Helping the Pilgrims’ Way

The Blue Beret
July 2005

Everyone Won in Pyla
London Tribute

UNFICYP observed two minutes silence at midday on 14 July in tribute to the victims of the London bombings, as did the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities of the island. The morning after the atrocity, Force Commander Maj. Gen. Figoli conveyed the mission’s condolences and sympathy to UNFICYP’s British Contingent.

On the day of the actual bombings, 7 July, the Secretary-General, who was attending the G-8 meetings in Glencoe, Scotland, spoke of his devastation at the news.

“These vicious acts have cut us all to the core, for they are an attack on humanity itself. My thoughts and prayers are with all those who have lost loved ones, all those who were hurt, all those who were traumatized by this tragedy. I grieve with all Londoners at the reminders that have been inflicted on this wonderful city – this city that is home to people from so many countries and cultures – and express my solidarity with the Government and people of the United Kingdom in this hour of trial.”

CANADA Day

Since 1964, 28 Canadians who came to Cyprus “In the Service of Peace” have died on assignment with the mission.

A Remembrance Service ...

... and Remembering Canada

Since 1 July 1867, when Canada became a dominion, Canadians have held celebrations to mark the birth of their country. This year, a celebration took place under the auspices of the Canadian Contingent (CANCOR) and assisted by those few “Canucks” who are part of the UN family here in Cyprus.

Capt. Dan Zegarac opened the festivities with a short speech welcoming friends and colleagues to the International Golf Club Nicosia. Canadian libations were served up, including a lethally innocuous concoction called “Moose Milk”, while Golf Club Nicosia. Canadian libations were served up, including a lethally innocuous concoction called “Moose Milk”, while...
USG Prendergast briefs Security Council on Cyprus Situation

On 22 June, USG Prendergast briefed the Security Council about his “pulse-taking” visit to Cyprus, Greece and Turkey between 30 May and 7 June, concluding that there was need to be wide while confidence between the parties did not seem high.

The USG said all parties in Cyprus wanted reactivation of the UN’s good offices and accepted that the UN plan should serve as the basis for resumed negotiations. There were concerns about political figures on both sides in an effort to promote mutual understanding; and there had been useful contacts at other levels, too. Of interest also, was an independent biocumulational survey of grass-roots attitudes on potential changes, that had formed an opinion on both sides encouraging as it might be possible to make certain changes. There was majority support for the UN plan in both communities.

Despite those important positives, he said, on the negatives side, the gap between the stated positions of the parties on substance appeared to be wide, while confidence between them did not seem high. Those two factors, especially in combination, made efforts to establish common ground even more difficult. The USG believed that the UN’s role in that context, the UN must be full respect for the decision of the voters on 24 April 2004 referendum, and that this position should guide the Organisation’s approach.

The USG noted that more than four in five Turkish Cypriot voters had rejected the finalised UN plan. While the UN could not countenance a solution other than the kind envisaged in Council resolutions, the concerns of both sides were important to bear in mind. The USG had said in Ankara, that that way must most certainly have to be addressed in any future process based on the UN plan. The Greek Cypriot electorate must have confidence that their concerns would be borne in mind in a renewed process. In that context, a prioritized and exhaustive list of proposals for negotiation would be an important advance, because it was very hard to engage the parties and remain on track if they were expressed without modulation or indication of their relative importance.

At the same time, USG Prendergast stressed, it would not help the search for a solution if Greek and Turkish Cypriot concerns were met in an isolated majority support for the UN plan on the Turkish Cypriot side. The Turkish Cypriot electorate must have confidence that their concerns would be borne in mind in a renewed process.

USG Prendergast said he was wholeheartedly encouraged to produce a list of top ten wishes if they were expressed without moderation or indication of their relative importance. At the same time, USG Prendergast stressed, it would not help the search for a solution if Greek and Turkish Cypriot concerns were met in an isolated majority support for the UN plan on the Turkish Cypriot side. The Turkish Cypriot electorate must have confidence that their concerns would be borne in mind in a renewed process. Meanwhile, confidence on the Turkish Cypriot side had been diminished by the fact that, although a clear majority of Turkish Cypriot voters supported a compromise UN plan finalised by an agreed procedure, they had seen little acknowledgement of their efforts to achieve a solution and little or no improvement in their situation since the referendum.

