

The Blue Beret



Peacekeepers Take Centre Stage

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Editorial

On 22-24 January, Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders held their fifth trilateral meeting with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon since November 2010. There were faint hopes of a breakthrough as the leaders arrived for the Greentree meeting in New York.

The Secretary General's Special Adviser, Alexander Downer stated there had been very little progress since their last trilateral meeting in October 2011 and none of the outstanding negotiating issues had been resolved. With a disappointing meeting behind them, the leaders will now have to redouble their efforts to produce a comprehensive settlement to reunite the island in the form of a bizonal, bicomunal federation before the Republic of Cyprus takes over the EU's rotating presidency in July 2012.

The impasse leading up to Greentree was not for lack of trying on the part of the UN, which, since 2008, has been facilitating the fourth round of talks to reunify the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities on the island, divided politically since 1963 and by military force since 1974.

At the end of the previous summit at the same location, in October 2011, the UN had hoped the leaders would reach an agreement on all internal aspects of the Cyprus problem before meeting again in January. It was thought that an international conference on the remaining issues could then be convened in early 2012, followed by referenda on both sides of the island to endorse a final settlement plan.

The UN Good Offices mission has moved into an "intensive phase" since mid-2011, but there is a limit to the pressure it can exert to a process that is "Cypriot-owned" and "Cypriot-led". As Mr. Downer often says to the media: "The UN cannot want an agreement more than the parties themselves."

At Greentree, the UN had hoped to get some agreement on three core issues already under discussion. The first was on power-sharing and most particularly determining how the Presidency will be elected and will rotate. The second concerned Property and the sharing of data held by both sides. The third dealt with Citizenship and the issue of settlers in north Cyprus from mainland Turkey. In his statement on 25 January after the summit ended, Mr. Ban said discussions were intensive, but they achieved "limited progress".

The Secretary General's Special Adviser on the island, Alexander Downer, stated to the media in early January that there were no plans for another trilateral meeting and warned about the difficulties of continuing the talks when the Republic of Cyprus takes over EU's rotating presidency in July 2012. These statements were echoed by the Secretary General who also said the negotiations had entered "a final stage" while asking the sides to share data on properties on the island and for them to accept participating in a wider international conference if conditions were met. The Secretary General also said he will review the situation at the end of March, following a report by his Good Offices mission in Cyprus.

Not all was lost at Greentree, however. The Secretary General underlined some tangible progress and once again urged the Leaders to take decisive steps. Let us hope that spring will come to Cyprus in more ways than one!

Secretary-General urges leaders to take decisive steps



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (standing, centre) speaks at a meeting with the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leadership at Greentree Estate in Manhasset, New York. He is flanked by the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Leaders Demetris Christofias (left of Mr. Ban) and Derviş Eroğlu.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has urged the leaders of the two communities in Cyprus to make decisive steps towards a final agreement on the Cyprus problem, noting that at this state of the talks, to maintain the momentum and continue negotiations, even in an intensive manner, is not enough.

Speaking after talks at the Greentree Estate in Long Island, New York, with the Cyprus leaders Demetris Christofias and Dervis Eroglu, Ban said that at the end of March he would be hearing about the process from his Special Adviser on Cyprus Alexander Downer and, "if his report is positive, consistent with the relevant Security Council resolutions and following consultations with the two sides, I intend to call a multilateral conference in late April or early May."

Ban thanked the leaders of the two communities for accepting his invitation to join him at Greentree, noting that "this has been our fifth meeting together to support the leaders' work to develop a comprehensive settlement for Cyprus, building on the steady efforts that have been made on the island since the resumption of negotiations more than three years ago."

"When we met in Greentree last October, the leaders expressed confidence that they could reach a settlement. The two sides have continued their negotiations since that time to meet this objective. Just before this latest meeting at Greentree, I wrote to the two leaders pointing out that the talks have moved into the final phase. Substantive discussions at Greentree were an integral part of this phase, leading to a multilateral conference and an ultimate settlement. Both

leaders responded by reiterating their commitment to a solution," he said.

He pointed out that "the two sides came to Greentree with three main challenges to resolve" namely "the election of the executive, property and citizenship."

"I asked the leaders to use this time to make decisive moves. Discussions over these two days were robust and intensive, although limited progress was achieved. I reminded the leaders that this process is Cypriot-owned and Cypriot-led. The UN is not here to impose solutions upon the sides," Ban said.

The UN Secretary General noted that, "in terms of next steps, I have proposed that the sides complete the exchange of data on property within the next two weeks, to which they agreed."

"Today my Special Adviser Mr. Downer will brief the Security Council in informal consultations. I will be providing a report to the Security Council on the status of the negotiations at the end of February. At the end of March, I will seek a review of the process from my Special Adviser, Alexander Downer. If his report is positive, consistent with relevant Security Council resolutions and following consultations with the two sides, I intend to call a multilateral conference in late April or early May," he added.

Ban also said that, "the UN remains convinced that it is in the interest of all Cypriots to reach a durable settlement," adding that "my Special Adviser and his team has been doing their utmost to assist the process and they remain ready to assist the sides in this important task."

Technical Committee announced deal on restoration of Apostolos Andreas

A full restoration of the Apostolos Andreas Monastery in the Karpas will start immediately, the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage announced on 21 February.

The bicomunal technical committee, one of a number set up as part of the ongoing peace process to deal with day-to-day problems between the two sides - issued a statement saying the restoration had been agreed.

"The committee agreed to proceed with immediate action for the emergency support as a first stage and subsequently the restoration of the monument according to the study prepared by the University of Patras," the statement said.

The committee will facilitate and oversee the restoration works "having the support of all interested parties in accordance with internationally recognised modalities and regulations," it added.

The monastery needs urgent support and restoration because the keystone to the monastery's main arch has shifted endangering the main part of the structure.

