



**RECONNAISSANCE  
SQUADRON, THE  
ROYAL CANADIAN  
DRAGOONS**

OFF TO THE SINAI: A REMEMBRANCE OF A YEAR SPENT AS A MEMBER OF THE RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN DRAGOONS, CANADA'S OPERATIONAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNITED NATIONS EMERGENCY FORCE, FEBRUARY 1962 – 1963.



## Off to the Sinai & Other Related Stories

*A Remembrance of a year spent as a member of the RCD Reconnaissance Squadron from February 1962 – 1963 as Canada's operational contribution to the United Nations Emergency Force.*



*Troop pennant flown throughout the year in the Sinai*

By

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## **About The Author**



*David Sproule joined the Royal Canadian Dragoons in Camp Gagetown, NB in September 1960 and served in both "B" and "C" Squadrons before joining the Recce Squadron in the spring of 1961. He was the Troop Leader of 1<sup>st</sup> Troop from that time until the squadron returned to Canada in the spring of 1963. He served in various postings across Canada as a junior officer. On completing Staff College in 1972 he was promoted to Major and posted to the Lord Strathcona's Horse (RC) as the Officer Commanding Headquarters Squadron and was later appointed as the OC of "B" Squadron. In 1974 he was posted to Northern Region Headquarters in Yellowknife as the Senior Staff Officer, Operations. He took his release from the Regular Force in 1977 but continued in the Supplementary Reserve. In 1986 he moved to Vancouver as the Safety and Training Manager for the BC Rapid Transit Company (aka SkyTrain). In 1987 he joined the British Columbia Regiment (DCO) his old militia unit, as the OC of the Recce Squadron and was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel and commanded the Regiment from 1988 – 1991. He continues to*

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reside in Vancouver with his wife Jean and is a frequent contributor to the RCD, LdSH(RC) and BCR Associations' newsletters.

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## **Off to the Sinai, a remembrance of a year spent as a member of the RCD Reconnaissance Squadron with the UNEF, Sinai Desert, February 1962 – 1963**

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*2012 will mark the 50<sup>th</sup> year since our squadron deployed to the Sinai Desert. It was a very unique experience for me personally and it would be fair to say, for all of us that served together. I have come to know and respect many of the men that I served with so long ago and am pleased that a few of us continue to exchange greetings and emails from time-to-time. Several have passed away and the youngest of our members would now be in their early 70's. The following story relates my recollections of the year we spent together as "Canada's Forgotten Legion."\* I originally wrote the story "Off to the Sinai" in the late 1990's but have since written about other events from that time and have included these stories as well. In this edition I have inserted photos and other documents to better illustrate our lives in the desert among the Bedouins. **I dedicate these stories to the officers and men that I served alongside so many years ago. DS, October 2011***

*\*Toronto Star Weekly article from August 25, 1962(included in this collection)*

### **Off to the Sinai**

I consider myself fortunate in having had the opportunities that I have had during my lifetime especially those experiences from my years in the Army. Foremost of those 37 years was the year that I spent as troop leader of First Troop, Recce Squadron, RCD with the United Nations Emergency Force in the Sinai Desert. It was my only overseas posting but one that I will always regard as a happy time and finding pleasure in recalling many of the moments from that year. This account is of some of those events, some funny, some intense and I realize now, even dangerous. One will not read of these events in either the History of the Royal Canadian Dragoons or the official War Diary of the Squadron. The squadron totaled about 120 personnel and in 1<sup>st</sup> troop, we were seventeen Canadians living our lives in a small portion of the Sinai Desert. We were one of four troops within the Squadron, one of which was an Administrative Troop. All of the troops rotated into the Admin Troop position once during the tour. In most instances the dates that the events occurred are long forgotten but are not particularly relevant to the telling anyway. We were: c/s1 myself and driver Tpr Jarvis, c/s1A Sgt Jack Binns and his driver Tpr Roy Payne, c/s 1B Corporal Bill Hovey and his driver Tpr Gillis, C/s 1C Corporal Ron Bandcroft and driver Tpr Red Hayes, c/s1D Cpl Bronson and Tpr Jackson, c/s 1E Corporal Quinn and Tpr Michelin and c/s 1F Tpr Ambose Campbell and Tpr Taylor. In addition each troop had three support staff – in first troop we had Craftsman (Cfn) "Brownie" Browne, Signalman (Sig) Dave Kitteridge and our cook Pte Murray Brennan. Most of these men figure in the following stories but some stories are about events that occurred in the Officers' Mess or Quarters and to other colleagues in other troops. My colleagues were: Major Spike Malone, Commanding Officer (age 41), Capt George MacRae, Second-in-Command (age 39),

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Captain Kev Troughton, Battle Captain (age 26), I had First Troop, Lt Norm Ashton, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tp, Lt John Olafson, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tp, 2Lt Cole Hale, 4<sup>th</sup> Tp and Lt Pierre LaPointe, Admin and LO. All of us lieutenants were 25 years old and we became a close group of comrades because of our shared experiences. We had the utmost respect and fondness for our CO, Spike Malone who was a man of great experience, charm and humour and a character. For the most part, he was a good role model for us junior officers because he understood soldiers and because he was a veteran he knew what we might face during the tour. Anybody that knew Spike knows that he was a man that has contributed to the history of the RCD and the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps.

