

ANTI TANK PLATOON RECOLLECTIONS OF THE CYPRUS EMERGENCY 1974

By Lt Col W J Blythe MBE



INTRODUCTION

By April 1974, 1 RS had deployed from Assaye Barracks in Tidworth more often than we could remember on emergency tours in Northern Ireland and to NATO exercises in Greece, Turkey, Denmark and Norway. The pace had become exhausting. Our reward was to be the Western Sovereign Base Battalion at Episkopi on the south coast of Cyprus between Paphos and Limassol. We were to be there for two years, with our families, to enjoy sunshine, sport and adventurous training. So confident were we of the prospect that Burns's warning escaped us, that "the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley".

All preparations had been made to move the Battalion from RAF Brize Norton by Britannia air-trooper to RAF Akrotiri. The complacency of which Burns had warned was shattered when I was summoned to the Adjutant's office to be told that the Unit Emplanement Officer's stomach ulcer had burst and that I was now the UEO. The Movements Staff at Brize were exceptionally helpful but a week of in-flight meals in the Gateway Hotel was a test of gastric resilience that threatened me with a stomach ulcer.

Eventually, my turn came in charge of the final flight which was uneventful, unlike that of the Mortar Officer, Capt James Finlay on the flight before mine. Overhead Gibraltar, there was an outbreak of vomiting and diarrhea. Over Malta, all the vomit bags, toilet paper and tissues had been used up, and on arrival at Akrotiri all were quarantined.

LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

Julius Caesar famously divided Gaul into three parts and our tour in Cyprus fell into three phases. The first phase resembled the land of milk and honey. We readily settled into comfortable accommodation and a new routine.

Muster parade was in the cool of the morning and the working day ended early enough for recreation in the afternoons. In Support Company, Anti Tank, Mortar and Assault Pioneer cadres were held.

Converting from WOMBAT, with which we had been equipped in Tidworth, to its CONBAT predecessor was something of a come-down. Whereas WOMBAT was light and vehicle mounted, CONBAT was heavy and towed.



Although our Royal Anglian predecessors left written sight settings, the standard practice was to zero guns as soon as possible after taking charge of them. I asked for ammunition for zeroing but was told that, as there was no tank threat, the priority was low.

Limassol was the nearest town with shops, restaurants and bars, some of the latter in the red-light district. One of the Platoon explained an encounter he had had when approached in such a bar by a lady of the night. "Ye'd never credit it," he told us, "who should it be but wee Jessie McSomething-or-other, who was in my class at the school. I'm on a tour wi' The Royals and she's daein another kind o' tour! She tried to entice me intae her boudoir, but I didnae because I ken her ma." Fact stranger than fiction.

There were outings to Famagusta on the east coast with its Ottoman fortress. Famagusta was subsequently bombed by the Turkish air force and its once prosperous beach-front Golden Mile of luxury hotels were soon to be empty shells. Nicosia held little attraction, there being the sensitivity of the Green Line, monitored by the United Nations Force UNFICYP which kept the peace between Greeks and Turks in that divided city.



Paphos was then a small fishing village and not the sprawling tourist destination of today. At the Pelican Restaurant by the harbour, taking its name from the pelican that stood sentry at the front door, waiters brought tray after tray of the local catch, across the road, to the harbour side tables. In today's volume of traffic, the



waiter would not survive half a shift were he not to observe the green cross code.

Kyrenia on the north coast was similar with its harbour, dusty streets and a Crusader castle. I went only once, denied return visits by the partitioning of the island that was soon to occur.

Closer to base was Halal's Kebab restaurant in the Turkish quarter of Limassol. Halal always gave a warm welcome by jolting his ancient juke box into action with Harry Lauder singing *Sailing Down the Clyde*. Here too, meze courses came thick and fast. Grilled haloumi cheese, chicken livers, minced lamb wrapped in vine leaves, sausages, roast chicken, barbequed lamb, salads, bread and eventually fruit and thick sweet coffee accompanied by Turkish delight. Halal served *kokineli* at no charge, this being local wine below the standard for bottling.

I invested in a hand painted mustard yellow Triumph Spitfire. Costing next to nothing, it was still over-priced. In the course of negotiation, the Cypriot vendor assured me that if anything needed attention, his mechanics would see to it at no extra charge. I immediately ordered new tyres, which he soon informed were not within his definition of "no extra charge". But by then it was too late and I drove off with the only road-worthy parts of the car having cost me nothing.



At 50 mph, the front wheels wobbled violently, threatening to shake the whole car apart but, in 1974, no road on the island was suitable for driving at 50 mph, so it didn't matter. When switching between full and dipped beams, all would be plunged into darkness, so driving by night on the hairpin bends through Happy Valley could be disconcerting.

