

BRAVE AND THE FALLEN

AUSTRALIA'S police involvement in the UN Peace-Keeping operation in Cyprus has been long and not without cost. It has had its fallen and its heroes.

The death of one Australian has been commemorated in the unveiling of a cairn.

Sergeant Ian Donald Ward died tragically on 12 November 1974, five days after he arrived in Cyprus as a member of the 11th Contingent.

A replacement from NSW Police, he was killed when the Land Rover in which he was travelling with fellow NSW member John Woolcott set off a landmine in an unmarked minefield.

They were taking a Turkish Cypriot family to a Turkish-controlled area at Lefka when the accident happened. John Woolcott was injured. One member of the family also was killed.

A cairn was erected on the Pedhoulas-Lefka road to commemorate the tragedy and each year a short service is held at the memorial.

Car accidents took the lives of two other members.

The Australians' first tragedy occurred on 26 July 1969 when Sergeant Lew Thomas, of South Australia, was killed in a car accident near Mari, 20kms from Limassol while returning from a water polo match.

On Sunday 29 August 1971, Inspector Paul Hackett, of NSW, was killed in an accident near Stroumbi while on the mail run from Nicosia to Polis. His vehicle left the road on a sharp corner and overturned.

Feats of bravery

Australians have received some high commendations for bravery and dedication to duty while in Cyprus.

The finest example involved the saving of a farmer's life.

Chief Inspector Jack Thurgar, now retired from the AFP, was in the Omorphita suburb of Nicosia supervising farming in Sector 4 of the Buffer Zone on 9 October 1979. He was watching to see no-one strayed into a large minefield. Suddenly a farmer drove his tractor and harrows straight into the minefield, ignoring warning shouts from troops at the nearby post.

"He had gone about 100 yards and was turning round when a rear tyre



Members of the 21st Contingent attend a service in November 1984 at the Ian Ward Memorial on the 10th anniversary of his death. Commander, Alan Morley, laid a wreath on behalf of members.

struck a land mine," Jack told the *Cyprus Weekly* newspaper later. "It cut the tractor in half."

The driver was blown into the air with the rear of the tractor.

"I could see he was still alive," Jack said. "His left arm was lacerated and he managed to get on to his elbow. He was trying to wave to us. I could see he was covered in oil and was blackened all over from the oil and the blast.

"He could not move his left arm or his feet. All he could do at this stage was put his right hand out in a gesture of help."

Jack, who nine years earlier was badly wounded by mines in Vietnam, knew the dangers.

"I could see how serious it was from the man's pleading motion, so I decided to go into the minefield myself. I told my sergeant not to allow anyone else in.

The history of Australian Police involvement in Cyprus has been recorded in the work "Police as Peacekeepers" by former Cyprus Contingent members Gavin Brown, Barry Barker and Terry Burke.

"I could see old tyre tracks and I thought if someone else could do it so could I.

"I could not leave him there. I can tell you I was very, very nervous. My knees felt like jelly," Jack said.

"Usually, when anti-tank mines are laid it is normal practice to put anti-personnel mines around them. As I was going along I could see the anti-tank mines where the rain had washed some of the earth away.

"At this point I asked myself the question — is it worth it? But then I was no more than 30 yards from the man. He was still conscious. Perhaps he could not hear due to the blast of the mine, but I'm sure he could see me.

"He tried to crawl across to me, holding his hand out, saying something incoherent.

"I kept going and when I reached him I managed to get him over my shoulders and turned back trying to follow my footsteps.

"Together we were almost 400 pounds which would set off any mine if we were unlucky to step on one.

"The ground was hard and there were no tell-tale signs and I just had to take the chance. Also time was of such great importance that I had to take him out the short way."

He carried the farmer to safety and his wounds were dressed quickly

before he was loaded into a helicopter and flown to hospital.

Jack has always been reticent about discussing the incident.

"It was a UN team effort that got him out, a combination of everybody," was his comment immediately after the event.

Jack received the Star of Courage in a Canberra ceremony on 19 March, 1980, and was officially commended by the President of Cyprus and by the Force Commander.

The citation for the award summarised his bravery with the words: "His cool and calculated reaction to the situation and his courageous decision to enter the minefield, well knowing the dangers, saved a life, was in the highest tradition of the service and is worthy of high official recognition."

Armed confrontation

Sergeant Vince Mylett, of Eastern Region, and Sergeant Greg Slater, of the ACT Region, were presented with UN awards and Commissioner's commendations for their bravery in an incident in the Buffer Zone on 28 August 1986.

The AUSTCIVPOL Contingent had been assigned the task of preventing citizens from entering an area where UN troops were attempting to resolve a territorial confrontation between two groups of angry, armed soldiers.

Because of security reasons, the local people had not been told of the UN military operation to defuse the situation, but the Australians were asked to stand by in case of civilian problems.

The UN operation began at about 7.30am but shortly after an elderly woman walked from her house into the street. Finding she was suddenly in danger from agitated soldiers and confused by the situation, she stood in the street blessing herself and oblivious to the calls to go back inside.

Sergeants Mylett and Slater, although unarmed, moved towards the woman. Sergeant Mylett reached her first and began to lead her to safety. Sergeant Slater met them and escorted them the remainder of the way.

The two officers were presented with awards by the UN Force Commander, Austrian Major-General Greindl, in a special ceremony on the island on 20 January 1987.

The Commander's citation reads: "Throughout the incident both Sergeant Mylett and Sergeant Slater were unarmed and clearly in danger from the agitated Turkish soldiers, threatening both Sergeant Mylett and the old woman. His prompt action and total disregard for his personal safety undoubtedly saved the elderly woman from a potentially lethal situation. In addition, his action contributed to the

overall success of the operation. He is a credit to both the Australian Civilian Police Contingent and the United Nations Force in Cyprus."

Both were awarded Commissioner's Certificates by the then AFP Commissioner, Major-General Ron Grey, for "Professionalism and bravery displayed in performing their duties in a dangerous situation within the United Nations Buffer Zone".



Chief Inspector Jack Thurgar talks with the rescued farmer and family members.

TWO-MAN UN TEAM GOES TO THAILAND

AFP officers also are involved in another United Nations Civilian Police operation — on the Thailand-Kampuchea border.

Superintendents Bill Kirk and Barry Carpenter have been posted for twelve months in Aranyaprathet, Thailand, attached to the UN Border Relief Operation (UNBRO).

They are working as part of a team of five Security Liaison Officers to liaise between UNBRO and the Displaced Persons Protection Unit (DPPU), a newly created troop of Thai Guards, to improve law and order in border camps housing 300 000 displaced Khmers.

The international policing team, including officers from Sweden, Britain and the USA, become the first western police officers based in

Thailand to improve security of Indo-Chinese refugees since the major influx of refugees in 1975.

The officers also provide training for Khmer Civilian Guards, organised and recruited by the Khmer administrations at the camps. While UNBRO provides food and medical supplies to people in the border camps, Thai authorities control them. Each camp has been allowed to establish its own Khmer administration.

The Security Liaison Officers will help the DPPU monitor the procedures and use of camp justice committees and camp jails, and assist the DPPU and the camp administrators in drawing up and implementing camp rules and procedures.