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Yale-UN Oral History Project

Aldo Guaccio

Jean Krasno, Interviewer

March 18, 1998

Beirut, Lebanon

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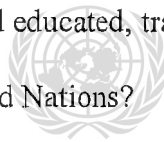
Interview with Aldo Guaccio

Interviewer: Jean Krasno, Ph.D.

March 18, 1998

In Beirut, Lebanon

Jean Krasno: This is an interview with Colonel Aldo Guaccio at the UNIFIL House in Beirut, Lebanon, on March 18th, 1998, and I am Jean Krasno. So, let me put this close to you. For the record, Colonel Guaccio, could you explain something about your background, where you were born, and educated, trained in the military, and then when you first became involved in the United Nations?



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Aldo Guaccio: I am Lieutenant-Colonel Aldo Guaccio, I am Italian. I am the senior UNIFIL representative in Beirut, so I represent UNIFIL in the capital of Lebanon. I was graduated an officer in an Italian military academy, in Modena, and so I am an army aviation pilot. I started my career in 1971. This is my background. I was the commanding officer of several battalions of tanks and of helicopters. I started my tour of duty in UNIFIL in 1995 as the commanding officer of Itlair; Itlair is the Italian squadron which works for UNIFIL. We have forty-five pilots and technicians and engineers in Naqura, the HQ, and we provide flight support to the operation of UNIFIL. And so I was there as one year as the commanding officer of this unit and the Italian contingent commander. After this tour of duty I was appointed as a senior UNIFIL representative in Beirut, which has nothing to do with Itlair, but with all the UN

missions. So, I represent the UNIFIL here in Beirut; I am here also as a liaison officer with all the UN agencies--we have about fifteen UN agencies, if I remember well--in Beirut. We [also liaise] with the governments and the Lebanese army. These are my duties and my responsibilities. I have to arrange meetings with both the political and the military [sides] of the Lebanese governmental organizations.

JK: When you arrived in South Lebanon, what was the situation there?

AG: Just a few months after my arrival, there was what we called the April Operation Grapes of Wrath. If you remember it was in the month of either March or April 1996. So, just a few months after my arrival, there was a real war in the area. And so I was there when there was the massacre of Karna, there was the shelling of Karna, in which one UN position, the HQob (Fijibatt) was shelled by Israel: artillery, and on that occasion, more than one hundred civilians died. As a pilot, you know that we have a helicopter ready for medical evacuation (medi-vac), twenty-four hours a day, and on that occasion we had all the helicopters of Italair--we have four helicopters--involved in the rescue and evacuation of both civilians and military. On that occasion, four--three or four, I don't remember exactly--Fijian military peacekeepers were very badly injured. But not only for the UN members, but also for the civilian members. As I told you more than one hundred people died in that operation.

JK: OK--so you airlifted them from the village...

AG: They were sheltered in the UN position. They died inside the UN position where they were sheltered during that operation. The situation was very bad, and so a lot of civilians asked to be sheltered, to have accommodation, inside the UN position just for security and safety. Unfortunately, it was not sufficient for them, because the UN position was shelled. And they were inside. They were living there, as families, children, and women.

JK: Why was that particular site hit?

AG: At that time, the Secretary-General sent an officer, a General, from the HQ in New York, to investigate about the accident, and if I remember well it was the General Van Houton, the advisor of the Secretary-General. He was sent here to investigate the accident, from New York. He was a UN officer.

JK: And that was Boutros-Ghali? Boutros-Ghali was still the Secretary-General?

AG: And Mr. Kofi Annan, he was the chief of the peacekeeping operations at that time. He was in Naquora just one month before, in February or March. In 1996, he was here. After a few days the operation Grapes of Wrath started. Why? The official version of the Israelis was that the Hizbullah were firing from very close to that position. They were firing mortar shells from very close to the position. And so the retaliation of the Israeli artillery and the results of the investigation are available in New York--and of the Israelis

say that it was a mistake, human error, that they shelled the position. But twelve shells arrived inside a small UN position in Karna.

JK: Twelve shells arrived? So it wasn't just one stray?

AG: Twelve. More than one. Officially the results are...

JK: But they were after certain Hizbullah members.