"Protection of cultural heritage is an integral part of the ongoing process of broadening areas of cooperation between the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots, which can only be achieved through joint efforts" the Committee noted. Therefore, it called on those who share this common vision to assist in this effort.



Cyprus leaders host UN in Pyla



Cyprus leaders, Demetris Christofias and Dervis Eroglu hosted a dinner for UN officials in the village of Pyla on 5 January ahead of their meeting with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in New York. Accompanied by their wives Christofias and Eroglu hosted the New Year's meal for Special Adviser to the Secretary-General Alexander Downer and Special

Representative of the Secretary-General Lisa Buttenheim and other UN officials involved the talks process. The two leaders greeted villagers and exchanged New Year's wishes in the village square before sitting down for a meal at a Greek Cypriot fish tavern, followed by pastries and coffee at a Turkish Cypriot restaurant.



Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters Celebrate the New Year

Members of the Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters (TCCCM) and Joint Communications Room (JCR) held a New Year's barbecue at the UNPOL club on 4 January.

Around 50 guests including the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General Alexander Downer, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Cyprus Lisa Buttenheim, Senior Police Adviser John Farrelly and Deputy Senior Police Adviser Miroslav Milojevic and representatives from the two communities enjoyed traditional Cypriot food in a relaxed informal environment.

The TCCCM and members of the JCR expressed their thanks to all those who attended the event and wished them a happy and peaceful 2012.

The Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters was established in 2009 whereby representatives from the two communities meet within the framework of a bi-communal committee dealing with criminal

matters under UN auspices, the office of which is located in the buffer zone in Nicosia. The TCCCM is one of seven specialized committees formed as a confidence building measure between the two communities with the support of the UN and is a direct result of an agreement reached between the two Cypriot leaders on 21 May 2008.

As an extension to this committee, the sides have also established a mechanism for information sharing and joint initiatives, namely a 'Joint Communications Room', (JCR) where UNFICYP police has an on-going presence, and which operates on a six day-a-week basis. Both sides have demonstrated willingness through these mechanisms to enhance communication between the respective police forces, and to cooperate and assist each other by exchanging information on cases involving criminal activity.

UNFICYP hosts community leaders



UNFICYP's Civil Affairs Branch hosted an informal lunch for Greek and Turkish Cypriot community leaders, known locally as Mukhtars, at the Ledra Palace Hotel on 1 February. The newly elected Greek Cypriot Mukhtars had the opportunity to meet with their Turkish Cypriot counterparts at the lunch, which was also attended by local authorities from Athienou, Troulli, Pergamos, Pyla, Dherynia and Louroujina. The lunch, which was actually the first of its kind bringing local authorities from both sides together in an informal setting, was held in a friendly atmosphere. Cypriots – speaking in Turkish and Greek to each other – expressed warm wishes and promised to collaborate and to cooperate further.

Maronite Cultural Centre opens in Kormakitis (Kormacit) / Koruçam

The first Maronite Cultural Centre in the village of Kormakitis (Kormacit) / Koruçam was inaugurated in the presence of the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, Mar Bechara Boutros al-Rahi on Saturday 12 February.

The cultural centre in the old village primary school was restored by the United Nations Development Programme – Partnership for the Future (UNDP – PFF), with funding from the European Union and contributions from the Maronite Welfare Foundation and the Kormakitis Community Council.

The centre which is to offer language courses and host cultural activities is the first Maronite centre to be opened in the northern part of the island.

Commenting on the significance of the centre for the community, one young Maronite said: “For our parents it involves memories and feelings. For us, it provides an opportunity to understand our origins, roots and traditions”.

The building, which now houses the cultural centre, was built during the period of British rule in Cyprus to serve as the elementary school of the village. The building had remained unused for many years, with subsequent deterioration of the roof, windows, and surrounding landscape.

In July 2009 UNDP – PFF with EU funding started the restoration works to convert the old school into a new cultural centre.

Today the cultural centre houses a folklore museum and, most importantly, the creativity, talent and efforts of the Maronite youth to preserve their grandparents' traditions.

The work to restore and convert the building into a cultural centre included extending the building to create new functional spaces and allowing the access of persons with disabilities. The community shared some



of the expenses of the project, such as the installation of staircases, and the restoration of the courtyard.

The conversion of the old school building was achieved within the wider framework of the EU-funded project 'Upgrading local and urban infrastructure,' implemented by the United Nations Development Programme in Cyprus to support the preservation of Cypriot cultural and architectural heritage.

The restoration of the cultural centre prompted the creation of a permanent exhibition of traditional and folkloric items donated by the people of the village to the non-governmental organisation Kormakitis Trust which will remain on permanent display.

The cultural center has two exhibition/conference rooms that the local youth organizations are planning to use for language courses and to host other cultural activities aimed at preserving the Maronites' unique culture, language, and history in Cyprus.

“We hope that the cultural centre will help to create more opportunities for young people to visit their village and actively participate in the life of the village. But most importantly, we hope that the success of this cultural centre will be inspirational for many other villages in the northern part of Cyprus, to see the potential that such spaces have for their own communities. We look forward to attending numerous cultural events in this as well as in other villages!” – says Tiziana Zennaro, Programme Manager of UNDP-PFF.





UNFICYP supports Basketball Twinning Programme

Saturday morning in Nicosia. Ledra Palace Hotel. You can hear yelling, “Throw it, throw it, move quickly!!” Another conflict in Cyprus? - No, this time these are shouts of peace, shouts of children playing basketball at the famous old hotel in the middle of the buffer zone. Approximately 40 school-age Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot children, boys and girls united at basketball matches as part of a twinning programme developed by Peace Player International Cyprus (PPI-CY).

PPI-CY is a non-governmental and non-profit organization with the aim of bringing children together by organizing popular sporting activities, such as basketball. PPI-CY works in villages across the island promoting the game of basketball and creating teams, led by local coaches who organize practice for the children twice a week, teaching them both the game of basketball and some life skills. Once a month each team takes part in a bi-communal “twinning” (mixed basketball game between teams from the Turkish Cypriot community and the Greek Cypriot community) in the hope that over time, continuous and frequent interaction will allow true friendship to emerge.

