The Blue Beret
December 2001

The Two Leaders Meet
Dear colleagues and friends,

At this time of year, we traditionally pause to reflect on the twelve months that have passed, and on the twelve that are to come. As we approach 2002, there is much that fills me with hope.

It is your work in UNFICYP that particularly leaves me spirited and optimistic about the future. That you are far away from your families and the comfort of home is a constant reminder for all of you of the need to care and counselling to those in need, and conduct religious services.

For Sector 2 Padre James Atchison, who has also served in Northern Ireland, his role here in Cyprus is much as it would be at home. “Ministry involves helping people and ministering to them wherever they are, and human nature changes little regardless of location,” he explains.

In Sector 1, Padre Eduardo Castellanos (whose experience includes Kuwait) agrees. The only difference in being a Padre overseas, he says, is that the distance from loved ones means that the soldiers may need more spiritual support. “Here I can see the man as real as he is, without shields or masks,” he comments. “That helps a lot in my tasks.”

For Sector 4’s Padre, the Rev. Father Miloslav Krehcňáv, has also seen how people can be moved to spiritual needs because they’re away from their loved ones, and facing new cultural experiences. He finds that he can help by explaining differences between religions and historical backgrounds.

Homesickness and relationships difficulties are common problems that the padres encounter amongst the soldiers -- sometimes, a sympathetic ear all is needed to help those serving peace to deal with times of loneliness.

For the Padres, who felt God’s calling in their decisions to join military and religious life, the opportunity to help the soldiers is key to their time in Cyprus. And they also appreciate the chance to experience the different cultures here on the island, and indeed within the UNFICYP family.

We wish them all a very Happy Christmas, and thank them for their support to UNFICYP soldiers throughout the year.

En esta fiesta de la natalidad de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo, Señor de todo lo creado, momento trascendente en la historia de la salvación, quiero hacerles llegar este mensaje de paz y alegría espiritual. Algunos se preguntarán como es posible estar alegres separados y tan lejos de nuestros seres queridos. Pero no debemos olvidar que esa separación es un momento trascendental en nuestra espiritual, mente y corazón, están unidos internamente a nuestras familias.

From the left: Rev. Father Krehcňáv (Sector 4), Padre Atchison (Sector 2) and Padre Castellanos (Sector 1)
This time of year is rich in festivals and holy days for cultures around the world. Here, we recognize some of the celebrations, and their origins.

**Christmas**
Coming from the words “Christ’s Mass” (Cristes Maesse), Christmas is the day that many Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus: 25 December. It was first celebrated in Rome in 336 A.D., and was designed to coincide with -- and replace -- the popular pagan celebration of Saturnalia, which recognizes the winter solstice. The tradition of gift-giving begins with the Wise Men, who brought the infant Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, and is reinforced by Saint Nicholas, who gave gifts to the poor and to children.

**The Feast of Saint Nicholas**
Saint Nicholas was a fourth-century saint who lived in Myra, in what is now Turkey. He was known for his humility and his generosity, and is often associated with helping children. His Feast Day is celebrated on 6 December, when, in Holland, children receive presents from “Sinterklaas”.

**Epiphany**
Also known as the Twelfth Day and The Adoration of the Magi, Epiphany is 6 January: the day that the Wise Men arrived in Bethlehem and saw Jesus, and also the date that John the Baptist later baptized Jesus. The Eastern Orthodox Church recognizes 6 January as the celebration of Jesus’ nativity. Other traditions include that of Austria’s Star Singers: between New Year’s Day and Epiphany, children dress as the Wise Men and carol from door to door, collecting sweets or money for charity.

**Hanukkah (or Chanukká)**
This Jewish festival celebrates faith, and begins on the 25th of the Jewish month of Kislev, which usually falls in December. The traditional story explains that when a small army of Jews was able to regain their Temple in Jerusalem after seven years of fighting in the 2nd century B.C., they found only enough lamp oil to last for one night…yet the oil miraculously lasted for eight nights, allowing fresh oil to be found. Hanukkah thus lasts for eight days, with a new candle being lit each night on the menorah, which holds eight candles plus a “helper” candle.

**Ramadan**
The ninth month of the Muslim calendar, Ramadan is when the Holy Quran is believed to have been sent down from heaven. A time of faith, contemplation and worship, it is also a time of daylight fasting, of prayer, and of visiting friends and family. The word Ramadan recalls the burning sensation in the stomach as a result of thirst, and it is also thought that Ramadan scorches out the sins with good deeds, as the sun burns the ground. When Ramadan ends, a three-day holiday called Eidul-Fitr, the fast breaking feast, features gifts, family gatherings, and prayer. The Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar of 252-3 days per year, and the month of Ramadan shifts every year by approximately 13 days.

