The Blue Beret

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The Blue Beret is the journal of the United Nations Force in Cyprus and, as such, is intended to provide a source of information on current events within the Force, on UN matters of general interest and on local tourist advice.

Articles of general interest are invited from all members of the Force. Photographs, together with captions, should accompany the articles.

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Front Cover:
Dutch Soldiers on Patrol
Photograph by Cpl Pat O’Meara

The numerical strength and national composition of UNFICYP has varied over the years since the inception of the Force from 6,411 all ranks in 1964 down to below 1,000 in 1993, stretching the Force beyond its limits and endangering UNFICYP’s fulfilment of the mandate. Shortly afterwards, the Force’s numerical strength reached a level slightly above 1,200 all ranks, and has remained stable since then. The national composition of the Force has differed during these years as well. Some time ago we had a farewell to New Zealanders, Swedes and Danes, and more recently we welcomed Argentinians, Hungarians and Slovenians. This month, yet another national flag was raised with the arrival of the Dutch officers and soldiers, and in this edition, The Blue Beret introduces the new Unit (see opposite). Their professionalism, discipline and thorough knowledge of English has already been recognized and appreciated by us all. Good luck and keep up the good work!

Arrival are always pleasant, and departures rather sad. This is the nature of every UN peace-keeping or observer mission around the world. It is with a feeling of sadness that we bid farewell to the outgoing Chief of Mission, Mr Gustave Feissel, who retired at the end of June. We hope that readers will find his last interview with The Blue Beret both interesting and informative. All the best to you both, Gus and Sharon, wherever you are and whatever you do!

Dutch King’s Company Becomes Part of the UNFICYP Family

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Captain Harm van der Have, the ever-smiling officer commanding of King’s Company, is proud to introduce his company to his blue beret colleagues. “Yes, the King’s Company is a unit I am proud to be the commander of”, he says. “The name ‘King’s Company’ has an historical background. Whenever a future Dutch King joined the army, he started off as a platoon commander within the Alfa Company of the 11th Battalion of the Grenadier Guards. Since we’ve had three Queens in succession reigning over The Netherlands, it has been a long time since we’ve had royal blood within our Regiment. And I personally am sorry that Prince Willem Alexander, our future King, joined the Navy instead of the Army!”

Major Reijnjout and his men are well aware of the opportunities serving with a multinational organization has to offer. “My grenadiers and I are looking forward to meeting colleagues from other countries, and to learn how they deal with our common challenges. In particular, the Dutch troop participating in the Mobile Force Reserve will have the opportunity to work in a deeply integrated multinational force. However, I am sure that the Dutch soldiers in Liri Troop and Falcon Troop will also make good contacts, not only with their comrades in arms, but also with both the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot parties. After all, these are the people we are working for. Dutchmen are traditionally used to communicating with other nationalities and have, over the years, developed good negotiating skills. I hope these skills will assist us in fulfilling our mission in Cyprus.”

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On 9 June 1998, the remaining few of the 100 soldiers who joined the Netherlands detachment within UNFICYP’s Sector Two set foot on the island for their six-month tour of duty with the United Nations Force in Cyprus.

For some, this is their first operational mission abroad, however most of the soldiers have served with the UN before. The unit itself, Alfa Company of the Regiment known as the Grenadiers and Foresters Guards (also called the King’s Company), secured the Tuzla air base in 1994 during the Bosnia War. The Regiment is one of the three infantry regiments of 11 Airborne Brigade. This brigade was founded in 1992 as the first part of a major reorganization of the Netherlands Army. Subsequently, it was also the first unit, starting of with the Alfa/King’s Company, to be manned with exclusively volunteer soldiers.

Since this major reorganization, national service in The Netherlands ceased to exist. The soldiers of this brigade are considered to be the fittest of the Netherlands Army, and discipline is said to be higher than anywhere else in the forces. Physically, their tasks in Cyprus will not be as demanding as their work as infantrymen, although patrolling on foot and bicycle in the summer will double take it for this.
Q. Tell us about your career with the United Nations.