The car served me well in summer although less so in winter, as I discovered during a sudden downpour. I had fitted the roof but, just when I needed them most in failing light and

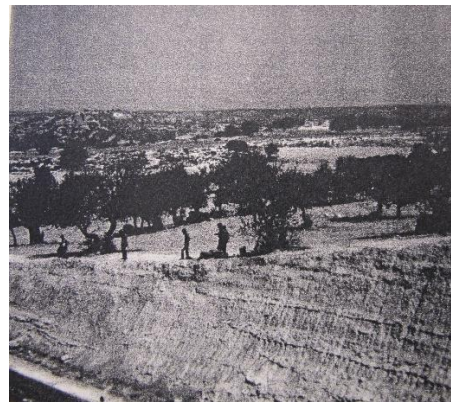
heavy rain, I flicked the switch for the windscreen wipers. Nothing happened. But nothing would, because during the summer months there was no need for wipers and the previous owner had removed them. I limped back to Episkopi, steering with one very wet and cold hand out an open side window, doing a poor job of windscreen wiping. But at least the tyres were good.

THE BEST LAID PLANS OF MICE AND MEN

One morning dawned to the news of a coup among the Greeks of the Cypriot Government. The issues included Cyprus's relationship with Greece, which had caused the emergency of 1956, during which 1 RS had mounted internal security operations against Eoka insurgents. The other was the ever present tension between the Greek and Turkish communities.

Support Company was the standby company that day, in the rifle as opposed to support weapons role, and the Anti Tank Platoon was dispatched to check the roads entering the SBA from both the west and the east. CSgt Hill and I set off with half the Platoon to the west, having sent the other half to the east. On the map, the SBA boundary marking blurred the exact course of the road at the western extremity, beyond which we had no jurisdiction. To complicate the issue, a recently built stretch of road had replaced the previous route. Nearby, on a table-topped ridge towards the sea was Bloodhound Camp where surface to air missiles pointed skywards, contributing to the RAF Akrotiri air defence plan.

Continuing towards the SBA boundary, we encountered a motley crew of a dozen or so Turkish militia, a swarthy bunch of cut-throats armed with shotguns and hunting rifles, astride a cutting through which the road from Bloodhound Camp ran. Which of us was more surprised was hard to tell but our arrival was met with much shouting and cocking of weapons. Time for the old "take me to your leader" routine, I thought. The leader was a swashbuckling youth with a bolt action rifle and a wicked looking dagger in his belt. If this was the stuff of diplomacy, it was typically inconclusive.



Turkish militia at the cutting

My line was that he was bearing arms within the SBA and that he should hand them over or take them elsewhere. His was that they were just outside the boundary of the SBA and had every right to be impersonating bandits. The *impasse* was broken by CSgt Hill calling me to the radio. I left the swashbuckling youth and his gangsters with the old story that I'd be back later and he'd better be gone, which convinced neither of us.

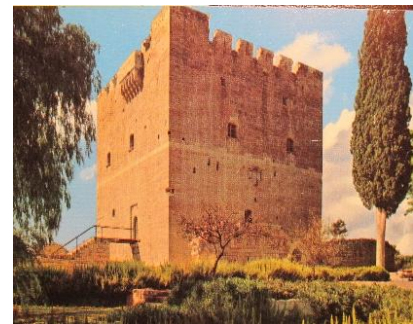
I reported to Maj John Dent, OC Support Company, who informed me that a convoy of Cypriot National Guard (CNG), a Greek Cypriot militia, was expected to transit the SBA imminently. I was to shepherd them through, ensuring that they did not attack any Turkish villages within the SBA. We made our way to the SBA boundary, where half the Platoon was to remain, and awaited the arrival of the convoy.

When the CNG convoy arrived, about a company strong, it careered past and headed eastwards with CSgt Hill and me in hot pursuit. The CNG, another swarthy bunch of cut-throats wore a mixture of civilian clothes, battle dress and olive green with 1938 pattern webbing, some wearing steel helmets of various patterns. Their weapons were No 4 rifles, Brens and Stens. Their vehicles were a mixture of early Landrovers, Bedford trucks and civilian vehicles.

In our Landrover, CSgt Hill and I leapfrogged up the convoy, reporting over the radio. The CNG continued right through the SBA without slowing down, brandishing their weapons at us. To the east of Episkopi Garrison is the Roman archeological site of Curium on a promontory overlooking the fertile plain to the south of Episkopi village, across which a mile long stretch of tarmac road ends at the eastern end of the SBA in a T-junction, right to RAF Akrotiri and left past Kolossi Castle, a Crusader tower, to Limassol beyond. The CNG convoy turned left and trundled out of sight. What they were embarked upon we never found out although later supposed it might have been to herd Turks, probably Halal of kebab fame among them, into the Limassol soccer stadium where they were kept without adequate shade, food or water before eventually being deported to northern Cyprus.