UNFICYP began its cooperation with PPI-CY in June 2011 when the concept of the twinning programme was first presented to the mission. PPI-CY had the know-how of bringing Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot children together through basketball, but did not have

a suitable venue and adequate funds for refreshment and transportation. UNFICYP saw the PPI-CY twinning programme as a great opportunity to improve inter-communal relations, and offered the Ledra Palace Hotel as the venue of the match as it is located in the buffer zone - a neutral place. UNFICYP converted the existing tennis court into a basketball court, fixed the fence and lights and provided basketball hoops. UNFICYP is also providing refreshment and transportation for children to make it easier for the parents to send the children off to the matches. A highlight of the event is an “after game pizza” provided also by UNFICYP, which the children very much enjoy.

Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot children playing peacefully together on a sunny Saturday morning is a pleasurable sight – a sight of good fruits growing. Though at the start of the match the children appeared somewhat nervous and shy, they begin to communicate with each other freely after a few throws of the balls together as a team. At the end of the game, when the children share pizzas together, they can be observed laughing happily together and making friends. Unfortunately, their parents seldom attend the matches for one reason or another. Having several games left to play, UNFICYP wants to see more parents participating in such a wonderful Saturday afternoon activity. Between January and May 2012, a total of 12 games are planned to be held at Ledra Palace Hotel.



Peacekeepers decorated at Medal Parades

Four medal parades were held to pay tribute to peacekeepers from all sectors and contingents who served in Cyprus over the last six months. On 23 February the Winter Medal Parade was held in the hangar of old Nicosia Airport in the United Nations Protected Area. The Mobile Force Reserve took on the responsibility of organizing the event

for personnel from Sectors 1, 2 and 4, while peacekeepers from the MFR were decorated at a second parade on 1 March. Peacekeepers in Sector 1 received their UN medals on 12 January in a ceremony held at San Martin Camp. Peacekeepers in Sector 4 received their medals at a ceremony held at the historic ruins of Salamis on 29 February.

Buttenheim: Political will, courage and a spirit of compromise needed for an agreement



Special Representative of the Secretary-General Lisa Buttenheim stressed that the Cyprus leaders will have to show political will, courage and a spirit of compromise in order to achieve an agreement in the peace talks.

Addressing the Winter Medal parade the Chief of Mission noted that the men and women receiving their recognition have contributed to the United Nations' overall efforts to bridge divides between the two communities, and in the mission's support and facilitation of the talks between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots.

She said that throughout the peace talks, the work of the peacekeepers improves the environment in which negotiations can take place: broadly by contributing to peace and stability; and specifically by ensuring that all practical arrangements – from security to logistics to facilitating media coverage – are carried out with the highest degree of dedication and professionalism.

This medal parade comes at a significant moment in the history of the United Nations presence here, she said pointing out that nearly three and a half years ago, the Cyprus leaders embarked on a journey in search of a comprehensive settlement to reunify the island. "It is a Cypriot-owned, Cypriot-led process, supported tirelessly by SASG Downer and the Good Offices team. While no one denies that progress has been achieved since the process was launched in September 2008, the sides have yet to agree on key outstanding issues – what are sometimes referred to as "core core" issues.

Both leaders have informed Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that they believe they can achieve a settlement; to do so they will need to show political will, courage and a spirit of compromise if they are to "seal the deal".

Buttenheim said the Secretary-General, who has met with the leaders five times since November 2010, most recently a month ago in New York, urged them to make decisive steps to move to a final agreement in the coming months. "A comprehensive settlement will help unleash the enormous potential and capacity of this beautiful island and make it a stronger and more prosperous home for all its citizens," she said. There is every reason to strive for the larger good, to look beyond the past, to the common and promising future that awaits all Cypriots, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots alike, she said.

Awarding the United Nations medal in the name of the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Buttenheim said: "In his latest report to the Security Council on the work of UNFICYP, the Secretary-General stated that the mission continues to play an important role both in maintaining calm and fostering bi-communal cooperation and trust, in close collaboration with his Special Adviser and the Good Offices mission and the other United Nations actors on the island. These words serve as a tribute to the peacekeepers ... and those who have preceded them, who have shown admirable dedication and vigilance in effectively carrying out the United Nations' mandate in Cyprus."



Force Commander Maj. Gen. Chao Liu, who was accompanied by the Chief of Staff Col Gerard Hughes reviewed the Sector 1 medal parade. This was followed the Argentine National Anthem and the blessing of the medals by Father Fray Rafael Melida. Sector 1 Commander Lt. Col. Carlos Ramon Aguilar addressing the parade said presenting the peacekeepers from Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Paraguay serving in Sector 1 with the UN medal recognizes their contribution to the peace process in Cyprus. "As the Contingent Commander I feel proud of each and every one of you...You may go back with the satisfaction of having accomplished your mission and having maintained a high international standing for your respective countries," he said.



Peacekeepers in Sector 4 took centre stage in the ruins of Salamis in Famagusta where they were decorated with the United Nations medal in recognition of their service in Cyprus.



Members of the Mobile Force Reserve receive their medals from the Force Commander Maj. Gen. Chao Liu and Chief of Staff Col Gerard Hughes.

The wartime origins of Nicosia airfield, and their traces today



The landing ground was first laid out in the 1920s on a barren rocky plateau to the south west of the town, by the fifth mile post on the Morphou road.

It was an unpopular place with the few pilots who used it. There were no facilities whatsoever and the site flooded whenever it rained – so it was closed every winter. Most flights to Cyprus, then as now, landed at Larnaca and no development work was done on the landing ground at Nicosia until the Second World War. The first survey of the landing ground was carried out in the summer of 1939, as war began to appear inevitable, and work on constructing three paved runways began in October.