We had been together for over a year and had completed the extensive training program that Spike Malone had devised for us in order to prepare for our duties in the Sinai. We had been on long range recce exercises all over New Brunswick and Nova Scotia; we had had our demolitions training so that we could blow up any stray mines that we might come across. We had heard that there were many mines scattered about in what would soon be our area of responsibility. We had kissed and hugged our wives (or girlfriends) and children for the last time for a year and were ready for job. I had said goodbye to my wife a few days before as I put her and our infant daughter on the TCA Viscount bound for Montreal and then onward to Vancouver. It was a Saturday night and there was a toga party going on in the Officers' Mess and everyone was having such a good time but soon it was time to get on the bus and head off to Fredericton International for the long flight to El Arish, Egypt but Marville, France was to be our first stop.



*Hovey on demolitions training – Camp Gagetown, December, 1962*

*Cpl Ron Bandcroft, Tpr Jim Gillis and Cpl Bill*

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We were all pretty excited about the tour and pleased to have been selected by the Regiment to go overseas. In reality though, one of those good news bad news messages that soldiers often have to deliver to their wives. Wanting to go so much but hating to tell my wife the “good news.” Knowing full well that there were dangers and knowing also that in spite of the company of men, I would miss my wife and new daughter immensely. In those days there was no service air so when we went, we knew we wouldn’t see our wives for one year – a long time. Like my Father and brothers before me during wartime, we would have to communicate by Canada Post. People change in a year, I know that I was different when I returned and although I know that my wife and daughter were pleased to see me, I missed the first year of my oldest daughter’s life and I chose the army over my family and that has hurt a wife.

We were all there on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1962 except for the one L/Cpl that couldn’t face up to the unknown and had committed suicide with his 30/30 in the bathtub early one morning mere days before disembarking. It was sad that this occurred but if it had to happen it was better to have happened in Canada than in Egypt. It did cause a last minute panic though in that a detailed investigation had to be completed in record time. At the airport there were last minute waves goodbye and brief embraces and then the SSM and the Troop NCOs took over and the men were lined up and heading up the air-stairs on to the RCAF “Yukon”. I couldn’t help but notice that there appeared to be a bit of a bottleneck at the top of the stairs. As it turned out this was the first time that an aircraft the size of a Yukon had landed at Fredericton and the air-stairs weren’t tall enough to reach the aircraft so a ladder was placed against the aircraft for the last few feet into the plane. We were all in battledress and we shivered while we waited in the –30 degree temperatures. Suddenly all these final moments remained in the terminal for we were all aboard, the door was closed, the engines started and we taxied out for take-off.

This was one of the first flights for the Yukon in RCAF service and we were amazed at the size for all 120 of us, and our gear, were able to fit on board in those rear-facing seats. This plane also was the first

RCAF aircraft to be able to fly non-stop across the Atlantic. Even our advance party a few months before had flown in the old Northstar via Newfoundland, Greenland, Iceland and Scotland before the European landfall. This was in the days before service air and not many of us had flown on large aircraft before and some were nervous about the experience but soon the cards came out and soldiers dined on box lunches while others snoozed, smoked, chatted or started letters home.

My first indication that we were approaching Marville was early in the morning when a flight of F-86’s (Sabre jets) broke through the clouds nearby seemingly as a challenge or a welcome. We spent a few hours at the Marville base which at that time was the Air Division HQ as part of the RCAF’s contribution to NATO. I think we had a meal while the aircraft was serviced and the UN insignia were fitted to the tail section of the aircraft. It was time enough to stretch our legs and that was about it. The trip to Beirut was relatively un-



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adventurous and within a few hours we landed at Beirut for our onward flight to El Arish, Egypt. It took three trips on the RCAF Caribou aircraft, similar to the Buffalo, to ferry the Squadron to El Arish.

I was on the first flight along with all of 1<sup>st</sup> Troop and all of John Olafson's 3<sup>rd</sup> Troop and the CO and a few others. John's and my troops were selected as the troops to replace the Strathcona troops in the Field so we had a lot to do before sunset. We were met by a few Straths, our 2i/c George MacRae and a few others that had been on the advance party and I realized on seeing them looking so cool and comfortable in their parkas? Parkas ! For God sake why parkas as I realized standing there sweating in my battledress in the +80F winter heat. It was of course also winter in Egypt and parkas were often needed. Soon we too became acclimatized.