The Anti Tank Platoon was now split between either end of the SBA where they established vehicle check points (VCPs), codenamed Stuck Pig and Hard Ride, to control main road entry and exit. This left CSgt Hill and myself as free-runners with Ptes Pearson and Thompson, our driver and radio operator respectively. Tragically, John Pearson was to be killed along with two others the following year by the IRA in South Armagh.

Those of the Anti Tank Platoon at the east end of the M1 alerted me to the latter-day Crusaders atop Kolossi Castle with a Browning machine gun and a 3.5 inch rocket launcher. Earlier in the morning they had announced their presence by firing a burst over the heads of the Section at the junction. I crept along the roadside ditch to ascertain whether they were still there.



I hadn't gone far when a voice called from thick cover on the other side of the road, "Oi! You! Yes, you!"

The voice belonged to a corporal of the cavalry regiment contributing to UNFICYP. In his Ferret scout car, he had been left to keep an eye on Kolossi, while the remainder of his troop had gone elsewhere. We swapped our respective understandings of what was going on, which would have had difficulty in covering a postage stamp.

Suddenly, he pressed his earphones to his ears and announced, "Gotta go! But first, let me tell you what we were up to earlier this morning."

"Wot a laugh! There's a village a couple of miles in that direction" nodding to the north, "The Troop was driving through and spotted a bunch of desperados, armed to the teeth, lounging outside a café. So we stops, and asks them wot they're abaht. They gets all prickly like, brandishin' their weapons and tells us to move on. The ringleader gets up orf his chair with his pistol, so our Troop Sergeant battens down, orders 'is driver to mount the steps onto the terrace where they're getting all agitated, and depresses his 0.3 Browning, pointing right at the hero waving 'is pistol like Errol Flynn, who has a fit of the vapours and shoots himself in the foot! Wot a laugh!"

We were instructed to remain at Stuck Pig and Hard Ride (whoever dreamed up these names excelled themselves) and also at Curium, where we would be joined by some of the Mortar Platoon, likewise in the rifle role. An RV was arranged on the road at the foot of the Curium cliffs (right) and CSgt Hill and I were soon joined by John Dent and WO2 Scoular.



We prepared to spend the night on top of the promontory which afforded not only a better view in all directions but also better security. The view was indeed better in all directions –

but not just for us. Standing up we were skylined and soon attracted fire from somewhere in the wadi to the north. CSgt Hill and Sgts Russell and Canning of the Mortar Platoon and I were particularly exposed. I found a shallow hollow to press myself into while the other three made the comic sight of doing their level best to take cover, all three of them, behind a discarded A41 battery. We soon found alternative cover as the small arms fire was augmented by mortar bursts. It was becoming the norm for the CNG to announce their presence by trying to kill us, even though they really had no truck with us, nor we with them. It seemed very odd.

We reckoned the machine gun was a Bren and that the mortar was of the 2-inch variety, but scouring the wadi with binoculars didn't reveal the firing points. I got onto the radio to Battalion HQ and sent a contact report as per the Voice Procedure pamphlet, "Hello 0, this is 56. Contact, now, from the area of grid 123456. Machine gun and mortar fire. Over"

Silence from the other end, so I sent it again, and for a third time. No response. So, I tried a different tack, asking for a radio check. The reply was immediate, "0 OK. Have you been trying to contact me?" I re-sent the contact report. Once again, silence.

Now frustrated, I dispensed with voice procedure, "Listen to me. We are under machine gun and mortar fire. Do you understand?" Silence until, hesitantly, "About the fire, is it a big fire? Can you see the flames? Is there much smoke? Has the fire brigade arrived?"

It bears explanation that, at this early stage of the 1974 emergency, we felt a bit forgotten and even disbelieved. It was as if HM Government, until the penny eventually dropped, was in denial because Greece and Turkey were fellow NATO allies. This percolated down the chain of command – until it got to Support Company of the First and Royal Regiment of Foot, who knew exactly what was going on and what to do about it.

By this time, our assailants had either run out of ammunition or had lost interest because they stopped their fruitless attempts and broke cover, pausing momentarily on a crest to wave to us before disappearing from view. We didn't return fire as they were outside the SBA and, besides, there would have been no point.

Daylight fading, we stood-to, posted sentries and settled down for the night. CSgt Clark did the breakfast rounds in the morning and we were visited by John Dent and WO2 Scoular. Some roulement at the VCPs seemed likely but, until it came about, we would remain. Having breakfasted, CSgt Hill and I with Privates Pearson and Thompson set off for the eastern VCP.

