

# 40 YEARS OF UN AID

**A**USTRALIA's involvement in UN special peace-keeping 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 — across the world.

Service under the pale blue UN banner has, however, done more than provide our nation with the chance to selflessly help others. It has introduced into our language a virtual lexicon of acronyms, some of which are all but forgotten while others survive through longevity.

Australia was first asked to provide personnel for a task nominated by the UN Secretary-General way back in 1947. The mission was with the UN Commission for Indonesia, which never developed an acronym of its own and was of relatively short duration.

Another 1947 UN group to which Australia was asked to contribute was UNSCOB — for those whose memories have slipped a little — the United Nations Special Committee for the Balkans. Our contribution was a single military officer.

## Special tasks

It seems 1947 was a vintage year for UN special tasks because we find its date on yet another special unit to which Australia was asked to contribute, UNCOK — and for those who haven't guessed, that stood for UN Committee on Korea. Both the RAAF and the Army contributed one man to that study but within a few years Korea would absorb a lot more of Australia's and the UN's attention.

The next call from the UN for Australia to contribute was in 1948 and today 13 Australian Army officers still serve under the aegis of UNTSO, the UN Truce Supervisory Organisation, formed to watch the ceasefire lines between Arab and Israeli soldiers after Israel's war for independence.

It is difficult to maintain chronological order for the various UN deployments but we have been with UNEF II (the UN Emergency Force) which helped keep separate Egyptian and Israeli forces along the Suez Canal from 1973 to 1979.

UNDOF (UN Disengagement Observer Forces) and its Australian personnel have been patrolling the ceasefire lines between Israel and Syria for about the same time.

In 1978 Australia contributed to UNIFIL (the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) but there have been others too.

UNYOM (the UN Yemen Observer Mission) occupied one of our soldiers for a while in 1963 while UNIMOG (which is also the title of a very versatile truck but in this context stands for UN Military Observer Group) checks things between Iran and Iraq. UNIMOGIP, despite its unwieldy nature, did great service as the UN Military Observer Group between India and Pakistan from 1949 to 1986 until we pulled out.

UNTAG, the United Nations Transition Assistance Group is the umbrella under which Australian Army engineers are removing mines and rebuilding infrastructure in Namibia prior to internationally-supervised elections to be held there later this year.

UNBRO — the United Nations Border Relief Organisation is manned by the AFP and maintains surveillance

of the Thai-Cambodia troubled border area. It is of relatively recent origin.

UNFICYP is the last of the UN groups to which Australia has contributed which need concern us here — the United Nations Peace-keeping Force in Cyprus.

For a quarter of a century now Australian police have walked a dead straight but razor-edged line between two latently hostile peoples and done it with their consent.

But the Australian police on Cyprus and in military units scattered far from home in the world's service are symbolic of more than the presence of "force". The dose of Australian friendship they have always taken with them on their duties has been attested to in scores of references.

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 nor much care for it when they do. Their hope from life is the peace in which to bring up their children and prosper in old age.

The friendly foreigner standing between them and their troubles comes from a long line of warriors — but now he's a man of peace. •



*Improving relations with the people is a vital part of the work of the AFP men in Cyprus. The Australians are on very good terms with both Greek and Turkish Cypriots.*