As we drove through El Arish and to paraphrase Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz" we knew we weren't in Canada any more. It seemed remarkably exotic with tall date palms lining the roadway, with minarets and camels and honking Mercedes taxis and sand dunes. We were finally here (or there). It was a short ride to Camp Rafah where the Canadian units were based and to the barb-wired enclosed Recce Squadron camp in the SW corner of the Camp. We were shown to our tents and advised that within minutes we would be off for the ride into the desert and our outposts. We exchanged friendly greetings with the few Straths that we had known previously and away we went – out to the desert.

First Troop was to replace the Strathcona troop at the southern outpost which we called Fort Landell, named for the RCD Commanding Officer that saw the Regiment through much of the WW2. The Strathconas welcomed us with coloured smoke grenades and a few brief greetings on our arrival. Needless to say they were very glad to see us, and then the operational briefing on the area took place, vehicles, weapons and ammunition were handed-over and away they all sped for Camp Rafah. I noticed that they seemed so self-assured about being there. They were tanned and fit. We had on our Canadian winter pale-faces and our new blue UN fatigue hats. It was almost as if we came from different countries for we had yet to "get sand in our shoes."

After the Straths had left for Camp, I (and the others) looked around at the vast expanses of desert, at our primitive accommodations, the white UN Jeeps lined up by the shacks and suddenly Canada seemed a distant memory. Sgt Jack Binns and I set to work thinking about our next step and suddenly from the radio tower the operator called, "Ahoy sir". Ahoy being the code word for an Israelis patrol moving along the border. This is what we had come here to do.





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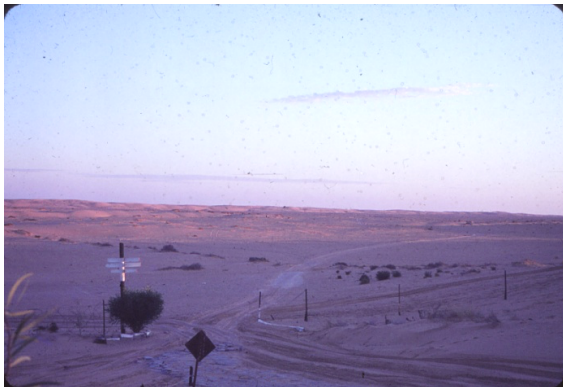
*Troop arriving at Ft. Landell*

*Scoping out a kibbutz – Cfn Browne, Cpl Bandcroft & Sig Dave Kitteridge*

I think we sent out two patrols. I remember heading out into what was unknown territory down the track to the border with a sense of excitement and some nervousness and there they were a patrol of several vehicles consisting of some three-quarter ton trucks with MG's mounted in the back and some half tracks. Boy did they move across the desert for in our inexperience we had a hard time keeping up with them. We soon realized that they were trying us on for size and getting a look at the shiny white faces of their new neighbours. They were Kibbutzim from one of the nearby kibbutz somewhere over there behind the distant hills of the Negev desert. Our role was to shadow them in their journey along the border and if they continued, to advise the neighbouring troop to meet us at Oakville (half way) and take over the responsibility. This they did and we returned to our little fort in the desert. The sun set quickly, we had dinner and the duty roster was explained and our first day came to an end.

Let me describe our area of responsibility. Our SHQ and echelon was located in our Squadron camp named Fort Worthington and it was located within Camp Rafah. Camp Rafah contained many Canadian support units as Canada's main contribution to the Force was logistical in nature. The Recce Squadron was the only Canadian operational unit to serve with UNEF. Camp Rafah was located just outside the ancient Arab town of Rafah right on the south-western edge of the Gaza Strip and about 3-4 km from the Mediterranean Sea.

Our task was to patrol about 35km of the border between Israel and Egypt extending south from the corner of the Gaza Strip into the Sinai desert. We operated from two troop outposts – one in the North (Fort Mann) about 10km from Camp and one in the South (Fort Landell) about 25 km from Camp. Our task was to ensure no Bedouins or Egyptians operated within a 500 meter zone back from the border and that no armed Egyptians operated within 1 km of the border by day and 5 km by night. We could not go into Israel and no Israelis were to penetrate into Egypt. The Yugoslavs operated on our right flank down to the Gulf of Aqaba and the Brazilians on our left flank along the first 10 km of the Gaza strip. Each troop was equipped with seven M38 jeeps with radios and Bren guns. We were in fact the last unit in the regular army to use Bren guns. Each of us carried our personal weapon at all times. Patrols generally were two vehicles operating tactically along the border. I still have a marked map of our area of responsibility.



*View looking north from Fort Landell, our southern outpost*



*Fort Landell, showing kitchen shack, radio tower and vehicle pit*



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View looking south from Fort Landell across the Wadi Heredin    Israelis army patrol along the International Frontier (left track)

## Map 1



Map of the Northern part of the Sinai Desert – Scale = 1:1,000,000  
Our area can be located in the top right grid square.