By the middle of May 1940, the runways had been completed, making the airfield available for use in all weather. In June 1940 the first Royal Air Force (RAF) personnel arrived at Nicosia: a radio unit, tasked with reporting movements of British and French aircraft at the airfield, and warning other RAF units in Egypt and Palestine about enemy planes flying their way.

The first aircraft – a single Blenheim fighter – arrived in October 1940. Cyprus had experienced its first air raid on 22 September, when Italian aircraft bombed the mines at Xeros, and the fighter was intended to protect the island against further attacks. The Blenheim spent only four days at Nicosia, in which it failed to make contact with any Italian intruders, before returning to Haifa.

Individual fighter aircraft were similarly sent over to Nicosia from Palestine for a few days in January 1941 but the real story of the airfield begins the early summer.

On 15 May 1941, the town of Nicosia suffered a moderately heavy air raid, in which about 100 bombs were dropped. The Italian bombers were unopposed. On the following morning, two RAF Tomahawk fighters arrived at Nicosia from Palestine to ensure that any

future attacks were met with at least some resistance. Their arrival marked the start of the RAF's long-term commitment to Cyprus. The Tomahawks were replaced a week later by a stronger force of six Hurricanes.

The German army had recently overrun Greece, and its invasion of Crete had just begun. The German advance seemed unstoppable and many feared that it would continue south eastwards to Cyprus and then Egypt. Nicosia airfield, with its Hurricane fighters, formed the first line of defence.

Despite its significance, it had few facilities. A few defences against air raids had been prepared in May – gunpits and trenches had been dug, in which airmen could shelter, and three-sided pens had been built using sandbags to shield aircraft from blast – but the airfield remained a primitive place.

It was nonetheless to play an important role in the next campaign of the war – in Syria. A French territory, Syria was ostensibly neutral, but in practice very obviously hostile. British and Australian troops invaded Syria from Palestine on 8 June. The land campaign was supported by a blockade at sea, mounted from Cyprus.

Six torpedo bombers had arrived at Nicosia on 29 May, to patrol the waters between Cyprus and Turkey and sink any ships trying to get through to Syria. The campaign in Syria lasted five weeks, during which time the bombers sank a French warship, *Chevalier Paul*, on 16 June in the waters between Cyprus and Lebanon, and a cargo vessel, *St Didier*, loaded with military equipment, on 4 July in Antalya harbour. They also forced four other French vessels that were bound for Syria to turn back. The inability to get reinforcements through was an important factor in the decision of the French commanders in Syria to surrender, which they did on 14 July 1941.

The significance of the patrols being flown from Nicosia did not escape the Germans and the Italians, who at-

tacked the airfield repeatedly. In the deadliest raid, on 15 June, seven soldiers were killed and another 12 wounded, when several bombs landed next to the hut in which they were eating their evening meal. A heavier raid on 7 July caused fewer casualties but much greater damage: one aircraft was destroyed, four others damaged and fuel set on fire. Two further heavy raids, on 9 and 10 July, left the runways pockmarked with craters.

Having won the campaign in Syria, however, Allied commanders felt able to reinforce Cyprus properly against such attacks. A full squadron of Hurricane fighters was sent to Nicosia on 20 July, comprising 12 aircraft, 500 ground crew, and 80 vehicles. The airfield, however, was still largely free from buildings. The new personnel were accommodated in a tented camp, just off the plateau – and thus safe from bombs dropped on the airfield itself. Critical facilities that needed to be on the airfield, like the control room, were underground in bunkers.

These precautions proved their worth, as air raids on the airfield continued into the autumn. By October, however, the raids were petering out – and, with all the fighting in the Middle East theatre focused on North Africa, Cyprus had become a backwater. Most of the Hurricanes were withdrawn to Egypt, leaving only three in Nicosia.

For most of the next two years, there were usually only three or four fighters based at Nicosia. As and when a particular operation was being carried out, more aircraft were sent over from Palestine. Such operations included providing air cover for ships moving troops into and out of the island, once (in August 1942) providing air cover for a convoy to Malta, and twice (in March and September 1942) escorting warships on raids into the Aegean to bombard the island of Rhodes. On each occasion, the aircraft returned to Palestine after their mission was over.

If the two years from the autumn of 1941 to the



summer of 1943 were quiet in the air, however, they were anything but quiet on the ground. Construction work on the airfield continued throughout the period. The original tented camp was replaced by solid buildings between September and early December 1941 and tarmac taxiways were laid around the perimeter of the airfield linking the ends of all three runways. In early 1942, the north-south runway was extended from 1,200 yards to 2,000 yards.

Up to this point, the three runways had been of equal length and had been used interchangeably. A decision had been made that the airfield should be capable of handling heavy bombers as well as fighters and other small aircraft. This necessitated a longer runway and the shape of the plateau dictated where that would be. The longer runway in turn necessitated an extension to the perimeter taxiway, which was completed in the summer. In the autumn new hard-standings were laid down at the southern end of the new runway, and sunken pens were built for fighter aircraft. Two large concrete pens for sheltering heavy bombers were also built.

At the end of 1942, a huge tank, capable of holding 15,000 gallons of fuel, was built by the Cyprus Mines Corporation – the only organisation on the island with the engineering expertise to build large tanks.