A. I joined the United Nations in 1963 as I was completing my doctoral studies in political science. Given my interest in international relations, the United Nations was an obvious direction for me to take. I was recruited by the United Nations in October 1963 at the entry level for professionals, and eventually, over the 35 years that I have been with the United Nations, I rose to the level of Assistant Secretary-General. During this time, I had been fortunate to have been selected for a number of key positions that exposed me to both political and economic problems of a global dimension. For the first 20 years of my career with the United Nations, I was intimately involved in economic development issues and, since 1984, I have been involved in preventive diplomacy, conflict resolution and peace-keeping activities.

Q. What was your first important assignment?

A. My first important assignment came in 1969, when I became the Special Assistant to the Under Secretary-General in charge of the economic and social activities of the United Nations. The Under Secretary-General had under him a department of over 1,000 staff and I was in charge of his Office. The department covered a wide range of economic and social sectors such as development policies, natural resources and energy, science and technology, habitat and population. In 1972, I was given the additional responsibility of project manager of a major exercise on the impact of multinational corporations on development which launched the involvement of the UN in the important area of transnational corporations and foreign investment, and which led to the establishment of the UN Centre on Transnational Corporations in 1975, which I joined at its inception as an Associate Director.

Another major assignment in my career came in 1984 when I was asked by Sir Bryan Urquhart to join the Department of Special Political Affairs as one of the Directors. That Department comprised a very small number of staff who worked directly with the Secretary-General on peace-making and peace-keeping. This is where my exposure to Cyprus began.

Q. What do you think is the future for peace-keeping operations?

A. The United Nations is uniquely placed to deal with peace-keeping matters. Unlike national governments, it has no self interests and thus is well placed to be perceived as impartial in dealing with conflicts. Of course, one must remember that the United Nations is first and foremost a collection of states, and therefore, its effectiveness depends on an important extent on the support and commitment of member states.

Q. How would you describe your contribution to the efforts of a peace settlement in Cyprus?

A. Even though the Cyprus problem has not yet been resolved, one should not underestimate the significant contribution made by the United Nations. During the 34 years that the UN has been here, they have played a significant part, both in maintaining a peace-keeping operation as well as in assisting the two sides to deal with their differences. While a settlement has not yet been achieved, the peace-keeping operation in Cyprus has been very effective in, so to speak, keeping the lid on the problem and providing the time to interested parties to work on a settlement.

Q. What changes marked your five-year assignment in Cyprus?

A. The fact that over the five years that I’ve been here we have not succeeded in resolving the Cyprus problem is, of course, disappointing. The passage of time makes things more difficult. This underlines the need for all concerned to redouble their efforts and to work more urgently than ever to overcome their differences and achieve an overall settlement, which I remain convinced is possible.

It is wrong to think that there is a status quo in Cyprus. The situation is continuously changing. There is, thus, the risk that sooner than later, the Cyprus problem can reach a point of no return. The recent experience in Northern Ireland, I believe, provides a good example of what must happen in Cyprus. Just as in Northern Ireland, the two communities in Cyprus must realize that the only way a settlement can be reached is through compromise, through give-and-take. If one or the other side is not willing to compromise, an agreement can be reached, obviously this will preclude progress. Furthermore, we have seen in Northern Ireland that their equivalent of the parent countries, that is the UK and the Republic of Ireland, became actively involved in support of a moderate approach, in support of compromise and give-and-take. This has yet to happen in Cyprus. It is indispensable that Turkey and Greece become actively involved in peaceful settlement through compromise and give-and-take. If these two elements come about in Cyprus, that is to say a willingness by the parties in the island to compromise and give-and-take, and the active support of that approach by Turkey and Greece, a solution will come to Cyprus very quickly.