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We were already busy as the new day dawned. We had to send out a dawn patrol and Sgt Binns and I had to develop a patrol schedule. In those first few days, routines were initiated that would form the basis for our years activities.

We spent two weeks at an outpost and then rotated into Fort Worthington (Sqn HQ) for a week as standby troop. During the week we maintained our vehicles, got haircuts, went on shopping trips to Gaza or at the local Victory Shop. The trips to Gaza usually involved learning how to barter for some Syrian brocade to send home to our wives, or the purchase of a pair of handmade desert boots or “brothel creepers” as they were known. Most of us had these and we preferred to wear them because they were cooler than boots. The Army didn’t issue shorts either, so most of us had shorts made too.



*First light - dawn patrol*

We were issued a set of Indian Army bush clothing but we were told to keep it for parade use. Looking back on it we were pretty relaxed looking group of soldiers – a sergeant-major’s nightmare. This is confirmed when I look back at pictures from that time. During the standby week we had time to visit other messes and learn the drinking habits of our Scandinavian allies – I was a slow learner not being accustomed to chug-a-lugging aquavit followed by a beer chaser. I managed to learn a few drinking songs and sampled pickled herring at their Sunday smorgasbord.

When in main camp, we also went down to the “Med” daily to lie on the beach and soak up the sun and to swim in the surf. There was a Palestinian lifeguard there and it was his duty to put up a flag as a shark advisory and we trusted his judgment implicitly. The beach was covered with Brazilians, Danes, Swedes, Canadians, Norwegians and Indians – dozens of us, all virile young men with not a woman in sight. We’d swim listen to music on the radio, read, snooze and bake in the hot sun.



*European handball*



*Rafah beach*

While with UNEF we made extra allowances – overseas allowance, UN Allowance and Piaster Pay valued at \$25.00 script that we had to spend each month. With all this extra money, this was also the time when we got to buy our first duty free items in the Blue Beret canteen. We bought all sorts of stuff that

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was cheap like Phillips multi-band radios, tape recorders, typewriters – you name it. As Spike would say, “going broke buying bargains.” We bought duty free cigarettes, for we all smoked at 9 cents a pack and beer was sold in our own messes for 3 cents including one cent for the piaster fund. This was Spike’s idea and the fund quickly built up and served as a loan fund for soldiers who had time but no money between pays. At the end of the year we dissolved the fund buying every man in the Squadron a pewter beer mug with the RCD crest emblazoned on it. I still use mine.

The officers during this time also went on trips to the UNEF Officers “B” Mess in Gaza which was situated right on the beach and here we met officers from other countries, civilian UN employees and the 13 Gaza queens. These were the only 13 women on the Force worked as secretaries at UNEF HQ and were from a variety of countries including one woman from Canada. We were not very kind to them as we were all young bucks and they were all women in their 30s and 40s. In short we were not interested. Looking back, I’m glad they weren’t appealing and besides most of them were already spoken for by some senior UN officer. A year is a long time and we didn’t need the temptation. The journey back was often an adventure with Trooper Vetten driving the Commanding Officer’s (Spike) Citroen CV2. The road was narrow and “blacker than Toby’s ass” as Spike would say. Thank God Vetten was always sober because we had to go through three or four Egyptian army check points complete with barb wire, tank traps and heavy machine guns. We had a pretty cavalier attitude about the Egyptian army or “gypos” as we called them. After all they had lost the war in 1956 against the Israelis. Hindsight is always 20/20 and I’m sorry we were so contemptuous of their army – this was a very foolish attitude on our part for our arrogance could have got us killed. We would holler and often in a drunken haze, “Canada Number fucking one” as we careened through the road block. I remember once Spike demanding that Vetten “give me my fucking Tommy Gun (Sten)”. Of course he didn’t and we are still here to tell the tale. If Vetten had given him his “Tommy gun” we would have been hem stitched by a .50 calibre machine gun. The trip was about 30 kilometers from Gaza to Rafah and “home” and driving in the Gaza strip or anywhere in Egypt had its challenges because nobody drove with headlights on except Canadians. All you would see of an oncoming vehicle was the small marker lights. The other thing I remember about driving over there was that the drivers use their horn all the time – it was really noisy.



*Cpl Bill Hovey skinning a gazelle*

After the week on standby it was time to go back to the line again. This time to our northern outpost, Fort Mann, named after MGen Churchill Mann, the Colonel of the Regiment. Our task in the north was similar so we carried on with our patrolling. And so it went. One of the “exciting” things to do out of Mann was to take your Jeep down the side of a dune we called “Franks (?) slide”. It was very steep and when reaching the top one put the Jeep into neutral and let the motion of the avalanching sand carry the vehicle down the dune. One had to keep the wheels very straight.