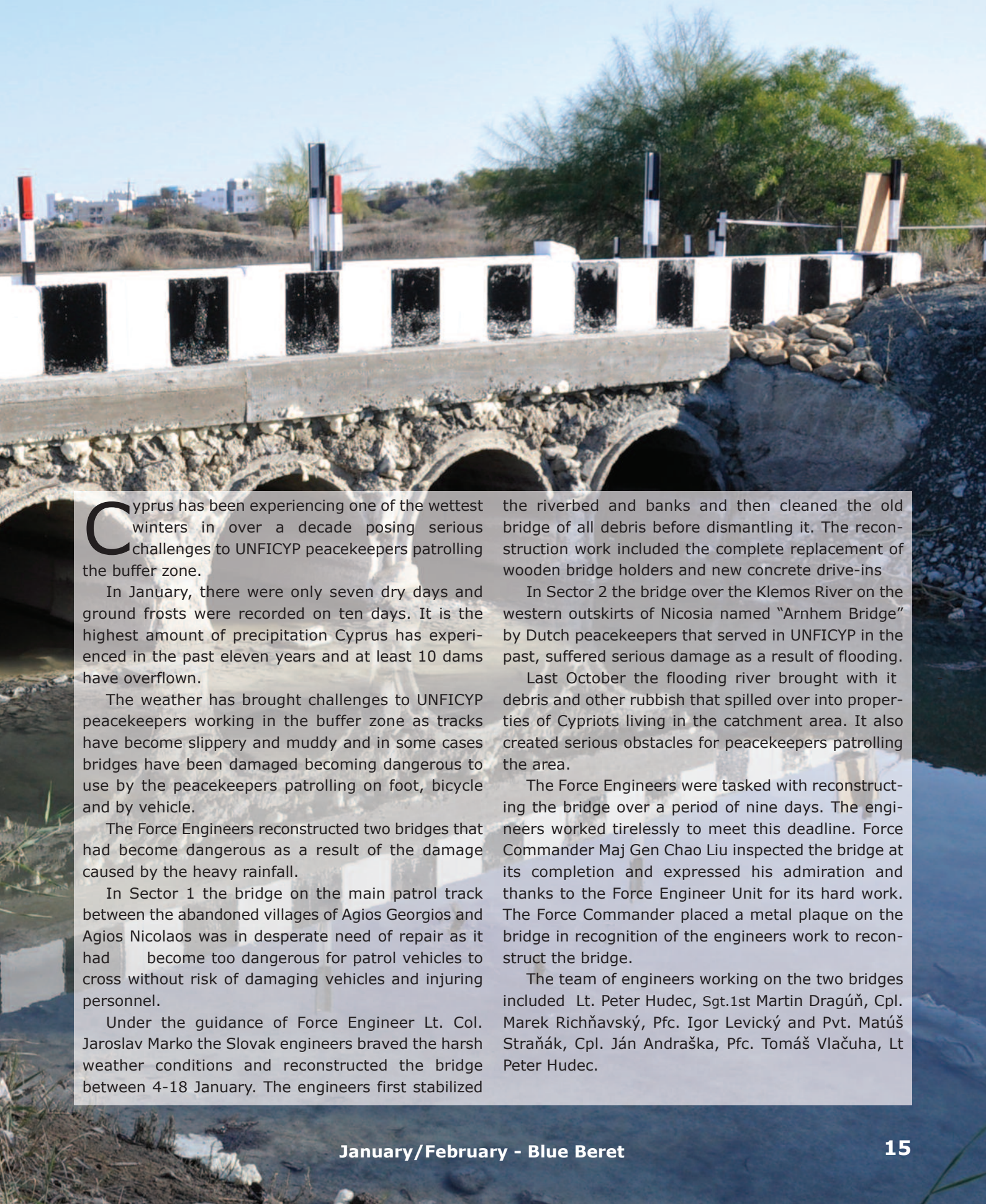


Nor was Nicosia the only place where such work was being done. A huge building programme, begun in the summer of 1941, had – by the summer of 1943 – produced seven airfields (at Nicosia, Lakatamia, Tymbou, Peristerona, Larnaca, Limassol, and Paphos) all with tarmac runways, another under construction (at Salamis), and one operational fighter strip (at Kokkini Trimithia). Every road roller and other item of road-building machinery on the island had been commandeered – and, at the programme's height – some 20,000 labourers were employed on building airfields.

Part two of this article will appear the next edition of the Blue Beret

UNFICYP Engineers reconstruct bridges in the Buffer Zone





Cyprus has been experiencing one of the wettest winters in over a decade posing serious challenges to UNFICYP peacekeepers patrolling the buffer zone.

In January, there were only seven dry days and ground frosts were recorded on ten days. It is the highest amount of precipitation Cyprus has experienced in the past eleven years and at least 10 dams have overflowed.

The weather has brought challenges to UNFICYP peacekeepers working in the buffer zone as tracks have become slippery and muddy and in some cases bridges have been damaged becoming dangerous to use by the peacekeepers patrolling on foot, bicycle and by vehicle.

The Force Engineers reconstructed two bridges that had become dangerous as a result of the damage caused by the heavy rainfall.

In Sector 1 the bridge on the main patrol track between the abandoned villages of Agios Georgios and Agios Nicolaos was in desperate need of repair as it had become too dangerous for patrol vehicles to cross without risk of damaging vehicles and injuring personnel.

Under the guidance of Force Engineer Lt. Col. Jaroslav Marko the Slovak engineers braved the harsh weather conditions and reconstructed the bridge between 4-18 January. The engineers first stabilized

the riverbed and banks and then cleaned the old bridge of all debris before dismantling it. The reconstruction work included the complete replacement of wooden bridge holders and new concrete drive-ins

In Sector 2 the bridge over the Klemos River on the western outskirts of Nicosia named "Arnhem Bridge" by Dutch peacekeepers that served in UNFICYP in the past, suffered serious damage as a result of flooding.

Last October the flooding river brought with it debris and other rubbish that spilled over into properties of Cypriots living in the catchment area. It also created serious obstacles for peacekeepers patrolling the area.

The Force Engineers were tasked with reconstructing the bridge over a period of nine days. The engineers worked tirelessly to meet this deadline. Force Commander Maj Gen Chao Liu inspected the bridge at its completion and expressed his admiration and thanks to the Force Engineer Unit for its hard work. The Force Commander placed a metal plaque on the bridge in recognition of the engineers work to reconstruct the bridge.

