

Australia's UN service is a long and proud tradition

By Terry Browne

AUSTRALIA'S involvement in UN special peacekeeping missions such as that engaging the AFP in Cyprus goes back more than 40 years.

It has been a heroic, if somewhat diverse, labour and witnessed the extension of Australian service, both civil and military, around the world.

Australia was first asked to provide personnel for a task nominated by the UN Secretary-General in 1947. The mission was with the UN Commission for Indonesia, which was of relatively short duration.

Another 1947 UN group to which Australia was asked to contribute was UNSCOB – the United Nations Special Committee for the Balkans. Australia's contribution was a single military officer.

From that time there was a succession of requests by the UN for Australian military assistance, but in 1964 came the first request for Australian police to act as UN peacekeepers.

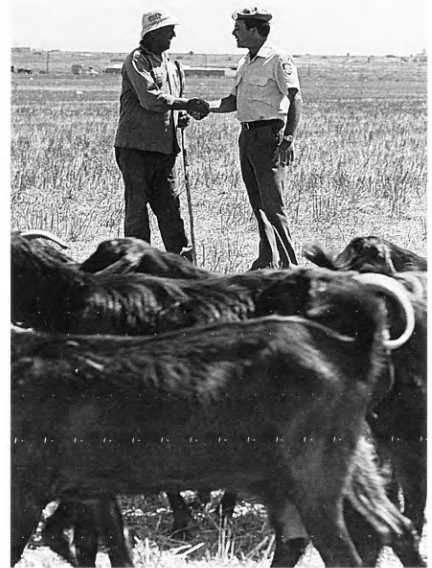
Police Tasks

These police peacekeeping tasks each carry a particular UN acronym.

UNFICYP – the United Nations Forces in Cyprus has for 30 years involved Australian police in keeping the peace between hostile factions in Cyprus. In that time 41 contingents of Australian police have served in Cyprus. Since 1979 the AFP has been the sole provider of police for this task.

UNBRO – the United Nations Border Relief Organisation saw the AFP provide assistance in establishing the framework for law and order in Thai border camps for the period 1989 to 1993.

UNTAC – In 1992-93, two successive contingents of 10 worked as part of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia. The contingents worked in north-western Cambodia and assisted in establishing orderly progress to democratic elections by training local police and



In Cyprus AFP members have established friendly relationships with communities on both sides of the conflict.

investigating human rights violations.

Similar commitments have followed with the AFP contributing two police advisors to UNOSOM – The United Nations Operation in Somalia in 1992, and in 1994 two contingents of 16 served with UNOMOZ – The United Nations Operation in Mozambique.

According to officers who have served under the blue beret, ordinary people in trouble-plagued areas understand little of the politics of the situation which besets them. Their hope from life is to have the peace in which to bring up their children and to prosper in old age.

In all the countries where Australian police are serving, or have served, on UN missions, foreigners have usually been warriors in an invasion force. Today the foreigner in the pale blue beret is still a warrior, but one who stands between opposing factions on a mission of peace. □



While in Cambodia, AFP members assisted in the delivery of school supplies to village schools. In the service of the UN, AFP members have always managed to combine humanitarian work with their work as peacekeepers.