CSgt Clark delivering breakfast



On our return, towards the western end of the M1, we detected a commotion in Episkopi Village, then a mixed Greek and Turkish village, just outside the SBA. Two hundred or so metres of fields separated the southern edge of the village from the M1. Inspection through binoculars revealed about 70 women and children with a few donkeys bearing belongings. It was evident that they were Turks being driven out by their Greek neighbours. Suddenly, machine gun and rifle fire kicked up dust in the fields around us and in the area of the fleeing Turks. The firing point seemed to be on higher ground to the east. If this was the CNG bidding us good morning, their intentions would be anything but charitable towards the Turks.

We moved the Landrover towards cover and reported on the radio. CSgt Hill and I started to make our way along a shallow ditch towards the fleeing Turks. "I'm coming with you", Hill

insisted, "I dinna want you getting oot of your depth", which I didn't find altogether reassuring. He followed up with a *sotto voce*, "I dinna ken who your scriptwriter is but some of his jokes are no awfy funny."

A combination of shouting and waving directed the fleeing Turks towards the trees at the base of the Curium promontory. Although standing ready to block any CNG follow up, we left them to their own devices on the beach a little further round to the west, now a popular swimming spot with coffee shops and ice cream stalls.

Among the trees we found a small Greek Orthodox chapel, cool and calm within, in contrast to both the heat of the day and the activities of the CNG. The chapel is still there, the surrounding shrubs have been cleared, although nowadays the door is generally locked.



The photograph shows CSgt Hill briefing members of the ATk PI soon after the incident near Episkopi village.

Also shown are Ptes Chapman, Stewart, Pearson and Thompson with Pte Hogg kneeling front right.

Pte Pearson, kneeling behind Pte Hogg, was killed in South Armagh the following year,

By now, Happy Valley had drawn hundreds of Turkish refugees. A civil aid plan provided tentage, latrines and water. Here I renewed acquaintance with the swashbuckling youth of a few days before, now without either rifle or dagger. Most, if not all, of these people eventually went to the Turkish north, some possibly via the soccer stadium in Limassol.



The Happy Valley Refugee Camp

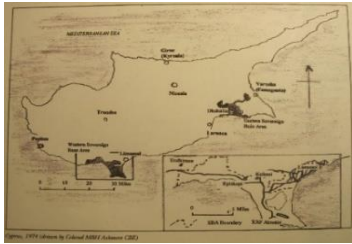


The GOC, Maj John Dent and the author in the Refugee Camp

A week later, the Turkish Army invaded around Kyrenia in the north. We waited and watched on heightened alert state. Apart from seeing the Turkish air force low over the area of Paphos to our west, nothing happened to encourage us to believe that we might somehow become involved.

Prior to all this, Support Company had been booked onto the small arms ranges in the Eastern SBA, to fire our Annual Personal Weapons Test. There being no imminent threat to

the Western SBA or, crucially at this stage, to our families in Limassol, it was decided that we should keep our range bookings. After all, the road between Limassol and Larnaca was open, so we could drive back in just a few hours if need be.



We set off in convoy for Alexander Barracks in the Eastern SBA. After our evening meal, we sat back in the warmth of the evening to the accompaniment of repeated “crumps” of mortar rounds landing around Larnaca. Greeks and Turks were busy settling old scores there too.

Instead of range practices the next morning, we were re-tasked to form a loose cordon on the Famagusta side of the SBA outside which a Turkish refugee camp had sprung up, lest there might be incursions into the SBA. The Anti Tank Platoon was allocated a sector to patrol and to monitor with OPs during the hours of darkness, so we advertised our presence openly. Stirring in a packet of soup powder, I brought my mess tin to the boil and set it aside to cool while attending to something else. By the time I got round to the soup, it was dark and I thought some of the lumps rather crunchy. When I came to clean my mess tin by torchlight, the crunchy bits turned out to be ants, each nearly an inch long. Although a crunchy end for several ants, I suffered no ill effects.

By now, the main east - west road had been closed, so we were ordered to King's Field to be flown back to Akrotiri. King's Field, a dirt strip and the base for the Cyprus sport parachuting club, could take C130s which were to be our mode of transport.



An RAF movements crew arrived and started to manifest troops, weapons, ammunition, vehicles and stores. We were aware of farmers going about their business but something else occurred that was unsettling. A number of men were driven in the back of an open truck from the direction of Larnaca up a wadi to the north, outside the SBA. A short while after they had gone from view, there was a burst of firing and I have since wondered whether what we had heard was what is now euphemistically known as “ethnic cleansing”. Greeks settling old scores with local Turks.