Q. Is there a message you wish to convey to the members of UNIFCYP?

A. My message to both the military and civilian staff of UNIFCYP is that it has been a rare privilege for me to have been the first Chief of Mission of the UN Operation in Cyprus. In that capacity, I have come to appreciate very much the dedication of the military and civilian staff and their devotion to the goals of the United Nations in Cyprus. I want to thank them for all the support they have given me for a job well done, and I wish them all the very best in the future.
19th Regiment Royal Artillery (The Highland Gunners), under Lieutenant Colonel Mike Relph, has deployed from its home in Colchester to take over from 1st Royal Tank Regiment as the Sector Two Regiment.

Since then, the Regiment has had its batteries deployed on operations in Korea, Aden, Northern Ireland and Belize, and most recently in Bosnia. The Regiment has also served in Austria, Hong Kong and Germany.

The Regiment's equipment during this time has been varied. It was initially equipped with 5.5" Howitzers that were eventually replaced by 25 pounders. During the Korean War, however, 25 Bty were also equipped with 4.2" Mortars and operated this weapon with distinction during the conflict.

In the 1960's, the 105mm Pack Howitzer was introduced, and this versatile gun was used extensively in Aden and for the Regiment's role with the AMFL division in Norway. In more recent times, the Regiment has been mounted with the Abbot 105mm self-propelled gun for its role in what was BAOR, the 155mm towed FH70 and is today equipped with the 105mm Light Gun. This is the "Little Brother" of current British Artillery pieces, but its effectiveness and reliability are well proven.

The Regiment is today part of 24 Airmobile Brigade and NATO's Multinational Division (Central). As the only British airmobile artillery, its primary function is to provide support to the Brigade's airmobile battle groups, but its flexibility and unique utility on the modern battlefield means that it could be called upon to support any of the national contingents in the division.

The Regiment actively cultivates its Scottish links manifest in its well respected "Red Hackle Band" and the wearing of the Regimental Tartan, the Robertson Hunting Tartan by the Regimental officers on formal occasions. The Regiment actively recruits in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, and is rightly proud to be known as the Highland Gunners.

A Seyruf gun of the Regiment under the basket of a Chinook helicopter in their airm mobile role

A gun of the Regiment firing during Operation Deliberate Force in Bosnia in 1995

Bosnia UNMOS work together in Sector Two

Two former UNPROFOR United Nations Military Observers, UNMOS, both of whom served in the Eastern enclaves in Bosnia during the winter of 1994-95, are now working together again in UNIFICYP with BRITCON in Sector Two.

Major Jos Reijnhout, 44, of the Dutch 11th Airborne Infantry Battalion, Garde Grenadiers, now the Dutch Executive Officer (XE), was the UNMO Team Leader in the Belgrade enclaves in Bosnia and Herzegovina from August 94 to February 95. Major Gary Donaldson, 40, now Second in Command of 19th Regiment Royal Artillery, was the UNMO Team Leader in the Enclave of Srebrenica from September to March 95. Although the two officers never met during the time with UNPROFOR, their shared experiences have provided them with a mutual understanding of UN operations even in the most extreme situations.

For Major Donaldson, married with two small children and based in Colchester, this present tour of duty in Cyprus allows him to further opportunity to work with Dutch soldiers. DUTCABAT were the UNPROFOR battalion in Srebrenica and, as part of this deployment, there are 97 men from the Netherlands Garde Grenadiers serving in BRITCON. He says: "I worked extensively with the Dutch 12th Airmobile Battalion, the Garde Jagers, in Bosnia and found them to be excellent soldiers who were very well led.

The 'UN Safe Areas' were exceptional places and all those who served in them have a common bond forged in difficult and dangerous circumstances".

Major Reijnhout, who is married with four daughters and lives on a farm at Nijeveen in the North of Holland, agrees, "I know you should never compare one UN mission with another, but former experience still gives you an advantage. In Bosnia, I used to work with several British UNMOS in sector Sarajevo, reliable officers who were always prepared to pick up their share of the sometimes heavy load."