We often saw gazelles, foxes and rabbits in the North and sometimes a sharp shooter bagged a Gazelle for dinner. They were like a small deer and tasted about the same. Life at the outpost was pretty much a routine of patrolling, maintaining our equipment and weapons, sleeping, eating and at night watching movies and playing endless games of

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Canasta and waiting for the mail. For soldiers and their wives, the mail is very important to morale. I learned this as a child with my Mother awaiting the little blue airmail envelopes from my brother overseas or his wife in England. In Egypt I have seen us send a patrol across the desert in the middle of the night to pick up the mail when it had arrived late rather than wait for morning. Sometimes the movies got mixed up as well and if we missed a movie which we normally got every second night, everyone would get really pissed off with the other troop for failing to deliver it at a contact patrol at say our contact at "Oakville" barrel marker.

Each troop hired a local Bedouin boy to be a "pot woller" in the kitchen. We paid him out of our troop fund something like five Egyptian pounds every two weeks (about \$2.47 per pound). At the southern outpost we had Jamal who came from a tribe to the south of us. I believe he was 15 years old. Jamal had only known Canadians and spoke English like he came from the East coast. He read English and played Ping Pong very well.



He also acted as interpreter for us on a daily basis as each morning we had "sick parade" at the outpost gate. These were sick or injured Bedouins who often walked miles to get to our outpost for medical attention. Often they had the flu or a gash to the head. Sometimes they were very ill and we transported them to the UN Hospital in Camp Rafah which was run by Norwegian medics. They got the best care that could be given but sometimes it was not enough. I remember once we picked up a young boy about 10 years old. He had been in hospital for several

*Murray Brennan and Jamal, Fort Landell kitchen*

months and they couldn't do any more for him as he had TB of the sternum and wasn't expected to live long. He was a very handsome little guy, scrubbed clean and tidy with a blue sweater and shorts and sandals. Our job was to locate his parents.

This proved to be a difficult job because after so long, he had been given up for dead. In the end I think we delivered him to the Yugoslavs to locate them, as his tribe was now located in their area. Once we treated a man for sword wounds to the head and he had put gun- powder on them but the wounds had been quite infected. Amazing what penicillin will do. Once we delivered a woman to the Hospital and she was complaining of stomach pain – as it turned out she was pregnant and gave birth that day. The hospital staff called the baby Unefa in recognition of being born in the UNEF hospital. Sergeant Binns was very good at "sick



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parade” and helping the “Beddies” as we called them. He was a very experienced senior NCO and a very compassionate man. He and I shared a great deal together and are friends to this date.

Coming from a large and prosperous country, most of us had a great deal of compassion for the Bedouins. They were very poor and lived a marginal existence farming a few crops and herding sheep and goats. They were fiercely independent though, cherishing the nomadic life and lived in family groupings within tribal areas. Their homes were goat hair tents and they wore traditional Arab clothing with the women wearing black hand-embroidered full length garments and the men the galabiah and kafiah. They were always dirty and smelled somewhat as people that don’t have enough water to wash usually do. The women were often tattooed and wore a lot of silver bracelets, beads, coins earrings, nose-rings etc. They usually went barefoot and did most of the work. We would usually see them trudging across the desert in small groups and the women carried enormous loads on their heads. They had marvelous posture and had such grace when they walked.



*Top left to right: Bedouin woman, youth and baby, little girl with a loaf of bread, a desert Koran school (madrasah) for young boys and trading bread and canned goods for eggs.*

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We also used to trade for eggs with the Beddies. We often had more bread or sugar than we could use and not enough eggs, so every week we would go and trade for these little eggs from their tiny chickens – free range. Our water truck carried more water than we could use, so we had set up a series of Bedouin water-holes with 45 gallon drums sunk into the sand, along the ADREP or administrative route and our water truck driver emptied the surplus water into these drums. We got water every day except Wednesday as this was maintenance day for the water truck. Tpr Norton was the water truck driver and he did an excellent job of keeping us supplied throughout the year and he took a real interest in the “Beddies.” He was from Norton, NB and joined the squadron just prior to our departure for the Middle East. At the outposts we had jerry rigged a method of heating the water by means a kerosene burner, so we had regular hot water for the kitchen and showers. Without the water that we provided, they (the Bedouins) had to walk an arduous route for many hours to obtain water at an old cistern in the south of our area we called “Niagara Falls”. We would see them lowering an old tin can attached to a piece of barbed-wire into this cistern to collect this brackish water to fill their pottery jugs which the women and girls then loaded onto their heads or onto camels to transport. This took a long-time as the cistern was so deep that the water couldn’t be seen from ground level.



gas

*“Niagara Falls” – a cistern developed by the Canadians for the local Bedouins and was the only local source of water for miles around.*