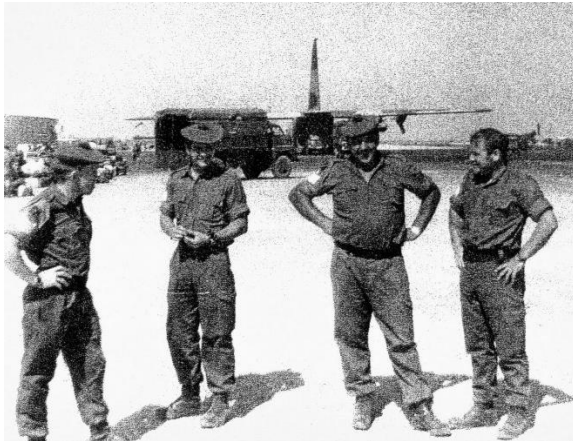
The RAF movements Flight Sergeant approached with the completed manifest papers which he made great play of talking through with us. Our transport approaching, he attempted brinkmanship.

“Everything's in order”, he announced, “Troops with their weapons listed by chalk, ammunition, vehicles and stores. Except that is”, he lamented with undertaker's demeanour, “the canteen stock which is non-military and will have to be left behind.”

The response introduced the Flight Sergeant to the translation of *Nemo Me Impune Lacessit* into broad Scots. “These are the regulations”, he retorted sniffily, “Take it or leave it.” By now the C130s were about to land for a rapid turnaround.

Murder might have been done that day but for the intervention of WO2 Scoular with disarming geniality. “No problem”, he announced, “The canteen stock can stay”, as the rest of us looked on in disbelief. The Flight Sergeant flounced off to announce to his crew that they were about to have drinks on us as soon as we had departed, while Scoular instructed

the issuing of two beers per man, to be consumed immediately at no charge to the individuals, and the soft drinks were poured into the dust.



ATk PI stalwarts: Sgt Muir, Sgt Dyer, CSgt Hill, Sgt Adams with one of the C130 in the background



The canteen stock that the RAF didn't get their hands on

It was a short hop from King's Field to Akrotiri and, back in Episkopi, it was immediately clear that the tempo was changing. We soon received orders for evacuating the families from Limassol, which was becoming increasingly violent. If the Battalion had to fight its way into Limassol, the Anti Tank Platoon was to have provided flank protection to two Rifle Companies forward and the third in reserve. The Recce Platoon had already proved off-road routes lest cross country movement became necessary.



The need to implement the plan was superseded by the gallantry of Capt Simon Barnetson and LCpl Spike Milligan who, along with the SBA political officer, drove into Limassol to broker a ceasefire between factions that were bent on murdering each other. Driving only so far because their Landrover's radiator was shot through, their final approach was on foot. A ceasefire was arranged and the families were evacuated safely, first into the SBA and then by air from Akrotiri to Edinburgh where an RS-led reception committee marched them into married quarters.

Great spirit was displayed by the families who regarded it all as something of an adventure despite the disappointment of leaving sunny Cyprus.



The Regimental Band playing for some of the families awaiting repatriation.

Simon and the SBA political officer were awarded Queen's Gallantry Medals and Spike Milligan was mentioned in dispatches. A few years after leaving the Army, Spike was in Bonnyrigg High Street when he and some others foiled an armed bank robbery, for which they were awarded QGMs.

It is a feature of the human condition that, every now and again, there are those who go off the rails and, in the context of recovering furniture from the vacated married quarters in Limassol, three Royals were court martialled for showing exceptional but unauthorized entrepreneurialism. The three in question had entered the secondhand furniture business and, instead of returning all items to the Barrack Inventory Accountant store, were selling some on the local market.



They were caught and paid the price, including one chap who had been in my 5 Platoon in Osnabruck in 1969. Some years later, after he had left the Army, I bumped into him in Edinburgh. On enquiring what he was doing in civvy street, he replied wryly, "I'm still in furniture", swiftly adding, "But I'm in management now!" Many years later, at his funeral, I was able to tell his grandson to be proud of him because, one night in West Belfast during one of the big riots of 1970, Henry Wood had dragged me out of harm's way after I had gone down having being hit by a brick.



No sooner than the evacuation of the families was under way, the Anti Tank Platoon was sent to Mount Olympus where the RAF radar "golf balls" are located. The station commander had become concerned about the security of his perimeter and had called for assistance. The RAF would continue to guard themselves but we would review their stand-to and contingency arrangements, and refresh them on their weapon handling.

As we awaited helicopter lift, I explained the mission to the platoon and added that, should the golf balls' perimeter come under threat by the time we arrived, we would be dropped off short and fight our way in. This proved not to be necessary and we landed within the perimeter. An RAF guide led us to the centre of the site, past the guard dogs' kennels, setting off ferocious and sustained barking. Some of the platoon barked back.