AG: Yes, they were firing from close. After this there was an understanding between the two parties involved in that operation, and from that time the monitoring group was created, which is a five-nation monitoring group--it has French, American, Syrian, Lebanese, and Israeli representatives. They usually meet in Naquora, and today--it is the 18th of March--they are in Naquora for a meeting. There was an understanding between the two parties, which said that they cannot shell, they cannot fire from close to civilian positions, and the retaliation cannot be towards civilian towns or villages or so on. So, when one of the parties involved believes that there is something against the understanding, they will ask for a meeting of the monitoring group, and the monitoring group will meet in Naquora.

JK: OK--there is not a representative of the Hizbullah at the monitoring group?

AG: No, they are not represented. There are Syrian and Lebanese representatives.

JK: I didn't know that there was a monitoring group. When did they create that?

AG: Just immediately after the end of the operation. UNIFIL used to call it the April confrontation, but the official Israeli name was operation Grapes of Wrath, just to be precise. Just immediately after the end of this operation, of course there were some political discussions, and so this monitoring group was created just to control the situation, or to monitor the situation, and to blame or to complain--there are some complaints raised by one or the other parties, and they discussed this complaint and there are some results of this. I have a copy of the April understanding, if you want a copy so you can read what I am talking about.



JK: This leads me to a very complicated question, but we may take it in pieces. When peacekeeping was first created in 1956 when Dag Hammarskjöld was Secretary-General he laid down some principles of peacekeeping which he thought were key: consent of the parties, only firing in self-defense, putting in peacekeeping only after there has been a cease-fire, and so forth. In UNIFIL, how do you define self-defense, or when you can use force?

AG: Yes, self-defense is a word that explains itself. It is very difficult for a soldier to be a peacekeeper, because the first thing you try to do is to save your life. This is how we are trained in our countries, my training is to defend my life. So, it is very difficult for us to change our mentality. But we do succeed in this, because first of all we are here to help the civilian population and to defend the civilian population and to help them in their

lives. So, self-defense: if someone is firing directly against you, you can use your weapons. But so far we have never used it. Of course, we are well accepted by both the parties involved in this war. As I said before, there should be a cease-fire, or maybe, both parties should accept the presence of the UN personnel on the ground, because if one of the two doesn't accept them then of course there will be problems. For instance, we had some problems with the Fijians. Some of the Hizbullah stopped some soldiers. You know when the peacekeepers are accepted by both parties, our job is easier. If one of the two parties, even for a short period, doesn't accept our presence, of course they will do something against us, and maybe we can use force, use our weapons to defend ourselves. So far, for what I know, we have never used our weapons. In the last two years, I can tell you that for sure. Before that, I don't know. I cannot be more precise. But, it is very difficult to be a peacekeeper, to be not involved in a war between two other countries, is not easy. Sometimes you lean very close to the civilian population and so you think that they are right and the others are wrong. To be equidistant, impartial is difficult. Sometimes it is not easy for a man. We have our code. But we have to be impartial between the parties, and so we don't need to use the weapons.

JK: It seems as though in Lebanon that there are more than two parties. There are two parties to the signed agreement, but then there are other parties that are armed.

AG: But you know, now since the arrival of General Abudu who is the chief of the Lebanese army, all of the militias who were before and during the war, disarmed. So, now the Lebanese army is increasing its operational capacity, and it is now a national

army. We can say that we did a very good job in Lebanon, and now they are working together, Muslims and Christians and all the factions, very well. I can tell you that now--of course there is still in the minds of the people a difference between the groups, because you cannot forget seventeen or more years of war--but I can tell you that now there is one army, which is really very well equipped, according to the situation, political and economical, it is well equipped and very well trained, good officers, they go all over the world to train. I think that now we can talk not about the militia or a faction, but one army, a Lebanese army that is in charge of the security and the safety of the country.

JK: So, the importance being that they have the authority, then, to really represent the fact that they signed the agreement?



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AG: Yes.

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JK: OK--so at this point, while the Israelis were seeking out the Hizbullah targets because the Hizbullah had been firing on Israel, what is the situation now with the Hizbullah? Does the Lebanese army have greater authority over that group?

AG: No, I don't think the Lebanese army has a big authority over the Hizbullah. Of course, the Hizbullah is a party. It is officially represented in the Parliament. If I remember well, there are six representatives of Hizbullah in the Lebanese parliament. So, this is the military wing of an official party, recognized by the Lebanese government, they have six representatives. So, the authority--I don't think the Lebanese army has a real

authority over the Hizbullah. I don't think so. They are financed by the Iranians.