**Kwanzaa**
First celebrated 26 December 1966, Kwanzaa began as an African-American cultural holiday, and is now celebrated by many of African descent around the world. It lasts from 26 December to 1 January, with each day recognizing one of seven key principles, including remembrance and rejuvenation. Founded by Dr. Maulana Ron Karenga, Kwanzaa comes from the Swahili phrase that means “first fruits”, and is linked to the first harvest celebrations that take place in many places in Africa: it is a time of unity, contemplation and joy.

**Pongal/Shankaranti**
The popular Hindu harvest festival, known as Pongal in India’s south and Shankaranti in the north, falls in the middle of January. The day marks the beginning of the sun’s northern course in the heavens, resulting in longer days and the sunshine symbolising life’s brighter aspects. Festivities feature thanksgiving to the Gods and sharing a sense of happiness and well-being with family and friends. Thus, most southern households cook a sweet rice preparation in milk (the boiled milk should overflow, signifying good fortune and prosperity) to be shared with friends and relatives. Similarly, sweetmeats are exchanged in the north. Farmers also decorate their cattle and offer thanks to them for their labour.
T oday, in Afghanistan, a girl will be born. Her mother will hold her and feed her, comfort her and care for her; and any day now, any day really, the poor of the world will see these most basic acts of human nature, humanity known, no divisions. But to be born a girl in today’s Afghanistan is to be born in a life century away from the possibility that one small part of humanity has achieved. It is to live under conditions that many of us in this hall would consider unendurable. What was it that the Nobel Committee for this high honour. My own path to service at the United Nations was made possible by the inhuman and cruel confrontation of my family, friends and all from all continents – some of whom have passed away – who have meant so much to me. To them, I offer my most profound gratitude.

In a world filled with weapons of war and all too often weapons of peace, it is not possible to build an age of peace and an age of hope. Peace in our time is not a battle and a test of strength, or privilege and authority, but a call of conscience and a demand for justice. It is not a military solution, but a demand for human solutions. It is not the absence of war, but the presence of justice. It is not the absence of threats, but the presence of human solutions. It is not the absence of danger, but the presence of hope and action.

In every great faith and tradition one can find the values of truth, love and dignity. We must live by them.

We have entered the third millennium through a gate of fire. If I have the courage and the wisdom to press the button, and if the button is set in the right place, the world will not be saved. It will not be destroyed. It will be transformed. It will be transformed from a world of violence into a world of peace, from a world of fear into a world of hope, from a world of division into a world of unity, from a world of hatred into a world of love, from a world of violence into a world of nonviolence.

We must start from the understanding that peace belongs to all, not just to a privileged few. The United Nations was created in 1945, and it is a testament to the belief that peace and security for all will be achieved by all of us – North and South, rich and poor, men and women of all ages and religions.

Today’s real borders are not between nations, but between powerful and powerless, free and fettered, privileged and humiliated. Today, no walls can separate humanitarian or human rights crises in one part of the world from national security crises in another.

Science and technology is so small and interdependent that a butterfly flapping its wings in the Amazon rainforest can generate a violent storm on the other side of the earth. This principle is known as the “Butterfly Effect.” Today, we realize, perhaps more than ever, that the world of human activity also has its own “Butterfly Effect.”

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From the Outside Looking On...

Making History in the UNPA

December 4 began dry and fresh. In the mid-distance the rain clouds were hanging heavy on the mountains. Everyone was geared up and ready for action. The leaders were coming. H.E. Mr. Rauf Denktash from the north. H.E. Mr. Glafcos Clerides from the south. And with them – well, actually ahead of them – a posse of 200 media people.

Signs arrowing the “Meeting” pointed the way to the Chief of Mission’s residence from the Fosfort and Morphou Gate UNPA entry points. Since they were standard, UNPA-issue signs, they actually signified “UN Meeting”.

The Chief of Mission’s house looked bright and trim. Outside the front entry wall stood a platform riser covered in green baize, strong enough to support a team of heavyweight TV cameramen and photographers.

Inside on the driveway (and stretching across the approach road outside), a fence of sparkling white, crowd control barricades stood ready to separate the media from the message. UNCTV, MFR, FMPU and MIPOs were in position.