As CSgt Hill identified stand-to positions, I was led to the Station Commander who welcomed me frostily, "Kindly instruct your soldiers not to bark at my dogs!" It turned out that his command was about 70 strong with a full complement of rifles and SMGs. I recommended to him that we would stand-to jointly at last light and in the morning, that the RAF would provide sentries day and night and that I would review their contingency plans which we would rehearse the following day. A programme of weapon handling instruction for the entire station would also be delivered. I went to bed that night secure in the knowledge that we were doing a good job but awoke in the morning so badly bitten by mosquitoes that I could barely open my eyes. In retaliation, I sprayed the room with so much DDT that I woke the following morning half poisoned. In the interests of good inter-Service relations, the Jocks refrained from barking at the guard dogs but continued to growl at them.



As the Turkish invasion force established itself in northern Cyprus, elements of 19 Brigade from the UK and 41 Commando Royal Marines from Malta arrived to reinforce. UNFICYP became concerned about the security of Nicosia airport and issued a plea for an anti tank capability.

Overnight, ammunition became available, including for zeroing. A make-shift target was a rock a short distance off shore and a gun line was marked out, on land, at the distance where the trajectories of main armament and spotting rifle coincide.

We would be first, with the Marines following on the next morning, and we set off in convoy with a Bedford bringing up the rear with the ammunition. However, we had not reckoned on a taxi driver stopping without warning in the middle of the road.



All the gun vehicles stopped in time but the Bedford ran into the back of the rearmost gun. There followed a series of collisions as the momentum of the Bedford shunted each gun and vehicle into the one in front. The radiator grill of the Bedford and those of some of the Landrovers were well and truly bashed although the guns suffered no damage.

Every picture tells a story. In this one are MTO Lt Bob MacDonald, Sp Coy MT Sgt Jimmy Stewart, Bedford driver Cpl Joe Shaw.

Early next morning, Plan B swung into action and we joined the Marines on the impromptu range. Both platoons lined up and zeroed successfully, in the process removing the rock from the map. We later learned that the rock had been a local navigation aide and had to be replaced by a buoy.

We never did deploy to Nicosia airport.



KEEPING OCCUPIED

This drew the second phase of the tour to a close and we renewed acquaintance with 10th (Princess Mary's Own) Gurkha Rifles who had arrived with 19 Bde. 10 GR moved into Alexander Barracks where Support Company had been only a short time previously. Immediately, an RS platoon went over to join 10 GR and a platoon of 10 GR joined 1 RS, and Support Company looked forward to returning to the Eastern SBA ranges to fire our range practices.



The few days there were very relaxing in a tented camp, albeit beset with flies which drove us to distraction and even survived the liberal applications of DDT around his kitchen area by Sergeant Wright and his cooks. In addition to “shooting for our pay”, rifle matches were fired against 10 GR who were skillful marksmen. On the final day, 10 GR brought out a curry lunch to our range camp after which we all retired to Alexander Barracks for a sports afternoon. I have a memory of Jocks and Gurkhas in small groups sitting on the playing fields with cases of beer in the gloaming, language being no barrier to communication, while the officers and SNCOs retired to their respective messes.



RSMs Kabitman Rai and Gilbert at Alexander Barracks

A second encounter with 41 Cdo was a challenge to meet at Happy Valley, which we accepted with alacrity because the 1 RS XV was playing a decent standard of rugby. “We’ll hammer you!” threatened the 41 Cdo skipper and I began to think they might when the marines took to the pitch with Bobby Clark as their hooker. Bobby, a Royal Navy education officer serving in 41 Cdo at the time, had been playing for Scotland in recent seasons and I knew him from home. Apprehension was short lived because we put 41 Cdo’s gas at a wee peep by taking 40 points off them, and I took two balls off Bobby against the head because he was let down by his props, whereas I had John Sands and Cush Henderson as mine. These were in the days when scrum halves put the ball into the centre of the tunnel, allowing hookers to engage in fair contest for bragging rights.

Sport became increasingly important in our routine because, without the families or the opportunity to travel freely around the island, we started to look forward to returning to Edinburgh. Much time was spent in Happy Valley which was irrigated by the water treatment plant that converted the garrison’s sewage into potable water – or so we were assured. Treated it may have been but potable it emphatically was not! Despite decent shower facilities, skinned knees and elbows became septic and needed treatment.



All Royals who served during the Cyprus tour will remember the VCPs at each end of the SBA, this one on the western boundary.

They will probably also remember the harshness of the sunlight reflected off the rock, and the huge wasps that were attracted by the perpetual urn of hot sweet tea.

Support Company established a tented camp on the beach below Bloodhound Camp, adding a popular phase to the Companies’ roulement of duties.