Hizbullah is the Party of God, and they fight for the complete withdrawal of the Israelis from Lebanon. But I don't think there is any authority. They had a big ceremony just last month. Hizbullah has a big military ceremony.

JK: I wanted to ask you about the fact that there are I believe nine different countries that have contingents here now?

AG: Yes.

JK: With all these different countries, and different languages and different kinds of training and standard operating procedures and so forth, what kinds of problems do you have in terms of coordinating all the different national contingents?

AG: You know, all the contingents are under the countries' authorities. So, the commanding officer of the Nepalese battalion has the command and the control of his troops. Of course, he has orders, and he has to follow those orders. We have some SOPs, standard operating procedures, and they have to follow those rules. UNIFIL gives them the general rules, the orders and the SOPs, and they follow their national rules within that. And so the coordination is an international coordination, from the HQ, from Naquora, which gives the orders. There is an ACOSOPs, Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations. We have a military structure. It is really like a military structure which gives the general

orders and the directives. I think that now there is an international way to coordinate the plan. But of course the battalion acts according to their national rules.

JK: Rules of engagement?

AG: No--the rules of engagement are from UNIFIL, from the HQ. The internal rules are the national rules. But the coordination and all the orders come from Naquora, from the HQ, where there is a multi-national staff. There is the first commander, of course, the executive first commander, and then we have a chief of staff, and then a staff which has several branches, an operational branch, a liaison branch, a logistical branch. And we have also a civilian organization too, for the administrative purposes.



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JK: The force commander now, is who?

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AG: It is General Corrote, he is a Fijian, from Fiji. As you know, we have also a Fijian contingent here. General Corrote is a Major General, he took over just a few months ago, he started his tour of duty just a few months ago. And he is of course the commanding officer of the whole mission. He is an Assistant Secretary-General for this mission.

JK: Do you find that there are different interpretations of standard operating procedures? That one country, Italy, might have a different interpretation than another?

AG: No, I don't think so. The general interpretation is the same, because it is very precise. In the military, we are sometimes stupid--we need very precise rules of action. It is better to give precise orders. So, the orders are really precise. I can show you the SOP. They tell you how to act in all the situations. Of course, then you have the personal factor, the soldier on the ground: "Self-defense, what does it mean?" They have to fire from one meter, or what? But we have also rules about firing close; firing close is when the retaliation or the fire from one of the two sides is very close to the position, and we have meters, "within fifty meters," "five hundred meters," and for the artillery. It is very precise; it is a question of meters. They have to report to HQ; the HQ will complain to the local authorities, either the Israeli or the Lebanese or Hizbullah authorities, against the fact that they were firing close, so the retaliation was very close. Ninety-nine percent of the time, since the retaliation from Israeli artillery is very close to the UN position, we cannot answer or retaliate to their fire. Say that the shells arrived within three hundred meters, so it's too close. They are firing too close. There will be protest from the UN liaison branch against them.

JK: So, for example, if Hizbullah had been firing from a position fairly close to the UN, and you can tell where they are firing...

AG: No, they cannot fire... If we see them, we cannot allow fire. For instance, we have the checkpoint, if they want to cross the checkpoint, they cannot carry weapons. We can keep the weapons, or send them away. If they want to keep their weapons, they cannot cross the checkpoint, but we cannot fire against people carrying weapons. We can stop

them, check the car, and if they carry weapons, we can confiscate the weapons or they cannot cross the checkpoint, the place. So, this is among the rules we have. There cannot be different interpretations. Of course, there is a different way of doing things according to the financial capacity of the government to help, for humanitarian cases. For instance, I know that all the contributing countries provide their own humanitarian aid to the population. For instance, I knew that the Norwegian contingent opened a dental care center in the area of operation, open to the Lebanese local people. This is humanitarian aid, it is according to the financial status of the nation. The Norwegian are rich, and the Irish have maybe other humanitarian activities. But from the military point of view, there are no possibilities to misunderstand.



JK: I just want to take it one step further, because I think people have a lot of confusion in understanding this. If for example you find that some faction, some group, is heavily armed, what is your response? Can you report them, or can you hold them?

AG: No, no, we cannot do that. We can avoid them firing from a position, we can stop them from doing this.

JK: Can you disarm them?

AG: Of course we can, if they are continuing in their activity, we can also stop them from continuing.

JK: Can you take their weapons away?

AG: Yes, yes, we can.

JK: You can do that. Even if they resist?