The team of engineers working on the two bridges included Lt. Peter Hudec, Sgt.1st Martin Dragúň, Cpl. Marek Richňavský, Pfc. Igor Levický and Pvt. Matúš Straňák, Cpl. Ján Andraška, Pfc. Tomáš Vlačuha, Lt Peter Hudec.

Story of the Škoda car



Once upon a time... this could be the beginning of my story because we all have dreams of fairy-tales coming true, but I managed to realize one of mine.

Where to begin? Cyprus is my fifth operational posting abroad and I do not claim it will be my last although I still hope that this is my last mission for my family's sake. Nevertheless it is clear from the title of this article that it is not about me.

Before deployment to Cyprus I asked all my colleagues that had served in UNFICYP how many Skoda cars they had seen on the island. I do not mean new vehicles manufactured by Volkswagen. I meant the real Czechoslovak cars that for me and many of my peers remain firmly in our memories. The smell of these cars evokes in me flashbacks of my childhood.

I came to the island of Aphrodite in March 2011 and I remember that it was raining lightly in Larnaca and through the raindrops I was searching for silhouettes of Skoda cars. I didn't see any that day. My search over the following months focused on local scrap yards. After four months of futile efforts I could identify Cyprus as a haven of old veteran vehicles even though I did not find my Czechoslovak Skoda from the end of the seventies.

I do not remember the precise date but recall it was a burning hot day in July when during a routine patrol of the Force Military Police Unit we decided to set the starting point at Morphou Gate and drive along the road towards Sector 1.

We reached the first roundabout and turned right. On our right hand side there is one of biggest local scrap yards which we had passed so many times, I hardly even noticed it anymore. However on that day I saw something that nobody else would have noticed. Under a big pile of rusty air conditioners and other rubbish I spotted the "four-eyed face" of Škody 120 GLS. I braked abruptly and my colleague next to me calmly asked, "what happened?" "That is a Skoda car over there," I said. "What Skoda," my colleague asked. "This is the Skoda 120 that I have been looking for, for months," I said. "What?" he still did not understand.

I turned the car around and drove closer. It really was the Skoda 120 GLS. "Year of production around 1979 or 1980," I said. It really is my Skoda. I finally found what I had been looking for from the first day I arrived in the mission. I found the "invisible" Skoda 120 GLS with right hand steering...and I had a feeling that I had not only sweat dripping in my eyes but teardrops as well.

How to get the car out of here? This question sounded through my mind. I asked a young lady that worked in the nearby shop. She did not understand. Full of emotions I tried to explain that the piece of rubbish under the old air conditioners is a Slovak Skoda – my favorite car from my childhood. She did not understand.

She dialed the number of her father who owned the scrap yard.

"The car is not for sale" sounded from the other side of the phone.

"What?" I asked again. It is under a pile of scrap and for you it is scrap iron. I insisted on personal meeting with him.

"The car was put there 6 years ago" the scrap yard owner said trying to convince me that car is not for sale.

OK, I thought I am a member of the military police. I will find the owner through the local Cyprus Police and maybe they will help me. They helped and the following day I knocked on the door of a nearby house. With cold feet I awaited the owner who bought this car in 1981 in Nicosia.

The door opened and an older man asked, "What can I do for you?"

"I would like to repair your old Skoda car!" I answered.

"Are you the owner of Skoda car?"

"But the car is not for sale! I have many great memories connected with the car and my three sons learned to drive in it, one day I will repair it" he said.

"Oh my God" I said "I am from the country where those cars were produced and we rode as children in the same car - please let me take it and try to repair it, to save a piece of our common history". He waved his head and surely thought that all Slovaks are crazy but he trusted me...

That was the beginning of the road. I am not an odd fellow but I have a fascination for those cars.

The next day I went to get the Skoda with the help of my Slovak colleagues. Anthony and his whole family were there waiting for us and I saw little flames in his eyes. We loaded the car and transferred it to the garage. My other Slovak colleagues smiled in disbelief. "You will never repair it! It is decrepit," they were saying. But I knew that I would...

After six years in a scrap heap the car was finally in a garage and cleaned of all the dirt ready to get its second chance.

"In a few days my family was scheduled to come to

Cyprus for their summer holiday," I reminded myself. The Skoda car must wait.

Nevertheless I rang my wife the same evening and told her the story of the Skoda I had found. Knowing my passion for these cars she responded saying I would find a Skoda even on Mars.

My wife took down the list of spare parts that I asked her to bring from Slovakia. Initially there were a few basic things that I found missing during first inspection of the car. Still it was more than enough to raise the eyebrows of the security officers at Larnaca airport. Just imagine! Surely not every tourist – especially not a mother with two children would carry electric car cables and spark plugs in her luggage.

After a well-deserved holiday and the departure of my family I began to work in earnest on the Skoda. Work? It was not work – it was relaxing balm for my soul. I removed tons of rubbish and dirt from the car and looking at it thought "Oh my, it's worse than I expected". I put up a white board next to the car and wrote down a work plan and shopping list.

Battery... I put in a new battery and full of expectations I turned the key. Nothing! Not a sound. Ok I would try something different. Fuses, cables and starter are all right. Chassis? Of course – I did not have grounding. I changed the starter and connected the cables to the chassis.

"I give you a 10 percent chance of making it work," said my colleague and good friend Marián Vincent.

"You always know how to cheer me up buddy" I cracked. "It will start – you will see".

After a few seconds the engine roared and broke 6 years of silence inside its heart. "Yes! I shouted. Yes, it runs! Oh my God, it runs."

So that was the beginning of the laborious work of dismantling and restoring the Skoda. After working on it for a month the engine was as good as new. I received other spare parts from Slovakia. We changed them and continued to restore the car. I had my hands dirty with motor oil and would fall asleep with the satisfaction of a car mechanic.

