

AFP's 53rd contingent of peacekeepers to Cyprus takes up duty



The AFP's 53rd peacekeeping contingent to Cyprus. Back row from left: AUSTCIVPOL officers Sergeant Keith White, Station Sergeant John Collins, Sergeants Brett Simpson, Ron Presswell and Joseph Kocka, and Station Sergeant Gary Brown. Front: AUSTCIVPOL officers Sergeant Kellie Ward, Superintendent Brian Dobrich and Station Sergeant Tracey Duck.

The AFP's 53rd contingent of peacekeepers to Cyprus left Australia on August 3.

They are part of a 20-member rotational team serving with the United Nations Civilian Police (UNCIVPOL) on the island.

The members undertook a pre-deployment training course at the Australian Federal Police College at Barton in the ACT in July which included sessions about the role of the United Nations, peace support operations, military culture, mine safety, map reading, and a presentation from the Cyprus High Commission.

AFP members patrol two sectors in a buffer zone which extends the length of the island and varies in width from a few metres to several kilometres. They support Argentinian troops in sector one and British troops in sector two.

They are being led by AUSTCIVPOL Superintendent Brian Dobrich from Northern Region and will return to Australia in February 1998.

Peacekeeping in Cyprus began after the island's population was on the brink of war in December, 1963. Greek Cypriots, who comprised about three-quarters of the island's population, sought union with Greece, a move resisted by the Turkish Cypriots who made up just under a fifth of the total population.

UNCIVPOL was the result of an appeal for UN member countries to provide civilian police to carry out a purely liaison and observer role in the tense situation.

Inter-communal violence erupted on the island in August last year leaving one person dead and about 50 others injured but the situation returned to one of relative calm and has since remained stable.