AG: You know, this is very tricky. This is the point of self-defense. If they open fire, we can do this. But if they open fire it would be self-defense. The separation between the legal point of self-defense and attack is very tricky. We cannot attack them. We cannot open fire first. We can stop them from firing, and if they don't want to stop we can do something to try to confiscate their weapons. But if they resist we cannot open fire. They have to do it first. As self-defense we can use our weapons. So far, we haven't had so many problems, because it depends on the way that you manage the situation. If you do not start the discussions; sometimes it is a strong discussion. But usually they go away, and maybe they will open fire from another place, but out of our position, so they cannot be seen by our men. Usually they go away.

JK: One of the things that peacekeepers need to be able to do is to resolve the conflict peacefully, in other words, 'de-escalate' the confrontation?

AG: Yes. We don't try to have direct confrontation. Ours is a peacekeeping mission. You know, there is a difference between peacekeeping and peace-enforcement. To force

the peace is like in Somalia, for instance. In our peacekeeping, we don't look for confrontation.

JK: Do you train the peacekeeping troops, say the Fijians that I saw yesterday, who are there guarding the checkpoints?

AG: I don't know how the different contingents are trained. As you know I am Italian, so I can tell you that we have a course on the general political situation. I can tell you how the Italian peacekeepers are trained. We are pilots and technicians. We are not involved in the direct confrontation. We are not on the ground. We are in the sky, in the air. So, we have a general idea of the political situation, we are trained about our role in the area. When the pilots arrive, they fly over the area with an expert pilot who has been here for at least four months. Of course, there are some training centers. I know that in Europe there are some for UN personnel, peacekeepers. I know that in Finland and in Norway they have training centers for people who are involved. I don't know if the Fijians have this kind of [thing]. I think so--I think that before coming they should have a general idea of where they are going and what they are doing, but I cannot assure you.

JK: Now, the other question that I have is on communications. What kinds of communication do you keep between the different contingents? You have radio operations...

AG: Yes, of course, we have radio communications, we have telephone, we have an internal line which connects all the battalions. From this point of view, we are very well equipped. We have radio, telephone, all that.

JK: So, the timing between having to get a message to any particular...

AG: Of course, we cannot provide a cellular phone to all the soldiers on the ground, so of course sometimes our news arrives two minutes after the journalist in the area has got the news, because they use the cellular phone and they communicate very quickly. We cannot provide a cellular phone to all the peacekeepers. So, they will communicate by radio to their HQ; the HQ to Naqura, to the liaison, or the operational barracks.

JK: And all of that is standardized? Does the UN...

AG: Yes, the procedures are all standardized.

JK: So, does the UN issue all the communications gear? Because the national contingents don't come with their own.

AG: No, of course. The internal communication is on their own radio, but the communication between the contingents and the HQ are provided by UNIFIL. Of course, if we need more radios, we would bring them from Italy. But, UNIFIL provides all the equipment for radio communication.

JK: And what about communications between Naquora and UN headquarters. Has that been efficient?

AG: Yes, yes. It is perfectly efficient. We have fax, etc. But you know that this is the official communication between Naquora and New York, it is working perfectly 24 hours a day.

JK: In to the situation center in New York?

AG: Yes, of course. Now, after twenty years of mission, we have increased our standard of quality and equipment, of course. Now we have an automatic switchboard; before we had to pass through the switchboard. Now we have an automatic one and we can dial directly. Of course, then we have the internal communication of each contingent with the home country and the embassies. This is my Italian phone.

JK: Yes, each one does that. Let me ask you just a few more questions and then we'll go. I wanted to ask you about the financial support, because certain countries have not been paying their dues and that has had an impact on the UN, in general. How has that budget constraint affected the operation here, affected UNIFIL?

AG: As I told you before, it is my personal point of view. I am talking about my contingent, the Italian contingent. The Nepalese, of course, have different standards or

qualities of life and equipment, and so they are different. Each government provides an additional help to each contingent. Of course, for the Italians it is very easy, because we have a letter-of-assist, it is a contract between the UN and the Italian government about how many hours of flight we have to provide to UNIFIL, which kind of missions we have to provide, and so on and so forth. And so it is a contract, a commercial contract. We provide this kind of help, and everything concerning the maintenance, it is under the Italian expense, so we have national equipment. And some are provided by UNIFIL. The United Nations provides a standard, a base. If we need more, we ask our government. So, this is a difference between the Norwegians, they are a rich country, for instance, and they can ask their government to provide better equipment--a cellular phone for each soldier--and maybe the Italians they cannot do the same because it is not as rich a country. But UNIFIL, the United Nations, provides the base, the standard, for the mission. For instance, we had old spare-parts for the helicopters, they are coming from Italy, they are not under UN auspices. If we need meteor-sat, to have meteorological conditions at the moment, it is from Italy, not from.