The Bosnian experience is also shared by some of the older soldiers, NCOs and officers both British and Dutch. 19th Regiment Royal Artillery, deployed their guns onto Mt Igman in 1995 and helped UNPROFOR to break the siege of Sarajevo. A 'King's Company' of Garde Grenadiers served with UNPROFOR at Tuzla Airbase and Serdanica. Individuals of 19 Regt RA and A 'King's Company' have also subsequently served with IFOR and SFOR.

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Major Reijnhout (left) and Maj Donaldson

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A BRIEF ENCOUNTER WITH THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF CYPRUS - Part XXI

The secluded gardens and fountains of this monastic establishment offer the weary tourist a cool, green and peaceful haven amidst the noisy tavernas, cafeterias and shops of the resort. The Church was built to honor an icon which was discovered here in a grotto amidst a thickly wooded glen during the 11th century.

HISTORY
The origins of the Church of Our Lady of Ayia Napa (wooded glen) were lost in the passing of time. The earliest documentary evidence are two references by a Cypriot chronicler, Leontios Machazerus, dated 1366 and 1373. This information is corroborated by archeology. As for the Monastery, it appears on Venetian maps and other post-Frankish documents. In addition, there are also two legends on Ayia Napa’s foundation.

Thus we learn that in the 11th century AD, a hunter, looking for her errant dog in the then wooded valley where the Monastery now stands, discovered his animal in a grotto. When he entered it, he was afforded with a floodlight which surrounded an icon of the Virgin Mary. The icon had probably been hidden there by some faithful who wanted to protect it from the hands of the iconoclasts.

It is an historical fact that during the 8th and 9th centuries, the world of the Byzantine empire was shaken by the iconoclastic controversy whereby a “war” was declared on the icons by their enemies in a bid to destroy the belief held by the peasantry that icons were miracle-workers. Many an important icon was then destroyed, especially in major cities of Byzantium, thus depriving Byzantine art of some of its most exquisite examples. As Cyprus was at some distance from the Metropolis, Constantinople, the Cypriot icons were more or less spared.

A second legend relates how the Monastery was refurbished in 1500 by a noble Venetian lady from Famagusta, who took refuge here from her family’s pressure on her to marry a nobleman. She probably built the two-storey house by the northern entrance and the domed fountain in the center of the courtyard. Some very interesting reading on Ayia Napa is provided by Pietro della Valle, who stayed at the Monastery for four days in September 1625. He wrote about his experiences at this “place noted for its sacred character and natural beauty” which was run by nuns. He says that “the rooms were full of people, men and women, Greek Christians with a few Turks among them, all playing, dancing, drinking, amusing themselves, and we amused ourselves likewise.”

Another interesting piece of information by him is that his friends ate “beccafichi,” (blackcaps and other warblers), or “Sylvia atricapilla” in Latin, known in Greek as “ambelopoulia.” The method by which these birds were captured was by use of nets or sticks covered with glue from a tree known in Latin as “cordia myxa.” It was in use from ancient times through the Venetian period until recently, when it was made illegal by the Cyprus Government. These “beccafichi” continued to be exported to Venice as delicacies, even after their loss of Cyprus.

During its long history, Ayia Napa served the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, both as a Monastery and as a Nunnery. It was abandoned early in the 19th century for unknown reasons, and its vast land properties were hired out to farmers, who came to settle in the area and enlarged the wilderness between the Monastic village, turned nowadays into a thriving summer resort.

DESCRIPTION
Parallel to the upper part of the Church is the Catholic chapel which is entered by way of arched openings on the eastern wall of the nave. The walls of the chapel bear signs of fresco paintings. Some crowned heads can be discerned. The roof is barrel-shaped and is reinforced by columns attached to the walls. An oblong window is found on the southern wall.

In addition to the screen in the grotto, icons are also found in other parts of the Church, especially along the western wall of the nave.