Every day we produced garbage and we had local garbage dumps that we had to burn off for health reasons. No sooner had the soldiers lit the kerosene soaked garbage and departed than the “Beddies” were into it scrounging whatever they could. We would see the same thing when we drove past the main camp garbage dump as well. One of the outpost routines was that the septic tanks for the kitchen and shower gray water and the latrines also had to be burned-off daily. The duty guy would simply pour a small amount of Kero “B” (kerosene with a bit of

added), and then light it thus burning off all of the kitchen greases. A funny latrine story: In Three Troop, Trooper “Spud” Walsh was the duty chore trooper and dumped the usual amount of Kero “B” down the latrine, but then forgot to light it. His Troop Sergeant, Sgt John Crombie went in to read and for his morning constitutional. He was having a smoke and threw the cigarette butt down the adjacent hole and then KARUMPH. The resulting explosion blew the roof askew, set the door off its hinges and there was John Crombie struggling out off the can with his pants around his ankles yelling for (or at) Spud Walsh. “You fucking idiot ..etc..etc.” Fortunately only Sgt Crombie’s pride was hurt. I was there when it happened – it was truly amazing to witness.



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Most of my memories seem to be from the southern outpost Fort Landell. It was located about 25 or 30 Km out in the desert, adjacent to the “Wadi Heredin” (dry river bed), and was surrounded by sand dunes, mine-fields, and Bedouins. The forts each had a double apron concertina wire fence, a look-out tower, a kitchen dining hall building, living quarters for the corporals and troopers (at one end) and the troop sergeant and officer at the other end. There was a rec room with a ping-pong table and Jamal’s quarters, and also an ablution hut. Outside there was a vehicle park next to the living quarters a maintenance pit for the vehicle mech and also a pit for storing our second line ammunition which consisted of 9mm, 303 for the Bren guns, 36 grenades, smoke grenades and usually protected by the scorpions crawling around in the outpost ammo magazine. In the desert most of the animals were small and the insects big – scorpions, centipedes, spiders, scarab beetles – all big. We never saw many snakes but they were there and there were lots of big iguana-type lizards as well. I also remember a young Bedouin boy named Ali that used to hang around the Southern outpost all day long. He had a toy Jeep that he had made out of two fruit juice cans with a barbed wire handle that he pushed in front of him. He always had a big smile and was grateful for any food scraps that we passed to him through the wire. Once we brought him in to the compound and let him have a shower for as long as he wanted. Then we



gave him a new T shirt to wear before he headed off. He had never had a shower in his life or had new clothes before. The next day he was back, but wearing all his dirty old clothes again.

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*Fort Landell activities left to right clockwise: the vehicle pit was too short, Sig Dave Kitteridge on the #52 set, filling the water tower, Ambrose Campbell & Danish entertainer, "Brownie" Murray Brennan and a gathering of 1<sup>st</sup> Troop.*

We never had any problems with theft at the outpost due to the fact that we kept guard dogs. Just mean old mongrels that the Canadians treated like house pets but were loathed as unclean by the Bedouins. The one dog that I remember was old black Nasser and he loved to ride along in the jeep on patrol. If we spotted any Bedouins grazing their sheep and goats within 500 meters of the border we had to chase them out and arrest any males over 16 that we found. Usually it was the women and girls that were given this chore so few arrests were made. Nasser loved to chase sheep and goats and he could herd them better than a jeep. This action was as much for their protection as anything because there had been ugly incidents involving Israelis patrols and Bedouin herders. The UN was completely responsible for this 500 meter zone back from the International Frontier or IF as we called it.

I want to relate a couple of things that occurred again at the Southern outpost. Our main contact with base camp and the other troop was by radio from our tower. We had a big tube-filled, 52 set which was compatible with our jeep 19 sets or the "Angry 9" radios that most of us used. The radio and the ADREP and the occasional patrol into Camp were our contact with other Canadians. Otherwise we were 17 RCDs in the middle of the Sinai desert for 14 days at a stretch. I thought that I had the best job in the world and I did. On one occasion during the Khamseen (wind) season we had a severe sand storm that lasted for 3 days and nights. Sand storms are terrifying things to be out in because you cannot see a thing and the sand gets into everything. We couldn't talk to anyone on the radio, we couldn't go on patrol and it was hot and difficult to sleep. One would go to bed and awaken covered in sand. When it concluded we had one hell of a job digging out – it took us several days. Everything was filled with sand, vehicles, latrines, trenches, etc. We had no re-supply during this time and had to ration our food and water. I've never been through anything comparable.

The Canadians before us had cleared a route through the minefield as access to the border. The Strathconas before us and then our squadron later used the Wadi Heradin as access to the IF as it was smooth and faster than the official route. One day one of our patrols found a mine in their path in the Wadi and ground to a halt. We quickly realized that this short-cut was no longer feasible unless we did some serious mine-clearing. Corporal Bancroft c/s 1C was given the task of conducting the mine clearing operation and during the few days that this took they discovered several mines. The Strathconas and

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our squadron had indeed been lucky. We blew up the mines and staked the route with iron pickets. Soon afterwards, all of the iron pickets were stolen by the Bedouins and I'm sure, sold for scrap. It must have been irresistible for them. Needless to say we were "some pissed off". And in our feeble efforts to get back the pickets, we cut off their water. Looking back on it, this was a pretty indiscriminate action on our part because we hurt a lot of innocent people by cutting off the water. We never used the Wadi again as a route to the IF.

