defence Force's General Staff plays a leading role in this.

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<sup>28</sup> Zsolt Maris, second secretary wrote the follows about the starting of the operation at our Pretorian embassy in May 1995: "*Probably UNAVEM-III will be the most important and expensive UN mission in 1995 and 1996. The leadership of the global organization want to live down on its prestige caused the failure of the previous action with a large action never seen before.*"



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