JK: I was just asking have there been budgetary problems in the last year or so because the money isn't coming in?

AG: Yes, of course there have been. For instance, in this office I had a secretary working here, and she was fired due to a reduction of budget, so a reduction of personnel, and I had to work for six months alone in this office. It was a big, big problem for me, myself. Personally, I was affected.

JK: So, you had no secretary?

AG: No, I had one starting last April or May, and so she was fired due to the reduction of personnel, due to the reduction of budget. Of course it affected the operational level of this office. So, personally I can tell you that the reduction of budget affected my job. In the HQ I am sure it did, but I cannot tell you what happened in the office of some other guy. Of course, the reduction of budget, it is a big problem for a mission. A mission so big, with a lot of necessities and requirements, of course the reduction of budget is a big problem.



JK: Is there any other example here in UNIFIL House? This is a big one, that you couldn't have a secretary.

AG: Yes, I was alone. It is not only the representative matter, but also the routine functions.

JK: Oh, the logistics of typing everything, you had to do yourself.

AG: .. typing a letter. I had to do it by myself. It seems to be stupid, but do you know how long it takes for me to type a letter? I am not a typist, so it takes a long time if I have to type and to send it by myself, it would take a long time. It is the quality of the job that is different, and so it is a waste of time.

JK: ... you are answering the phone all the time.

AG: Ninety percent of the time, I have no filter for the telephone calls, so they all arrive here at my desk. I am interrupted if somebody has a wrong number. But, of course, there are some things more important than this, obviously. But it really affected the quality of the job.

JK: This is really important, because we have talked about this over the last day or so. It is how the Lebanese people here feel about the United Nations and about UNIFIL?

AG: I can tell you something. They love UNIFIL. Not only in the south, where UNIFIL is of course a help, because the population in the area has increased enormously after the arrival of UNIFIL. They left the area for a long time, and after the arrival of the UNIFIL peacekeepers, they are coming back to the country. This is the first and very important thing. So, they love UNIFIL. During the Operation Grapes of Wrath, a lot of people were sheltered inside the UN positions, and they received accommodation, food, and everything from the UN. Considering the humanitarian help, it is not only the contingents that helped them but also UNIFIL that provided humanitarian help. The UNIFIL hospital does a big job. But I can tell you in Beirut, we are considered as VIP. In all the situations--if you go to the airport, they know that we have preferential treatment. They love us, I can tell you. Once General Aoud said that the UNIFIL peacekeeper should be considered like a Lebanese soldier, so all the facilities for the

Lebanese military or soldiers or officers, they are also for the UN members. This is to let us know that wherever we go we are always very well accepted. They love us. I can tell you that I have never found the same situation in other parts of the world, in Somalia, or whatever. Even in my own country, they don't love the military like that. It is very strange, too.

JK: Well, UNIFIL has been here twenty years. The first mandate to create UNIFIL, will be twenty years old tomorrow. It's the celebration. So, over twenty years, for UNIFIL to have this kind of reception, after that length of time...

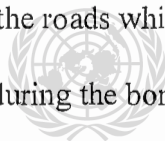
AG: Yes, after one year in the south and one year again in Beirut, I can tell you that I was really surprised at the beginning about how well they treat us. They are so open-minded, so well-accepting, from whatever. Wherever we go and ask, we are welcome. Wherever. If you go to the airport, you can see how they treat us--it is the red-carpet. They give us the red-carpet for UN members. This is very nice.

JK: All right, thank you. Maybe we can pick up again later if we have time.

[Break]

JK: OK--I wanted to ask you more specifically about the relationship that you have maintained with the Lebanese people in the villages in south Lebanon, and the kind of relationship that you have cultivated in the region.

AG: We have inside the HQ, in the liaison branch, we have an officer who is the humanitarian officer who is in charge, the deputy of humanitarian affairs, who is inside the liaison branch of the United Nations Interim Force HQ in Naquora. So, he is in touch with all the humanitarian officers of each battalion. There is a humanitarian officer, or someone who is in charge of humanitarian affairs. So, all the activities are coordinated by the HQ of UNIFIL. But of course there are some independent activities which are led by the governments, each government has its own humanitarian target. For instance, in health and schooling, these are the two main fields. Of course we know that each contingent provides help in restoring the roads which are bombed or the houses of the villagers which have been destroyed during the bombing.