We used to find mines occasionally and some old mine fields from the 1956 war were littered with anti-tank and anti-vehicle mines. Deadly. One task that I remember being given was an assignment to assist Captain Gerry Coe the Canadian Ordnance Disposal Officer with UNEF. He had about 13 tons of old ammunition, mines and explosives to destroy. We dug 13 pits into the side of a big sand dune, wired them up with det cord and explosive charges, posted patrols all around the area to prevent Bedouin "looky-loos" from wandering into the demolition area. Gerry then ran the wires back to the firing unit. We lay low on the far side of the dune and then Gerry pressed the button. Karumph. There was the large explosion followed by a huge cloud of sand, smoke and debris. Suddenly Gerry turned to me passed me his camera and said "shoot me as I run out of the cloud of smoke." So I did. There is a photo of this crazy Canadian Ordnance Corps officer hightailing it out of an explosion of his own creation. He looked like he was about to miss the last boat from Dunkirk – "click", captured on film for this wild and crazy guy, as we learned on more than one occasion.



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*Mines & explosives from top left to right clockwise: anti-vehicle mine found near the IF, setting of the 13 tons of surplus UN explosives, Lt John Olafson setting a charge, Cpl Bandcroft and Tpr "Red" Hayes sweeping for mines, getting the charge ready to blow the mine.*

Another time John Olafson and I were enjoying a smoke at Fort Mann on a summer day when in the distance we heard a Karumph – a mine going off. We jumped in our Jeeps and headed for the cloud of smoke in the distance steeling ourselves for what we thought would be a grizzly scene of either body or camel parts or both. When we got there, there was a group of “beddies” sitting in a circle around a hole where a mine had once been. They were laughing their heads off as I might have done had it been me that detonated the mine. Traditional Bedouin mine disposal – light a fire under it and eventually it will blow.

We often had visitors from Canada and elsewhere, generals, politicians, and entertainers. Here are a few examples:

The Honorable Douglas Harkness, Minister of National Defense and his wife visited us in December 1962. He was a very distinguished man in the Diefenbaker Government at the time. There we were having them for tea and sandwiches at Fort Mann (Northern outpost) on a cold and windy day in the desert drinking out of Melmac cups. They were delightful guests and I think he was the first politician that I had met.

We were visited by General Geoffery Walsh, the Army Chief-of-General Staff, who was accompanied by his Aide de Camp (ADC) Captain John Dechastelaine. As it turned out I had something in common with John as his Father and my wife Jean’s Father had been agents in Europe during the war and his parents and my in-laws were fast friends. The General was arrogant, unsympathetic to our situation and critical of everything he saw around him. I had had experience in 1959 with his off-hand behaviour when I was on the staff at Vernon Cadet Camp when he was the visiting GOC of Western Command. Army generals sometimes acted more like Scottish lairds than the leaders they should be (even then). His visit was a very uncomfortable time for Spike and for the Canadian Base Units Middle East (CBUME) Commander, Colonel DL Rochester.

A very welcome visitor for the Canada week and medals celebrations was our own RCAC Colonel Commandant, Major-General FF Worthington, accompanied by the then Director of Armour, Colonel Ned Amy. We had quite a program organized for the General. I was appointed as his ADC for his stay and what a privilege that turned out to be. We organized a dinner with Sheik Umbarak out under a tent in the desert. All of us attending sat around cross-legged on carpets. A big pot full of flat bread and goat meat was placed in front of us by one of the Sheik’s men and we all ate from this common bowl – naturally with our right hand, grab a piece of bread, rip off a piece of meat, eat and ignore the gritty sand in the chewing, This was followed by tea, coffee and chit chat. Then the Sheik produced his horse for the General to ride, which he did – sedately. Worthy was curious about everything – opening the conversation with, “so you’re a Sheik eh!” He had seen it all and done it all. He took delight in the subbies’ pet chameleon “Zot” which lazed around on the Eucalyptus trees in front of the mess, zapping flies. I think General Worthington understood the need for men in difficult situations to have stupid outlets and to do silly things from time to time. He was our guest for the RCD Regimental birthday and our Medals Parade which coincided with Canada Week and participated in celebrations at the Rafah Beach. There were he and Ned Amy dressed in swim trunks, the General with a red fez on his head looking like a “Shriner” on holiday and Ned with a blue UN peaked cap.