First TV crews and satellite vans were manoeuvering into place by 6.30 am. Soon the designated areas adjacent to the house were chock-a-block with Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot TV channels ready to broadcast the day’s events live and wide. Among them were a number of off-island channels, including CNN Turkey.

The “scribblers” turned up last, the pen, paradoxically, being later than the lens. Then, in one fell swoop of swiveling cameras, the show began.

The Secretary-General’s Special Adviser, Mr. Alvaro de Soto, arrived to a chorus of questions about his role. He responded silently but eloquently by holding up a tiny notebook in one hand and a pencil in the other. Cameras clicked and flashes popped as he disappeared through the front door with Chief of Mission Mr. Zbigniew Wlosowicz. Promptly at 10.00 a.m., Mr. Clerides drove up to be greeted by Mr. Wlosowicz. He too paused for the benefit of the cameras, and then entered the house.

Four minutes later, Mr. Denktash arrived. Before going inside, he responded to a reporter’s shouted question by saying: “I love you”.

Quickly, the two leaders emerged once more to stand alongside one another and provide the obligatory “photo-op” handshake before re-entering the snug comfort of the residence quarters to get down to the real business of the day.

Outside, the media were less fortunate. Commentators and anchormen were just getting into their stride, prognosticating and predicting, when the skies opened. The ensuing scramble for raincoats and umbrellas suggests that they were right to go into political commentary and not weather forecasting!

Fortunately, the UNFICYP contingency planners had consulted the meteorologists and a tent had been erected across from the CM’s house. Originally intended to serve coffee, it quickly became the shelter of choice where media from both sides mingles (to the degree one can when pressed together shoulder-to-shoulder).

An hour passed. Came the word. Mr. de Soto was about to make a statement.

Back into the elements raced a stout but determined media, as they took up their positions in front of the entry again.

The Special Adviser, flanked by the two leaders, stood on the top steps. In the doorway, the Chief of Mission, officials and members of the security details.

Mr. de Soto attempted to read the statement above the clamour of reporters, shouting: “We can’t hear… louder please…”

Moving nearer to be more clearly heard, Mr. de Soto almost lost his footing on the slippery steps. He recovered and under the yellow folds of the umbrella of the Spokesperson began to read “And the good news is…” (see text box, left).

Mr. Denktash and Mr. Clerides left separately afterwards, only to come together the following evening for a dinner at Mr. Denktash’s house honouring Mr. de Soto.

And the good news is...

At the meeting held on 4 December 2001 between H.E. Mr. Glafcos Clerides, the Greek Cypriot leader, and H.E. Mr. Rauf Denktash, the Turkish Cypriot leader, at the residence of the UN Chief of Mission and in the presence of Mr. Alvaro de Soto, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus, the two leaders agreed to the following:

- That the Secretary-General, in the exercise of his mission of good offices, would invite the two leaders to direct talks;
- That these talks will be held in Cyprus starting in mid-January 2002 on UN premises;
- That there will be no preconditions;
- That all issues will be on the table;
- That they will continue to negotiate in good faith until a comprehensive settlement is achieved;
- That nothing will be agreed until everything is agreed.

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He noted that cooperation with the opposing forces is generally very good, and that they understand that UNFICYP’s credibility as an impartial force depends on the consistent way in which the rules are applied to both sides.

As for the island itself, he said that he and his family had found all of Cyprus to be a very beautiful place. They particularly enjoyed Polis, with its picturesque scenery and quiet, peaceful atmosphere, and "Turtle Beach" in the north, which they often visited for its beauty and tranquility.

His tour has also been special in that he and his wife Anu have both their daughter Pooja, 24, and son Mandir, 20, living with them. "Both undertook courses at Intercollege, which is affiliated with the University of Indianapolis in the States. My daughter has followed computer sciences and my son has taken a course in business administration, so it has been lovely having the four of us under one roof, even if only for one year.

Maj. Gen. Rana said that someone recently told him that you do not make friends on a tour like this; you make acquaintances. He believes this to be completely untrue. “My family and I leave UNFICYP with some sadness that we are parting from good friends, but we also have the comfort of the happy memories of our time here. Memories may fade, but good friendships will always last.”

He also mentioned that he will miss the friendliness of the people of Cyprus. “I was so pleasantly surprised to see how friendly and hospitable the people are, both to ourselves as well as to others. It was clear to me that a lot remained to be done to improve the lot of soldiers on the line across the Buffer Zone, and I am delighted to see that this is showing results in all sectors and I hope it continues.”