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JK: So now, would they do this on their free time?

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AG: No, no. It is part of their daily activities.

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JK: It is part of their daily activities, that they could go and help to rebuild somebody's house.

AG: For instance, the engineers of the Irish-Norwegian battalions would go and restore the road which connects two villages. Or, as I told you before, there are some dentists, who train dentists, and they opened a dental care center in a small village in their area of operation.

JK: OK--so not only would they do some dental work...

AG: Not personally. They help, and they train. More than give them the help, they help the locals to do something for themselves.

JK: OK--so they help to train the local people to do the dentistry.

AG: ... how to manage a situation, how to manage a hospital. I don't know about the other contingents, because maybe I was not informed. As I told you, there is a humanitarian officer who is in charge of this in the HQ.



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AG: There is a lot of humanitarian activity, from each contingent, from each nation according to their budget, managed by the HQ in Naquora. It's part of our country contribution to the mission, the government. So Norway, Ireland, and Italy--it's our contribution to the mission. It's not only a UN project but also each government according to its possibilities.

JK: The Fijian who works here in the office, was telling me that there are daily patrols that go out and they walk along the roads and they meet with the local people.

AG: Of course, this is the way to. You know, it's the local policeman who knows the people on the ground. And of course, it's according to the mentality of the people. They are warm people, the Fijians. They like to be in close touch with the people. The people, they love the Fijians. When I passed through the Fijian checkpoint, I can see the people shaking hands, saying hello to the locals, because they are very close. Maybe the Norwegians, they are more reserved, I tell you. It's according to the mentality. But all the peacekeepers are very well accepted. I can tell you that there are a lot of marriages between the locals and the soldiers, the peacekeepers.

JK: They become very close!



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AG: Maybe too close!

JK: So, it's been a general policy, basically, and plus also just the interest of each of the national contingents who are here, to get to know the local population, and so forth, so that they know the UN.

AG: Yes--lots of people are marrying locals, and so they are becoming very close to each other, maybe too close.

JK: But how does that help, say, for example, if there's a crisis? A crisis occurs--so, how does it help that you have this interaction?

AG: Sometimes you have official rules, as I told you before, there are some interests that are personal. We have to consider that the men who are maintaining the peace are not the top level UN in HQ in New York. It's the last Nepalese or Irish or Norwegian man, on the ground, close to the people, who has to help. So, this is the man who has to maintain the peace; this is the man we have to consider as the real peacekeeper.

JK: Yes--he's right on the line. His life is on the line.

AG: Yes, he is on the line, the first line. So, if we consider the Nepalese, maybe they are more close than others but not so open-minded as the Fijian. Still, they are very well loved. There is the official activity, then you have the man, the soldier, who helps the old woman to cross the road. This is also humanitarian because it is very close to people. But then you have the official activity that is managed by the humanitarian officer of the battalion, coordinated by the humanitarian officer at HQ. We provide medicine, for instance. But most of all there are different policies. For instance, the Norwegians--I know because I've been here for a long time--they prefer not to give but to help them do it by themselves. This is their policy. They don't want to give assistance, but they want to help train them, first of all, to organize. This is their policy. But maybe that's been changed since I've been there. But this is the help that we provide. It's a big help, I can tell you, according to what we hear on the ground. It's a big, big help. We can give them a lot, and they accept us. They love us, as I told you. This is because we are very close to them, and we don't have any political interest in the area. They know that the Nepalese, they are a long way from Nepal; they have no political interests. There are no personal or

national interests in the area. The only interest is to help them. And they know this, even the people of the community... not the leaders. Most all of the people, the simple people, they understand that the help is something without any interest.

JK: Do they ask you in disbelief as to why would you sacrifice your life and why would you come to do something for their peace?