While it was natural for each party to seek to protect its own interests, it was important to encourage both sides to focus on their overriding common interest: the need to live free. In that context, the UN plan could command majority support not only in their own community, but also in the other. Outsiders must not help, but it would be helpful if there had been a broadened opinion on both sides encouraging as it might be possible to make certain changes. There was majority support for the UN plan in both communities.

On substantive issues, Mr. Papadopououlos had said that the plan finalised by the SG last year gave the Turkish Cypriot side and Turkey nothing that they wanted, more than they needed and more than was fair,” he said, in his view, that was why a majority of Greek Cypriots had rejected the plan, while a majority of Turkish Cypriots had accepted it. He believed that future negotiations could only be successful if the Turkish Cypriot side understood that and that they were prepared to meet outstanding Greek Cypriot concerns during the course of negotiations.

He said that the substantive points that the Greek Cypriot side would like to pursue were those that they had dealt with in the plan, including governance, security, citizenship, residency, property, territory, economic and financial issues, transition periods and guarantees of implementation.

On the Greek Cypriot side, he said, Mr. Talat had said that from the outset he had wanted a solution as based on the UN plan and that he would like to see intensive negotiations under the SG’s auspices to achieve such a settlement within a reasonably short time. He had stressed the desire of his people for an urgent settlement. He had favoured a process with UN arbitration and clear time limits for negotiation, since he was concerned that the negotiations might be frustrated.

He said that Mr. Talat had stressed that Turkish Cypriots were disappointed at the Security Council’s failure to respond to the SG’s good offices report of 28 May 2004, particularly insufficient acknowledgement by the SG of the importance of the deadline for submission of the SG’s mission of good offices in the period ahead. He would also take account of all the comments that could also be observing developments on the ground, particularly any evolution in the position of the parties if in line with the SG’s report. He had encouraged the parties and explore whether the necessary common ground existed, or could be built, to enable the resumption of full-scale negotiations.

USG Prendergast said that the Secretary-General’s aim in asking him to travel to the region had been to test whether or not the SG could speak their views on what, if anything, the UN should be doing in the current context. In that context, the SG had said that there had accepted it. He believed that future negotiations could only be successful if the Turkish Cypriot side understood that, and that they were prepared to meet outstanding Greek Cypriot concerns during the course of negotiations.

He had told Mr. Talat of the SG’s surprise at the Security Council’s lack of response to his report, but reminded him that the SG believed that the majority of the Greek Cypriots who had voted had rejected the finalised UN plan, which was a problem not just for the Greek Cypriots, but for all in Cyprus.

In Athens, the Greek Government had expressed a wish to see a resumption of the SG’s mission of good offices, he said. In that context, Greek representatives had described the UN plan as the first comprehensive solution from which work ever put forward, and it had come close to delivering a settlement. However, Greece believed that on certain aspects the plan reflected the fears of the past more than it did the possibilities for a solution that the SG was seeking.

He said that in Ankara, the Turkish Government had expressed a wish to see a settlement based on the UN plan, and that Turkey would welcome an intensive process under the SG’s auspices. For that to happen, the Turkish Cypriot side had to lead, not just follow, their supporters, and a new effort that had to be brought about in a way that conveyed respect, understanding for one in the settlement would only be possible if the parties acted together. The SG believed that the gap on substance appeared to be finite, manageable, prioritized proposals.

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Helping the Pilgrims’ Way ....
At Ayia Marina ...

One of life’s most rewarding moments is when we find ourselves in a position to help others, especially when it is something impossible to do alone. So it was with UNFICYP’s Sector 4 soldiers on Sunday 17 July, when they provided transport, security and medical assistance for Greek Cypriots attending the mass in the small chapel of Ayia Marina located in the buffer zone. Activities began at 6.00 a.m. Sector 4 soldiers had, however, been up since the crack of dawn, getting ready for their day of goodwill. Approximately 30 members of the Slovak Contingent, plus members of UNCIVPOL, were present at the checkpoint, along with their vehicles, when the first pilgrims arrived. Most were from the village of Dherinia but some came from nearby villages. This event takes place every year with an average of 800 attending the service. This year, UNFICYP soldiers escorted 976 pilgrims, some in UN vehicles and some traveling in their own vehicles. In all, 87 civilian cars were escorted to and from the chapel.