The beach camp from above

The officers and SNCOs messed together which was always fun. Our main meal was in the evening and we would gather by the table where the cooks set out their fare. Once all the soldiers had filed past, we would take our share to where we sat together to eat and talk and plan for the morrow.

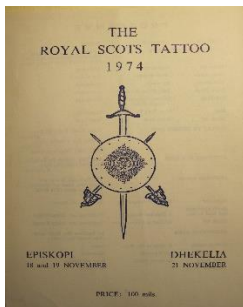
A mile or so to the west of the beach camp was Evdimou Jetty, on the SBA boundary. The jetty was quite substantial then and, at the landward end, there stood a shack where a local man sold cold beer. Around this time, a new waiter appeared in the Officers Mess, a bright, eager chap who introduced himself as Soutiri. He was among the many Greeks displaced from the north by the invading Turks. He had lost his home, his restaurant and all his possessions. His family were now living somewhere in the Greek south.



Thirty years passed before I revisited Evdimou. The jetty had been washed away in a storm and the shack had been replaced by a restaurant with a shady veranda overlooking the beach, with three generations of the same family doing good business there. Supervising the whole operation was Soutiri, having come full circle from his original restaurant in Kyrenia. I have returned to Cyprus on a number of occasions since and have always paid him a visit.

Sadly, the days are gone when battalions had both Pipes & Drums and Regimental Bands. There was always music around barracks and in Cyprus it was no exception. The Bands played for the standby company regularly and were appreciated greatly. Further entertainment was added by the first Billy Conolly LP, which was played until it wore out, on a Dancette record player on the veranda of the Support Company block. I don't know why we needed it as there were already 650 comedians in the Battalion, but the Big Yin went down well nevertheless.

The Roman site at Curium has since been excavated and is now a popular visitor attraction. In 1974, only the race course and the amphitheater were evident and the Bands played a series of concerts at the latter. The acoustics were perfect, and the setting idyllic on balmy evenings.



Equally well attended was the extravaganza produced by Edward Cowan OC A Company, *The Royal Scots Tattoo* under floodlights in Happy Valley. It would have given the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo a run for its money in content and grandeur. There were lights, music, action, pyrotechnics, a field gun race with Anti Tank detachments vying for podium places and even a re-enactment of the Battle of Culloden.

Based on an actual event, Kipling wrote "They're hanging Danny Deever in the morning", about a soldier of the British Army in India who had taken a daft turn and shot his sergeant major dead. He had been court martialed and hanged, as was the way then. It was the sort of thing that simply couldn't happen in the modern age – or could it?

One morning, as the sun climbed towards its zenith, baking the dusty landscape and banishing all sensible beings into the shade, I entered the CSM's office. WO2 Scoular sat behind his desk, talking with Cpl Burke. Scoular didn't quite look his usual robust self and I enquired whether he was all right. "An awful lot better", he replied, "than if Cpl Burke hadn't been standing behind the door when LCpl (who I leave nameless) burst in here, cocked his rifle and took aim at me!"

Cpl Burke of the Mortar platoon was a PT instructor and a skillful boxer. The instant the muzzle of the rifle had appeared round the opening door, Burke grabbed it with one hand and felled the would-be murderer with the other, whereupon Scoular and he wrestled the

assailant into submission. The RMO was summoned and administered a hefty sedative, “sufficient to knock out a horse”. We never saw, or heard of, the miscreant again but we can be confident that psychiatric treatment, rather than the death penalty, was administered. But it was sobering nonetheless.



Winners of the Near East Land Forces Skill at Arms meeting



A Parade to mark the visit of Maj Gen W T Campbell Colonel of the Regiment
Sp Coy led by Maj John Dent with
Lt Bob MacDonald and WO2 Jimmy Scoular



At that time both 1 RS and 2 RS Colours were
carried on Battalion parades

Another incident was out of the ordinary, although perhaps not in Support Company. One Saturday afternoon, Alan Blamire 2IC C Company and I had been in one of the bazaars in Limassol. We had embarked on a period of severe restraint due to overspending on the social scene. Why we were in the bazaar when both of us were skint I don't remember but Alan bought a snakeskin wallet. When I reminded him that were trying to avoid spending and that he had a loathing of snakes he replied, “Exactly. Whenever I put my hand in my pocket to buy anything, I'll recoil in horror.” Good idea - but it didn't work.