AG: You know, as I told you, we are human beings. We are not different from the other; we are no different from the ones who are fighting each other. Maybe in our country we have a war, and we fight our war in our country, and here we are peacekeepers. This is very strange. It's the situation on the ground that gives you the shape of a peacekeeper. It's the situation on the ground. It's not the mentality that you come from, because maybe in my country I'm fighting against my neighbor or I am fighting in the roads against the terrorist. And here I become a peacekeeper with my heart open to the others. It's the situation of the moment. But of course it's also the fact that the local population loves us. So, it's not difficult to love them. Of course, if there is a situation of conflict between the local population. I don't know if I told you, I believe that the real peace can be maintained only from the locals. It's not possible for a foreign force, army force or whatever, to really maintain the peace or the control of the territory without the help of the local population. So, I give you that UNIFIL--I personally believe--can help the local government, as it is written in the resolution 425, that we have to help the Lebanese government in restoring the peace and the control of the territory, this is resolution 425. I think that this is sufficient for our mandate.

JK: In your opinion, UNIFIL has not been able to actually carry out some aspects of the mandates 425 and 426. What has been the significant contribution of UNIFIL, and has it contributed to the peace?

AG: We have to ask ourselves what if UNIFIL was not here, could that have happened without the our presence? I am from NATO, but we consider that NATO provided 50 years of peace. We cannot ask what was the need of NATO, but we have to ask ourselves what would have happened without NATO? Maybe the massacre of Cannan would have happened daily, the massacre of Cannan, Tivonin. We don't know what could have happened without UNIFIL. We know that the population is increasing day by day, they feel safe under the blue flag of the United Nations.

JK: By 'population' you mean that people are returning back to the area, not just giving birth.

AG: Returning. No, but even new people coming. Maybe there are also investments in the area from other countries that before they couldn't have invested because the situation was not so clear. This is what I think about UNIFIL. UNIFIL is important because it is on the ground. Without UNIFIL we don't know what could have happened.

JK: One of the things that Timur Goksel [UNIFIL's spokesperson] was saying to me was that when it's time for the villagers to harvest things out in the field, that the UN

troops will go out with them and provide security for them while they are out in the fields harvesting the various different crops, because they would be afraid to go out in the fields and be vulnerable.

AG: Yes. This we did. They feel protected by UNIFIL. They consider UNIFIL as the only help they can have, because you know the Lebanese government cannot enter inside that area. UNIFIL is the only real help, real not only in speech, the only real help they can have. We provide security and safety for them. Even though sometimes we cannot succeed in our mission, because without the political will we cannot succeed in a peacekeeping mission. It's the basics; there should be the willingness of both parties for peace. So, peacekeeping is the word.



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JK: But having the visibility of the UN trucks or the flag--does that provide a certain kind of deterrence?

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AG: Of course, deterrence against attack and the fact that there are people observing day and night what is happening around the area, can avoid retaliation against the population. They know that every time that we have a witness looking at them all the time, what are they doing?

JK: I wanted to just ask you if you could just give a general description of the entire UN system here in Lebanon, because it is very vast, actually.

AG: We have almost 15 different agencies in Beirut, working for the United Nations. We have UNDP, we have ALOBA which is another military mission in Lebanon, it's an observer group in Lebanon, we have also ESQUA, we have the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Information Center, UNICEF, UNIFEM for the women, and the World Food Programme, FAO, and so on. Fifteen different agencies. UNIFIL is the only military mission, and we have...

JK: And then who coordinates the non-military aspects of it?

AG: There is the UNDP coordinator, whose name is Mr. Ross Mount, I know he is in the same building. He is the coordinator of all the UN activities in the area. And of course I attend the meetings. We coordinate with his mission, but we have not been involved, we are separate. But, usually I attend all the meetings, all the coordination meetings. I will attend the next meeting, which may be tomorrow to prepare for the visit of our Secretary-General. So, we coordinate together the activities. But he coordinates the civilian activities.

JK: Yes, that's excellent. You have given me a report that's called the United Nations System in Lebanon. So we will make this available in the library.

AG: So, you have all the details and the general situation in Lebanon. It is very interesting. We have a lot of activity here; the UN is very much involved in the political and the economic and the social aspects of life in Lebanon. Even the program of the

Palestinians, there is UNRWA, which is in charge of the problem of the Palestinian refugees. So, we cover all the aspects of life here in Lebanon.

JK: Now, I noticed when I was in south Lebanon yesterday, that there are a number of Lebanese that are actually employed by UNIFIL, that work as mechanics, as engineers, even as gardeners, things like that. What role do they play? Is it less expensive for UNIFIL to hire local people, rather than to bring all those people in?