In July I announced that by October I would drive the Skoda.

It was 1 October and we quickly deaerated the clutch and brakes. Sitting on the half dismantled seat that was being held by two screws... I sat behind the steering wheel and started the engine – I did my first few hundred metres. "Skoda runs again."

This was received with applause and smiles from military police colleagues.

Somewhere in between the mifnight oil and duty at the Police station I wondered, "What do I do with the car when its ready? Will I take it back to Slovakia?" During the few months that I repaired the car I found that Anthony has the same passion for Skoda that I had. He would call regularly and ask how the repair work was proceeding. I also became a regular visitor to his house and family and while enjoying Cyprus coffee and excellent local food I realized that this car has an owner already – and it is Anthony who paid 2000 Cyprus pounds in 1981 for the Skoda 120 GLS. That was the answer. The Skoda would not go back home but would be returned to its owner. Problem solved.

Writing this story I imagine how surprised Anthony will be when he sits in his car bringing back memories of his younger days and the childhood memories of his children.

I am Slovak and I am proud of it. I am proud of the fact that I could leave a bit of the wisdom and work of our small nation here on Aphrodite's beautiful island.

My thank goes to all who supported and helped me during their free time and on weekends. Of course special thanks go to my wife who puts up with my love for old cars and the guys in the Engineering unit of UNFICYP especially to Cpl. Edo Mazák.

MSgt. Radovan Januška
FMPU UNFICYP



MSgt. Radovan Januška hands Anthony the keys to the Skoda 120 GLS that got a new lease on life.

UNFICYP Remembers Haiti quake victims

A minute's silence was held on the anniversary of the 12 January 2010 Quake in Haiti which killed over 316 000 thousand people including 102 peacekeepers. The brief ceremony was held outside UNFICYP headquarters in memory of the victims.



Cypriot Footballers Do 1 thing for Refugees



UNHCR Cyprus joined forces with local football clubs APOEL and Omonia in support of refugees and those people who continue to be forcibly displaced or uprooted from their homes due to violence and persecution.

The two football clubs organised separate events at football matches to highlight the issue of refugees. Omonia invited children of refugees living in Cyprus to accompany their footballers onto the pitch at the start of one of their matches on 5 February, while the message of Goodwill Ambassador Angelina Jolie was displayed on the video wall of the stadium.

APOEL posted on its website the UNHCR's banner which says "I'm 1 who cares" so that fans can show their support by clicking on the UNHCR banner. The message by Jolie was also displayed at one of the APOEL matches on 10 February.



The initiative falls under UNHCR's global campaign that calls on the individuals, organisations, corporations and other groups to take action and "Do 1 thing" in solidarity with refugees and forcibly displaced people.

Chinese New Year Celebrated



Celebrating Chinese New Year was a new addition to the UNFICYP Calendar. The aim of the event was to provide a social experience that would benefit all members of the mission, their families and

guests and to provide a focus of celebrations for our Force Commander, Maj. Gen. Chao Liu and his Chinese colleagues who were unable to be at home on this important occasion.

Under the direction of the Chief Personnel and Logistics Officer (CPLO), Lt Col Peter Williams the event was organised with support from the ever willing and capable Mobile Force Reserve (MFR), by British contingent (BRITCON) staff and the sectors.

Each of the sectors were invited to provide activities in the form of Chinese-themed games. These activities were a resounding success and reflected the great efforts and thought that the sectors had given to maximising the enjoyment of the evening. Adding to the ambience were a further 2 stalls provided by a local Nepalese Restaurant and a Chinese Delicatessen. Chefs from sector 2 provided a delicious, authentic meal of

noodles, sweet and sour chicken and beef chow mien for over 400 hungry mouths.

The climax of the festivities was the much lauded (and competitive) "Dragon Dance." This involved a team from each of the Sectors constructing their own dragon and a team of 4-5 personnel performing the dance. The history of the Dragon Dance can be dated back to the Han Dynasty (180-230 AD) and plays an important part in Chinese culture. The Dragon itself has always been regarded as a sacred creature, symbolising power, courage, righteousness and dignity amongst others. For this reason, the Chinese show great respect towards the dragon. The dance signifies the end of the year and welcoming a new start, driving away evil spirits, bringing good luck and fortune to the people. The Force Commander anointed the eyes of each of the Dragons prior to their dance as a symbol of the opening ceremony.

The standard of the dances was extremely high and the amount of effort by each sector in making their Dragon was superb and greatly appreciated by all. Maj. Gen. Chao Liu who judged the dance, after much deliberation, awarded the victory to Sector 2

The festivities were concluded with a spectacular fireworks display. In all some 500 people enjoyed a memorable evening.

By SSgt M Truswell

Valentines Day marriage for a peacekeeper



Valentine's Day this year sealed the love story of UNFICYP peacekeeper Lt.Col. Ľubomír Chrenko and his beloved Ľubica. Their story began in Slovakia and continued on the island of Aphrodite together with their 33-month-old son Tomáško.

Nobody knows what inspired them to get married but one guess could be that Ľubomír and Ľubica came under the island goddess' Aphrodite's powerful spell of love. Another possibility is that they decided to follow in the footsteps of Ľubomír's colleague LtCol Sebastian Hitz who got married on 29 October last year or they just decided Valentine's Day was the perfect opportunity to express their love, consolidating it in marriage.

Ľubomír's answer is simple "I did it because I love her"

Slovak Ambassador H. E. Anna Tureničová conducted the formal ceremony at the embassy in Nicosia. Before formally announcing the marriage the Ambassador expressed her best wishes reading a poem to the couple that stressed the importance of this occasion in their lives.

Invited guests then continued the celebrations in Camp General Štefánik in Famagusta where Ľubomír had served between 2006 – 2007 and has fond memories of the area and people.

As their ship of love sets sail we wish them good winds.