Returning to barracks we found that Support Company had deployed. We grabbed our kit and headed off to where a group of Greek Cypriots had entered the north western part of the SBA with intentions to squat there. Support Company had been despatched to advise them to vacate and by the time Alan and I arrived, a good going riot was in progress with rocks being hurled by the Greeks and the Company baton-charging with gusto in clouds of CS gas. As usual, CSgt Banks of the Assault Pioneers was without a respirator, being immune to CS gas. John Dent's briefing to us was along the lines of, “You've missed the best of it but, now you're here, you might as well stay. We were deployed to persuade this lot to return to whence they came, which they declined to do and you can see for yourselves what resulted.” Anticipating our question, John apprized us that HQ NEARELF had lost interest hours earlier. Eventually it petered out and we all went home for tea. It was never mentioned again and wasn't even recorded in the Digest of Service maintained in Battalion HQ. It was just something else that wasn't supposed to be happening.



The ATk PI formed up in a square for riot control during an inspection by HQ NE Land Forces. For the riot described above, we reverted to what worked best in Northern Ireland. I'd like to say that the banner, Greek on one side and Turkish on the other reads, "Disperse or we'll show you the meaning of Nemo Me Impune Lacessit!" but that would be fanciful.

As Christmas approached, a pantomime was organised by Iain Johnstone OC Recce Platoon, who billed it as "Worrloadorubbish" with each Company and the Messes producing acts. Much time was spent rehearsing and, on the day, too much beer was issued to the audience who became raucous, most of the acts bombed and we were altogether lucky to get away with it.



Christmas was celebrated in the traditional way with the officers and SNCOs serving the soldiers their Christmas dinner, followed by a sporting contest between the two Messes.

On this occasion it was hockey on the Battalion square. The rules were dismissed as an irrelevance and mayhem resulted with one team blocking its goal with a Ferret scout car and the other mounting its forwards in a Saracen armoured personnel carrier as a mobile snatch squad, taking prisoners for ransom.

By the time the "match" ended, half the officers were incarcerated in the Sergeants Mess bar and half of the SNCOs were likewise imprisoned in the Officers Mess. CSgt Hill was the last to be released from the Officers Mess where he had been handcuffed to a radiator and plied with beer. When one of his fellows offered to release him, CSgt Hill took the handcuff key and flung it out into the bushes, declaring, "I'm quite happy here, thank you very much".

Around the same time, the CO informed the Battalion that, the following Christmas, we would be in South Armagh. Whereas when the first Northern Ireland tour had been announced there had been a rousing cheer at breaking the BAOR routine, on this occasion there was the grim reality of a return to the activities we had been sent to Cyprus to recuperate from. Besides, at that time, South Armagh was becoming as challenging as West Belfast.

A visit to the Garrison Officers Club, frequented by the RAF and Civil Servants, coincided with a convention of Chaplains of all denominations from all three Services, gathered from every station between Gibraltar and the Gulf. Our Padre at that time was an Ulsterman who, as a youth, had been a Royal Ulster Constabulary B Special Reservist. He obtained a large platter from the barman and with a wry, "Watch this", set off to visit every table. Chaplains,

RAF and Civil Servants alike were all invited to make generous donations to an exceptionally worthy cause. By the time Maynard returned to the bar, the “offering” was stacked high on the plate. One of the Chaplains enquired as to just what the worthy cause might be. “A round of brandy sours for The Royal Scots!” was Maynard’s reply.

Such escapades did not escape the attention of the Adjutant. However, John Dent saved Alan Blamire and myself by alerting us to an exercise that was soon to mount out of Brize Norton, refuel at Akrotiri and fly on to Nairobi. With a nod and a wink, the RCT movements officer at Akrotiri added us to the passenger list. There followed several weeks leave as Kenya cowboys, white mischief and no mistake and a tale for another day.

By the time we returned, John had managed to sell my Spitfire for far more than it was worth, and the advance party of 2nd Battalion The Royal Irish Rangers had arrived. The Anti Tank Platoon had handed over the guns, complete with sight settings and the advice that if the Rangers wished to use the off-shore rock as a zeroing target, they were too late. A wheeze was cooked up that the Rangers’ officers should greet their CO on his arrival at Akrotiri, each with a limb in plaster by way of a joke. Both Regimental Medical Officers were willing accomplices and applied the full range of plaster casts. On first viewing the “casualties”, the Rangers’ CO had very definitely not been amused, but got his own back by ordering the RMO not to remove the casts until the joke had worn off on the pranksters.

Alan and I were among the last to depart Cyprus for wintery Kirknewton. We flew from Akrotiri to Brize Norton and then went by train to London. At King’s Cross, we charged onto the platform as the doors were slamming shut on the overnight sleeper to Waverley. Halfway along the platform, my Limassol bazaar suitcase fell off its handle. With the air of having seen it all before, a sleeping car attendant held his door open until we had bundled ourselves on board. He was an ex-Serviceman and, recognising us by type, enquired “Could you manage a cup of tea, boys?” which he kindly brought, along with some miniatures of whisky. “Welcome home!”