AG: It is a very nice question, because as you know due to the reduction of the budget, as I told you before, some people were fired by the United Nations. In a moment of economical crisis in Lebanon after 17 or 18 years of war. Of course, they are much cheaper than the international staff, and they are very well educated, because 90 percent of the Lebanese people are educated in European and American universities. They have a high level of education, but we usually keep on the international staff which cost the United Nations much more than the local ones. When we have to fire people, we fire the local staff, which cost one fifth of the international salary. But they are very well integrated into our system, and they work very well. Now there is an organization, ESQUA{?}, which is hiring a lot of Lebanese employees. It's good.

JK: To a certain extent in conversations down there, they were telling me that they not only provided services for UNIFIL--I mean, they do a good job as mechanics and everything--but the other thing it that it offers employment for these people, which is important because if they weren't employed then they would need to seek some kind of

income which might lead them to seeking some kind of income through insurgency groups.

AG: Of course. If you consider the fifteen nations, UNIFIL employs almost four or five hundred local employees or local staff. Then you have ESQUA, which is hiring almost more than one thousand. So, we have a lot of people who are working for the United Nations system, in general. This is very important in an economy which is coming out of a very disastrous war, a very bad war. If you consider two thousand people--I think that is the average number of local staff employed by the UN mission--two thousand people is a good number. They could have more, I don't know. I'm telling you two thousand, there could be more. I think more than that--three or four thousand.

JK: So, also, for example, speaking from your experience, in the Italian contingent, which is the air support, did you hire or do you hire local mechanics?

AG: Yes. Not for the helicopters, of course, but for our necessities inside. Our cook is an Italian employee, he works for the Italians. Others either for Itair or UNIFIL, that UNIFIL employee assigned to Itair. Some other countries may have their own cook, for instance, not UNIFIL, but as a French contingent employee.

JK: What I was wondering was does UNIFIL provide some kind of training for specialized skills as mechanics or engineers or something like that--training on the job?

AG: No. As I told you, the level of education here is very high. You have a lot of people very well trained because they went out during the war, they studied in Europe or in the United States. So they have the Lebanese university, the American University in Lebanon is one of the most important in the area. You have the French university, the British university. You have the Lebanese university. So the level of education is very high. So, it is not necessary to train the people; maybe they can train the UNIFIL members.

JK: Ok.

AG: No, I am joking. But the level of the quality of the local staff is very high, considering the people with high level of education.

JK: So, in that case UNIFIL might be a fairly unique peacekeeping operation in some aspects.

AG: UNIFIL, even though the names may say something different, UNIFIL is part of the south of Lebanon, part of Lebanon. We are Lebanese.

JK: After twenty years.

AG: Yes, after twenty years, they cannot imagine the south without us; maybe some Lebanese they can believe that the blue flag is the Lebanese flag. I think UNIFIL is a very important mission in this area.

JK: Well, actually then that brings me to kind of a summary of our interview. Looking back over the twenty years, you have been here toward the end of that period, but looking back, how would you summarize the role that UNIFIL has played here in Lebanon?

AG: Of course, twenty years of presence has to mean something for the locals and for Lebanon, in general. After twenty years, UNIFIL is still much more loved by the population. So, it means that it was useful for Lebanon. We are not talking about politicians and the speeches they are giving; we are talking about the men on the road. They love UNIFIL peacekeepers, so this means that we are useful for them. This is the reality check we have, not from the politicians but from the humble people. We know that they need our help so this is why I am sure UNIFIL has been important for the country. So, this is what I would summarize. People love UNIFIL because UNIFIL is important for them.

JK: Even though at times, from the UNIFIL point of view, it has been frustrating?

AG: I think that the mission of all the peacekeepers is frustrating, because if there is war it means that we failed in something. But I think that it's the failure, you can

consider this also the failure of the United Nations because we cannot avoid all wars in the world, but we can help the people at least to maintain a certain level of life, without descending downward. The quality of life is much better now than before the arrival of the UN peacekeepers. And so I think that sometimes when you have war it is very frustrating for the people to avoid the war, but their job should be to continue toward a complete peace process. So, I think that UNIFIL has a role that is as important now as it was twenty years ago, and I can see that now public opinion, even in Italy, is much more interested. We had the visit of the Italian president to Lebanon. It was the first visit of the Italian president in the area. Last year there was the French and the Irish, so I think this is the most important.



JK: The Irish Defense Minister is here now. Kofi Annan comes Friday.

AG: Yes.

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JK: Thank you.

Yale-UN Oral History Project

Aldo Guaccio

Jean Krasno, Interviewer

March 18, 1998

Beirut, Lebanon

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