It was a hot Sunday, yet the soldiers were very happy to be of help and to meet with the people. Special mention should be made of Pte. Marian Sekerka, who alone transferred more than 80 pilgrims throughout an exhausting but exhilarating day. Pte. Jozef Piliar so impressed one of the old ladies, that she gave him a white flower, a gentle gesture which he found very moving. The best present for the soldiers’ hard work were the smiles and words of gratitude they received during the course of the day.

By 12.45 p.m., the celebrations, which had been prepared in collaboration with the local municipality, were over. The Mayor of Dherinia gave a short speech, thanking the UN soldiers for all they had done. The officers of Sector 4 were then invited to lunch with the Mayor and representatives of the local municipality.

For the second time since 1974, Greek Cypriots attended a liturgical service at St. Barnabas Church in the village of Engomi, Famagusta area, on 11 June, the feast day of the saint. Under tight security, the service started at about 7.50 a.m. and was attended by just over 600 clergy and civilians from the south. Bishop Vasilios, who officiated, said he was very moved to be back in the place where he started out as a young deacon over 30 years ago.

Some 200 cars, buses and trucks arrived for the ceremony. Authorities in the north, in close cooperation with the Civil Affairs team of Sector 4 and UNCIVPOL, worked together to organise and supervise the whole event. Checks made before entry to the church were worked together to organise and supervise the whole event. Checks made before entry to the church were carried out smoothly and efficiently, enabling the service to proceed without a hitch.

While the ceremony had special meaning for the worshippers, it was no less significant for the members of UNFICYP who attended. Once the service ended, candles were lit and icons kissed in traditional fashion.
The southernmost end of the old Nicosia International Airport runway lies a hangar once used for housing aircraft of the island’s only commercial airline company, Cyprus Airways. It is now home to a Bell 212 and a Hughes 500 D, the two helicopters manned by UN Flight, the unit responsible for providing helicopter air support to UNFICYP 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

When the Argentinian Air Force first took over from the British 16 Flight Army Air Corps in September 1994, it was equipped with two Hughes 500 D helicopters. However in July 1998, one of these was exchanged for a Bell 212 medium transport helicopter, which substantially enhanced the capabilities of the unit. Both helicopters are equipped with a hook for external underslung load transportation and a medevac/casevac configuration. Infrared equipment is also available for day or night surveillance. One helicopter and crew is maintained on 30 minutes standby notice to move outside duty hours at all times in support of operations in the buffer zone and for casevacs.

In the hangar vicinity, associated buildings provide accommodation for the operations room, flight briefing area, administrative offices and technical support facilities. All UN Flight personnel are volunteers. The operational flying crew is made up of eight pilots, headed by the Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. Osvaldo Albanesi, who is on his second tour with UNFICYP. On his first assignment in 2002-03, he held the post of Air Safety Officer.

The 2/Lt. Capt. Adriano Ferrari, is on his fifth tour with UNFICYP. Asked why he returns so often, Adriano says: “There is a shortage of pilots in Argentina, so it is not difficult to get to Cyprus – if you don’t mind being away from home for months at a time. I am lucky – my wife is with me, and my first child will be born soon. Some are not so fortunate and leave wives and children behind. That is really difficult, but flying is a vocation for us – a way of life. So we make the sacrifice willingly, and our families support us.”

Adriano adds: “We pilots do not only take on the responsibility of flying the helicopter. We all take on additional duties, for instance Personnel, Logistics, Operations, Transport, Training and Communications. Each of us has to deal with administrative/paperwork, so we have very little free time. I take care of the flying schedule, arrangements for demining activities, liaison with the north and south civil aviation authorities on flying restrictions near minefields, etc. I also run regular safety briefings.”

His office is at one end of UN Flight’s operations centre. At the other end is the general pilots’ room where all the paperwork is done.

The room is named “Alejandro Sucarrat” after a pilot who served with Adriano on his first tour with UNFICYP in 1995 and who died of multiple sclerosis in 2002.

1/Lt. Maximiliano Videla has just returned for his second tour with UNFICYP. He recently served a six-month term in MINURSAH, Haiti. Also a pilot, Maximiliano has enjoyed serving in both missions, although, as he says, “There is an enormous difference between Haiti and Cyprus. In UNFICYP, our primary task is to patrol the buffer zone. In MINURSAH, we patrol the whole country. Here we are peacekeepers – in Haiti we were peacemakers, which meant we carried arms, both personally and on our helicopters. We saw a lot of poverty in Haiti – mothers and their children begging or searching for food in rubbish piles. On one occasion, we helped clear the streets when more than 4,000 people were killed by floods. Such scenes don’t occur in Cyprus.”

