Senior Liaison Officer LCol JT Galuga was MONUSCO’s representative to the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC), the national Congolese army, from June to December, 2014. He is pictured with two FARDC officers in the town of Mavivi in North Kivu, DRC in July, 2014. Photo courtesy of LCol JT Galuga

Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo — Canadian Army soldiers’ language abilities and cultural sensitivity make them a natural fit for the United Nations’ (UN’s) largest current peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), according to LCol Jason Galuga (Engineers - RCE), Senior Liaison Officer to the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC), the army of the DRC government.

Ottawa native LCol Galuga just finished a deployment from June to December, 2014 with Operation CROCODILE, Canada’s military contribution to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, better known as MONUSCO (Mission de l’Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo). Before he left, LCol Galuga spoke about his experiences in the DRC.

“My role, and all the tasks which that includes, is to facilitate information flow between the MONUSCO international UN forces and the Congolese army. That includes facilitating joint planning, answering information requests, setting up meetings and being MONUSCO’s representative to the FARDC,” said LCol Galuga, whose home unit is Canadian Army Headquarters, Directorate of Land Requirements.

MONUSCO’s mandate is to monitor implementation of the arms embargo imposed by the UN in November of 2009 and to seize and collect materials that violate the ban. The mandate also includes providing technical and logistical support to national and local elections if asked by DRC authorities.
The Canadian group is known as Task Force DRC. According to LCol Galuga, the experience Canadians have gained over the years from peacekeeping operations in places like Bosnia and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan translates to the type of training that helps bridge cultural divides.

“Canadians are in short supply here. Having military officers with the level of training that we do and the almost native ability to speak both English and French is a real asset here in the Congo. Specifically, because the working language of MONUSCO is English and the working language of the country is French, we’re a natural fit.”

A veteran of Bosnia, as well as Afghanistan where he served as officer commanding 42 Engineer Squadron with the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group, LCol Galuga still faced a certain amount of culture shock in the DRC. “I think one of the hardships of the mission is just to be able to get by on limited food stocks or selections. It’s not incredibly hot here all the time, but it certainly is from a Canadian perspective. There’s crime and the potential for violence is always there, so that’s always a challenge,” said the Lieutenant-Colonel.

Looking back at his time in the DRC, LCol Galuga said, “Especially in concert with the FARDC, we have certainly dislocated a few armed groups that exist here in the country and in the province. In doing so – and by keeping a pressure on those armed groups – this helps protect the civilians of the villages and regions within the province.”

Despite the difficulties, the mission was a good fit for LCol Galuga. A sense of adventure led him to sign up for the military as a reservist during university while studying engineering. He transferred to the regular force in 1998 and has served with 2 Combat Engineer Regiment and 4 Engineer Support Regiment.

The Lieutenant-Colonel, who is married with two young daughters, was quick to point out the sacrifices his wife makes as a single parent during the time he is deployed. “With four tours and all the training that is done over the course, I’ve probably been away from home for almost three years,” he noted.

This story is the first of two articles about Canadian Army officers who have been deployed on Operation CROCODILE, Canada’s military contribution to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, also known as MONUSCO.

By Gerry Weaver, Army Public Affairs