ENTRANCES
The main entrance of the Monastery leads down to the subterranean part of the Church, i.e. the original grotto where the wonder-working icon of the Virgin Mary was found. This icon, now covered by a relief-decorated bronze cover, is a 1962 donation by a family from Famagusta. It hangs on the wall on the right of the screen which is in front of the apse. The irregular roof of the grotto is plastered throughout. Natural light is provided by means of a beehive-type of roof window.

In the northermost end of the grotto is a tap from which holy water is provided to the faithful. A staircase leads up to a third door.

Large cistern with over-hanging sycamore tree

A large cistern outside the southern gate is overshadowed by one of the most ancient massive trees of Cyprus. It is a “Ficus sycomorus” mulberry fig-tree, commonly known as a sycamore tree, and is a native of Ethiopia. It was planted here 700 years ago, during the Frankish period (1192-1489).
O n 26 May 1998, a modest memorial ceremony was held at the Ledra Palace in honour of Private Stephen Kohlman. A wreath was laid by his mother and father at the Canadian monument for their peace-keeper who died in Cyprus on 11 April 1975. The short ceremony was attended by Padre Richard Dunstan-Meadows, the Force Commander, Major-General Evergisto de Vergara, and the Military Assistant to the Force Commander, Captain Eric Pellicano. Headquarters Sector Two provided an excellent guard of honour, and a piper performed a very touching lament in his honour.

Private Kohlman served with the First Battalion The Royal Canadian Regiment, deployed in Sector Three. On the night of 8 April 1975, he was returning from Louroujina Camp to his section observation post at Pyrit. While negotiating a turn at an intersection, the jeep he was traveling in struck a pothole and he was thrown out of the back. He suffered a fractured skull, and lapsed into unconsciousness. He was evacuated to the British Medical Hospital in Dhkelia to undergo surgery. Sadly, 19-year-old Stephen never regained consciousness and he died in his sleep.

A memorial service was held for Private Kohlman at the Paphos Gate Church which was attended by soldiers and officers from the Canadian Contingent. The memorial erected at the Ledra Palace bears the following inscription:

In Memory of Pte Kohlman S.J. 1 RCR
Who died in the Service of Peace
11 Apr 75

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NEW CHIEF HUMANITARIAN OFFICER

Lt Col Eduardo Horacio Candinas was born in Buenos Aires on 23 September 1954. Between 1968 and 1971, Lt Col Candinas attended the Military High School (Liceo). He later joined the Military Academy, and was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant (Cavalry) with honors. He was subsequently posted to the 1st Tank Regiment, NCO School, Female Profession- 

Corps School and the Military Academy. In 1989, he graduated from the Command and Staff College as a General Staff Officer. As such, he served with the VIII Mountain Brigade, 26th Cavalry Regiment (School Regiment) and was ultimately posted as an Instructor at the Command and Staff College.

His other appointments included a one-year com-

mission with the Naval Academy, where he served on the frigate “Liberdad” in 1976. Between 1991 and 1992 he served as a UN Observer with MINURSO in the Western Sahara, and finally as Battalion Commander for the Peace-keeping Operations 97 exercise in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He has since been awarded with decorations from Chile, Colombia, Brazil and Spain.

In 1980, Lt Col Candinas married Marisa, a PR consultant, and they have three boys: Martin (16), Frederico (14), and the baby (and “boss”) of the family, Tomas (2½).

His favourite sports are skiing and polo.

NEW OC UN FLIGHT


Maj Vergara joined the Military Air Force Academy in 1978, and since then, he has held the post of academic instructor in the Air Force Academy. He has also taken part in several courses, including overflights of the jungle (Brazil), the Sea Survivor’s course (Argentina), Public Relations, International Human Rights and others. He has been honoured with three national decorations.

Maj Vergara and his wife Silvia Mabel Amato have three daughters: Maria de la Paz (13), Maria Laura (10) and Maria Cecilia (8). His wife will join him later in his tour.