Also on his second tour is WO II Jorge Martinez, a specialist technician who will be serving for one year with UNFICYP. Jorge also recently completed a tour in MINURSAH. He explains that technicians not only maintain the helicopters on a daily basis, but also carry out regular maintenance inspections, some minor and some more detailed. For instance, the Hughes 500 D undergoes a main inspection after every 300 hours’ flying time – the Bell 212’s inspection is after 1,000 flying hours. During these inspections, the helicopter is taken to pieces and every part undergoes thorough scrutiny to check it is up to standard. And any free time the technicians may have is spent assisting the pilots with paperwork.

The air crews are augmented by two loadmasters and one commando. The loadmasters check the weight on helicopters including equipment, passengers, fire-fighting equipment, medical equipment, etc. They are also flight followers, monitoring take off and landing, checking wind velocity, etc. The commando is trained in air rescue operations, and is also a specialist in ground combat, parachuting and sharp shooting.

The ground support crew consists of a Maintenance Chief Engineer who supervises 13 technicians and three fuel specialists. The fuel specialists check the safety of the fuel truck, the fuel (e.g. for condensation), fire fighting equipment, etc.

Walking into the Ops Room, the first impression a visitor will get is one of calm and tranquility. Run completely by Argentinians, any one of the UN Flight members would typically welcome all visitors in a relaxed and friendly fashion. South Americans are known for their geniality and hospitality. However, make no mistake – these men are highly skilled and extremely professional. At the time of going to print, the unit has logged 12,100 successful flying hours, 33,232 transported passengers and 22,480 kg carried cargo. That’s no mean feat!
Sergeant Major Sector 2 Regimental

The United Nations!

After a period of intensive training starting in late 2003, Gnr. Grimett joined the Regiment in Iraq in August 2004 during a particularly dangerous period of the six-month tour. On return from Iraq, Gnr. Grimett deployed on exercise in England, serving on the AS90 hard top road linking the two checkpoints. After a period of leave upon finishing his UN duties in 2005, he became aware of the rules allowing commonwealth soldiers to serve in the British Army – and then peacekeeping in Cyprus as a member of the United Nations!

Working in a variety of casual jobs throughout 2002 and 2003, he became aware of the rules allowing commonwealth soldiers to serve in the British Army. He saw a friend join, and then decided to go to The Strand Recruiting Office and take the plunge himself. Recruit Grimett was trained by a 1 RHA officer and so elected to serve in 1 RHA.

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Visitors to UNFICYP

Two Foreign Ministers

The Foreign Ministers of the Slovak Republic and Hungary arrived two weeks apart – Mr. Eduard Kukan in late June, and Mr. Ferenc Somogyi in early July. Chief of Mission Zbigniew Wloсовicz received the Slovak, while Force Commander Maj. Gen. Hebert Figoli welcomed the Hungarian Foreign Minister.

Among visiting ambassadors were those of Austria, Dr. Eva Hager, on 27 June, Germany, Dr. Rolf Kaiser on 18 July, and newly arrived British High Commissioner Peter Millett on 14 July. All were received with customary honour guard. Ambassador Hager and High Commissioner Millett subsequently toured the Green Line.

Irish Delegation

The European Union figured again when an Irish parliamentary delegation dealing with EU affairs, accompanied by Irish Ambassador to Cyprus John Swift, came to mission Headquarters to meet with senior staff on 6 July as part of a fact-finding visit to Cyprus.

Peacekeeping Colleagues

Colleagues from peace-keeping missions around the world gathered in Nicosia for a special senior management training course in late June. Nine missions were represented in all, including Kosovo (UNMIK), Tajikistan (UNTOP), Georgia (UNOMIG), Congo (MONUC), Liberia (UNMIL), Côte d’Ivoire (ONUCI), plus Middle East (UNTSO), and, of course, Cyprus (UNFICYP).

Several members from the training group took advantage of an invitation by UNFICYP to take a short break to visit the UNPA. They can be seen in the photo (below) being briefed at the old Nicosia International Airport by PIO Capt. Štefan Žemanović.

57 Pick-up(s)

You may have noticed something different about the UN Vehicle Fleet recently. Well, you’re right! On 1 July, UNFICYP swapped its 57 old pick-ups for 57 brand new Chevrolets, fully equipped (carlog, Motorolla, UN stickers and more) and ready to take on the patrol track.