Another of his priorities was developing the liaison arrangements between the opposing forces on the island. At every opportunity, including meetings with the opposing forces, he emphasized that liaison at the lowest levels was the most effective way of preventing operational problems from escalating. “We now have a working system that I believe is unique in peacekeeping terms,” he noted. “I don’t know of any other mission where individual private soldiers on the line have this degree of involvement in the mission. This has added the effect of making it easier for opposing forces to relate to the mission at higher levels, because many of the problems are solved at the lowest level.”
Settling Down in Sector 4
By Lt. L. Klime

Five months ago, SLOVCON took over the command over Sector 4 and it seems that the time has passed too fast. All beginnings are difficult, and the start of the mission was no exception. Slovak soldiers have been participating in UN missions all over the world.

Magdalena Petroczi ("Magdi" to her friends) training there.

With a personal best of 185 kg in the death lift, István, you will likely find Cpl. Magdi in the gym. Her usual training unit lasts two hours, and she trains four times a week, so she spends a lot of time at the gym. Her usual training unit lasts two hours, and one of the problems facing the newly arrived soldiers was the different climatic conditions: when they left Slovakia, the temperature was about 15 degrees (very unusual for June, even in Slovakia!), whereas Cyprus was already reaching the 40s. Another hurdle to overcome was a partially imperfect knowledge of English – in this mission, most positions need at least a basic knowledge of English. This caused some problems, especially for COMCEN. The strong-willed guys have been working really hard to overcome that disadvantage, and now you may see their significant improvements.

It takes time to get used to different systems of work and working conditions, but the members of SLOVCON are ready to solve any problem, and to fulfill their duties with excellence. They appreciate the honour and the trust that were placed in them after they took over command of Sector 4.

By T.N.I.M. Vera

November 22nd is a special day for Argentinian military musicians, who celebrate the International Day of Music, which is also the day of their Patroness, Saint Cecilia.

Since the Independence War days against the Spaniards, military bands have accompanied our troops, enhancing esprit de corps. They also provide an accurate frame not only for military parades and ceremonies, but also in schools, squares and everywhere where military music provides an important link between servicemen and the civilian population.

Here in Cyprus, Sector 1 band members feel very proud and honored to be serving with the United Nations. We may be far away from home, but we are happy at the opportunity to share our musical march and our "Argentinian touch", to make our comrades feel at home.

Being here is also a professional challenge for us, because we are playing music from different countries such as Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, plus national anthems and tunes from the many countries with whom we share responsibilities in UNFICYP.

But there is something that keeps intact a feeling that fills us with immense happiness, as much as the accurate firing of our Howitzers: it is the satisfaction of accomplishing accurately and with effort, with detail and self-denial, with care and professionalism, each mission that we are tasked with, so that we can take pride in the high honour of our legacy, sung in verse by a chaplain of the Spanish Army.

Barbarian are your Howitzers, Barbarian are your mortars, Barbarian is your holy patroness... What you will be, Gunners!!

Celebrating Music
By Lt. L. Klime

The Blue Beret

Magdi provides a shining example of how our holy patroness, Saint Barbara. On this day, we remember her unyielding Christian faith, even as she was executed by her own father, Diocletian, for refusing to deny Christ; and we remember the resulting lightning bolt that killed her father today. Saint Barbara protects those at risk from explosions and storms. For that reason, gunners worldwide come under the sacred mantel of her protection, wherever we are.

Today we are very far from our artillery pieces, and absent from the magazines. It is not the task of controlling firing effectiveness that places the binoculars in front of our eyes, but rather the observation mission in our area of responsibility; there are not displacements to occupy new firing positions, but rather our patrols that are monitoring the status quo in Cyprus. We have exchanged calculations in the firing control centre for reports dealing with the accomplishment of firing cease in our area of responsibility, and the mimicked Colts that covers our units in Argentina has been supplemented by the blue beret that distinguishes the United Nations Soldier of Peace. Today, we serve next to comrades of the Argentinian Marine Corps, integrating into a Combined Task Force with brother countries like Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, very far from our Units and our families.

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Saint Barbara’s Day in Sector 1
By L.H. Fantoni

On 4 December, Argentinian Gunners commemorate the day of the artillery branch and of our holy patroness, Saint Barbara. On this day, we remember her unyielding Christian faith, even as she was executed by her own father, Diocletian, for refusing to deny Christ; and we remember the resulting lightning bolt that killed her father today. Saint Barbara protects those at risk from explosions and storms. For that reason, gunners worldwide come under the sacred mantel of her protection, wherever we are.