10km Road Race in UNPA

The Mobile Force Reserve (MFR) organized the Force Commander's 10km Road Race on 16 February. The event was well supported by all the components of UNFICYP, with a total of 5 teams from Sectors 1, 2 and 4, the MFR and UNPOL. There were also 34 individual runners, including the Force Commander's MA, Major Thomson.

The race was a great success, the route chosen by the MFR's SQMS, SSgt Mc Naney was challenging particularly running the 3km of Concession Road uphill into a headwind. The winners of each category were awarded a prize by UNFICYP Force Commander,

Major General Chao Liu. Cpl Young of Sector 2 was the race winner with a time of 37 minutes 56 seconds. Cpl Williams, one of the UNPA nurses took the ladies' title with a time of 47 minutes 39 seconds. As well as taking first place in the race Sector 2 had the winning team on the day with an average time of 43 minutes 59 seconds, beating the MFR by a minute. A prize was also awarded to the 'tail end Charlie' of the race who was Cpl Hester of the MFR in a time of 1 hour, 7 minutes and 23 seconds. Many thanks to the SQMS department of the MFR for organizing a successful event, enjoyed by all who attended!



New Faces



Chief Security Officer

Larry Ellis commenced duties with UNFICYP as Chief Security Officer on 15 January 2012. His work experience includes a career in civilian policing, followed by service with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations. His service with the United Nations includes several Peacekeeping missions, most recently with UNTSO, where he served as the Chief Security Officer.



Civil Affairs Officer

Moshe Dayan A. Karbo arrived in Cyprus on 16 January 2012 to join UNFICYP as a Civil Affairs Officer. Moshe Dayan is a Ghanaian who hails from Lawra in the Upper West Region of Ghana and has a combined experience of service as a Military Officer of the Ghana Armed Forces and a UN International Civilian in Lebanon (UNIFIL), Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Liberia (UNMIL) and Darfur-Sudan (UNAMID). His combined service has placed him in various peacekeeping roles including Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) operations; Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Recovery programs (RRR); Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) programmes; Support to UN assisted Elections; and Civil Affairs (CAS). Moshe is a graduate of the University of Ghana and the Ghana Military Academy and has undertaken several training courses in conflict management and peace support operations as a participant or facilitator with institutions including PPC, KAIPTC, ACCORD, LECIA, IPSTC and IPCS-DAR. Moshe is married to Bongi and they are blessed with one son, "Tawanda". Moshe loves to travel and his hobbies include tour-biking and game hunting.



Force Signal Officer

Lt Col Lucas Alejandro Quiroga assumed the post of Force Signal Officer in February. Born in Cordoba (Argentina) in 1964 Lt Col Quiroga graduated from the National Military Academy in December 1988 as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Signal Corps. During his career, he held the following positions: Platoon commander at 141st Signal Battalion, from 1989 to 1993; Cadet instructor and company commander in a Reserve Officers Academy, from 1994 to 2000; Commander of a Radio Technician course, at 602nd Signal Battalion, in 2001; Student at the Command and Staff College (Personnel Course), in 2002; Personnel Officer (S-1) at 181st Signal Battalion and Deputy Commander, 181st Signal Battalion. Before arriving in UNFICYP he was posted at the Army NCOs Academy where he was in charge of the Public Affairs Branch. He has experience in three previous UN missions: UNPROFOR (former Yugoslavia), as signal officer in the Argentinian Battalion in 1992/93; UNTSO (Middle East), as a military observer and operations officer in the Golan Heights in 2000; and MINUSTAH (Haiti), as assistant operations officer in the mission HQ, in 2005 He attended the following courses: Military Parachutist; Peacekeeping operations instructor; Military Observer; Staff officers for peacekeeping operations; Civil and Military Coordination (CIMIC); Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reinsertion (DDR); and International humanitarian law. Lt Col Quiroga holds a degree in History and is married to Cecilia Navarro and has two children, Marcos (13) and Maria Belen (9).



Aide de Camp to the Force Commander

Captain Dongyang Yang arrived in UNFICYP on 24 Feb 2012 to take up the post of Aide de Camp to the Force Commander. With the departure of Major Xiaojiang Chai, Yang is the third Chinese military officer and peacekeeper in UNFICYP. Captain Yang was born in Yunnan, the border province southwest of China. Although greatly influenced by his artist father, Capt Yang commissioned into Chinese Army in 2004. After graduating from the Chinese Army Command College in Nanjing in 2008, he served as platoon leader in an armored division, and as staff officer of liaison Bureau, Ministry of Defence in 2010. His interests include photography, swimming, reading, travelling and music.

Visits

Assistant Secretary-General for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Edmond Mulet on a familiarization visit to UNFICYP in February had the opportunity to see the work of UNFICYP peacekeepers first hand. The Assistant Secretary-General over two days visited all the sectors, met with mission leadership and spoke with individual peacekeepers on their role in supervising the ceasefire lines which extend over 180km, providing humanitarian assistance and maintaining the buffer zone between the two opposing sides while at the same time promoting the resumption of normal civilian activity in the buffer zone.



High Commissioner for Canada H.E. Robert Peck, visited UNFICYP on 9 January where he met with Special Representative of the Secretary-General Lisa Bittenheim and other members of the mission leadership.



Force Commander, Maj. Gen. Chao Liu received Vice Admiral Philippe Combes on 24 January.



Serbian Col Zeljko Petrovic visited UNFICYP on 24 February where he had the opportunity to inspect an honour guard and meet with members of the mission leadership.



Delegation of Defence Attaches based in Nicosia met with Force Commander, Maj. Gen. Chao Liu on 8 February and were taken on a tour of Old Nicosia Airport.

The Blue Beret would like to clarify that in the previous January-February edition it's reference to a visit by a Hungarian military delegation should have reported the Hungarian State Secretary of the Ministry of Defence, Lajos Fodor visited UNFICYP and met with members of senior mission leadership.

UNFICYP engineers repair bridges in the buffer zone.