What you might not know is what this rotation actually involved.

In the week leading up to change-over day, Tony, our auto-electrician, assisted by Nieis, Lennart, Gary and Jerry, started removing carlog units from the old pick-ups and re-installing them into the new vehicles (which had started to arrive on the unit!) at a rate of about three per person per day.

It was estimated it would take about half an hour to complete each vehicle replacement. This procedure involved inspections, documentation, carlog calibration and changeover of number plates.

We also had to consider the fact that the 57 old pick-ups had to be de-rigged and returned to the contractor by midday on 1 July in their original state.

The other problems we faced were first, the fact that UN operations cannot be interrupted, second, the expected volume of traffic (over 100 vehicles) and, of course, the difficulty of working long hours in the sun.

This was a task that needed preparation and planning! The solution?

The night shift! Comprising Jerry on the carlog, Cyril playing the trip tickets, Shane and Gary on vehicle inspections and Lennart on number plates and inspections, together with their manager Dave “Master Driver” Goodchild, the gig started at 9 pm. The group played on through the night until 10 am the next day.

The boys all looked a little punch-drunk by morning, but thanks to their hard work, the rotation went very smoothly without a hitch. You didn’t notice?

Then it must have been a successful operation! Congratulations Transport!

Christine Iacovou

PIO House-Warming – Better Late than Never

Several months after moving back in, the Public Information Office unveiled its new look offices and resplendent elegance by hosting a come-one-come-all breakfast series for colleagues and staff at mission headquarters. Those unable to attend the big event because of work commitments were invited to attend a smaller gathering the following day.

PIO staff were happy to show off their new open plan, glass panelled offices and display the best of recent Force photography on their walls. Spokesperson

Brian Kelly paid tribute to Paul Kilmartin’s Engineering Unit, especially Draughting Assistant Andreas Alexandrou; to the ITU and Communications team led by Roy Joblin, and to the stalwart crew from BMU. Their combined skills fully realized what had been blueprint theory at the beginning of the year. Words of thanks were also extended to CAO Frank Clancy for the “greenery”, and to FC Figoli for the uniform support throughout the transition from old to new.

Catering was by PIO information and translation staff members, with a little welcome backup from the International Caterers. Ersin Oztuyan added to the occasion with a display of traditional Turkish dance.

Congratulations Transport!
Swimming

Hockeyball

Summer Sport Round-up

“Foottennis”

When the Going Gets Tough, the Tough Get Going

Civilians facilitated the first ever exhibition football match between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot teams of the mixed village of Pyla on Sunday, 17 July. This was the first time the two sides had played since the teams separated along ethnic lines in 1963. The event went off very well with some 100 in attendance. Refreshments followed. The Greek Cypriot side won with a 2-1 score and trophies were presented to both teams by the Force Commander and the Australian High Commissioner, Mr. Garth Hunt. The UN provided the referees whose impartial use of whistle and flag has won them a follow-up assignment when the next match is held in the Turkish Cypriot stadium in the autumn some time. Civil Affairs also continues efforts to push for a mixed children’s team in the village.

As Australian High Commissioner Garth Hunt looks on, the Force Commander congratulates the team captains.

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Everyone Won on Playing Fields of Pyla

This year’s UNFICYP Cross Country and Family Run was organised by Sector 1 on 24 June. On a clear sunny morning, members of Sectors 1 and 2, the MFR, UN Flt and the HQ arrived for the event, which consisted of a family run of 5 km and a cross-country run of 15 km, all within the boundaries of the buffer zone. There were 21 entrants for cross-country, while 42 participated in the family run.

The path chosen for the run was for the most part Sector 1 patrol tracks, a difficult terrain which included climbs and long, sun-dried stretches, ending at Camp San Martin. To quench the runners’ thirst, water stations were set up en route.

Gnr. Steven Braith (MFR) was the fastest runner for the 5 km run, with a total time of 18 minutes. SSgt. Oscar Sosa (Sector 1) was the first to cross the finish line for the cross-country with a total time of 1 hour, 3 minutes, 51 seconds. The only lady to participate was LCpl Joanne Burgess (MFR). In both events, medals were awarded to the first three places of each age category. Sector 1’s ultimate purpose was to bring together UNFICYP personnel so they could get to know each other and promote comradery. Also, of course, there the challenge of a good run on a demanding course.

The Blue Beret 2005