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Argentinian military musicians

Cpl. Tapajna.
A Little Bit of Snow -- Pleeeeeezzzeee
By Charlotte Mortensen

- - - or at least a little bit of cold. Just for Christmas. I am struggling to get into my usual Christmas spirit, being surrounded by palm trees, sun and fairly warm weather. Especially for a Scandinavian, these are unusual conditions for the month of December. As a matter of fact, I think most of us here in UNFICYP are used to different weather. The Slovaks are experiencing fierce snowstorms back home, the Hungarians are facing bitter cold, in Ireland and England -- let me take a wild guess here -- it’s cold, grey AND raining. The Argentinians and Australians -- of Christmas too, and I love all the street lights and December, Cyprus is beginning to look a lot like Christmassy-feel when I look at it.

I cannot lie to you and say that it looks good, but the kids family in our building complex with such a creation. I have put bright, beautiful and very colourful lights in a palm tree we have on our balcony. We are definitely the only ones rolling around in one-inch of snow! Rumours have it that a little bit of snow has fallen. We will be the ones driving around and look at them. Soon we’re off to the Troodos Mountains, where nothing but snow. It’s surprising what inspiration can descend upon us...

Caption Competition

With very short notice, we did well again in this competition with the captions creating much meriment. It’s surprising what inspiration can descend upon us...

- SSgt Curtis from Bengal Tp has an idea -- it doesn’t happen often!
- Bob’s hair transplant was a bit off-kilt.
- But it was nothing that a couple of aspirins couldn’t cure...
- Those blue berets aren’t much protection; better order helmets instead.
- And so the UN was once again contacted by aliens.
- More proof that it really IS better not to drink and drive...
- Nah, he’s just in love! (WINNER)

Finland gained her independence on 6 December, 1917. To recognise this important part of the country’s rich cultural heritage and national identity, the Finnish members of UNFICYP held an evening reception at the Hilton Hotel in Nicosia on 6 December 2001 – the 84th anniversary of Finnish Independence Day. The day’s celebration also included presenting Capt. A. Partanen with his UNFICYP medal.

In 1915, Finland was incorporated into the Kingdom of Sweden. The border between Finland and Russia was changed five times during constant war in 1809. Despite the exhausting wars, firm foundations for an independent judiciary, public services and political system were laid.

In October/November 1917 the turmoil in Russia led to a revolution. Finland took the opportunity and unilateral declaration of independence, managing to consolidate it in favour of the government after a short but fierce civil war against the “Reds” (Russian communist-backed troops).

Finland became a member of the United Nations in 1955. The following year the first Finnish peacekeeping force – a company of over 200 men – was sent to Sinai. Since that time Finland has been involved in almost all UN peacekeeping operations, by contributing either military forces or military observers. Today some 1,350 Finnish soldiers serve overseas. Only 50 of those serve under the UN flag, as most of them operate in NATO-led operations. The total number of Finnish soldiers who have been in the service of peace is over 42,000. Out of those, more than 10,000 have served in Cyprus since 1964.

12 SU Walkdown 2001

With a cold, dark and raining morning when five teams from UNFICYP met to check in for this year’s 12 SU Walkdown, held on 1 December 2001. The race is 18 miles on road, track and bondu from Platres to Episkopi in teams of three. During the race you must navigate through three checkpoints to the finish in the fastest possible time.

In the mixed category, UNFICYP took home first, second and third place. The winners, “UN Mixed 2” from Sector 2, consisted of L. Bunch, G. Lamb and Hall. “Get back in the van, you’re embarrassing us all”, comprising J.J. Simon, Angela Milne and Jan Gajdös, came in second, only 41 seconds after the winners. Not far behind them were the “UNFICYP All Stars” of Madeline Garlick, Walter Absmann and Kyriacos Michalides.

Sector 1 entered a true UN team, with members from Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. The “Mercur” team of M. Villegas Zanon, W. Paiva and S. Marancovich, after only having one week to train, finished in just over four hours, beating many teams who had trained for months. We are going to look out for this team in the next race.

“Ferret, Gump & Co Mark 3” made its third 12 SU Walkdown together with team newcomer Kathleen Quigley. William Style and Janet Forrest have finished the race three years in a row – William travelled from England this year to compete with the team.

The Globe Trotters

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Farewell to Force Commander, Major General Victory Rana