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*Colonel "Ned" Amy and MGen FF Worthington at Rafah Beach*



*Sheik Mbarak mounted when MGen Worthington visited him*

They participated in the donkey races, had a few beers with the troops and generally had a good day. I have photos of it all. I remember one evening sitting around in the Mess and "Worthy" regaling us with stories of Mexican banditos and of WW1 and he kept turning to Ned and saying, "Ned go get the boys another drink." And he did. Ned came along to be of service to a wonderful Armoured Corps legend and he did it with such grace and willingness. I think he enjoyed spending his time with the subbies. I have a letter and autographed photo that General Worthington sent to me thanking me for serving him so well during his visit in the Sinai.



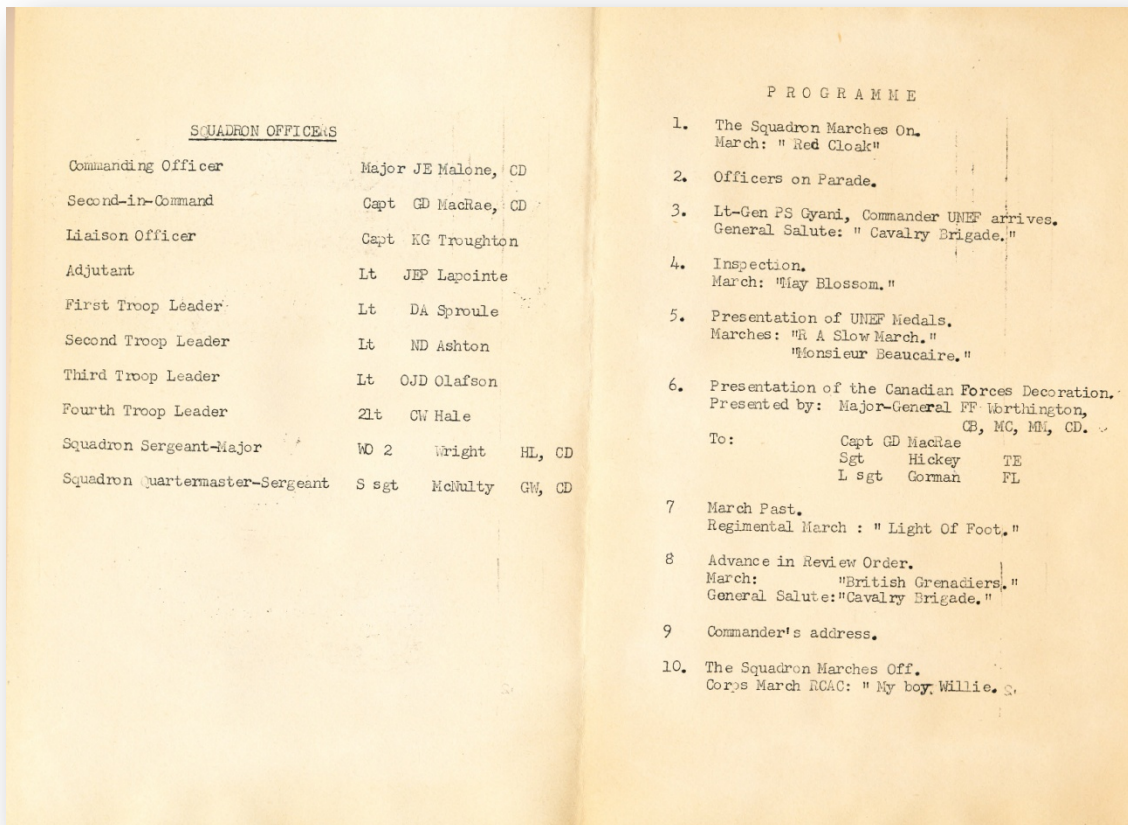
*Recce Squadron on the Medals Parade, May 21, 1962*



*Medals parade May 21, 1962-presented by LGen Gyani, Indian Army and UNEF Force Commander, myself and Lt Norm Ashton (2<sup>nd</sup> Troop)*

We had entertainment groups visit us and I remember the Canadian group so well. They were much appreciated. Tommy Hunter, the Rhythm Pals, Peter Appleyard, the baton twirling Lansbury Sisters, from St. Catherines, a French Canadian chanteuse Denyse Ange and the MC a piano playing comedian. I have the program at home in my diary. They performed for us on three occasions one of those in the desert at Fort Mann.

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*Program from our Medals Parade*



*CBC group at Ft Landell – the Rhythm Pals and Tommy Hunter*



*CBC's Peter Appleyard (vibraphonist), Denyse Ange (chanteuse) and 2Lt Cole Hale (4<sup>th</sup> Troop)*

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Hot on the heels of Tommy Hunter was the RCD Band. Captain Ed Spooner brought his merry band of musicians to Rafah from Germany and they stayed in our lines. They were also wonderful entertainers and put on an excellent show for us. The Sergeants' Mess made a tidy profit that month.

The last group of entertainers that I remember was the Scandinavian group. They had three gorgeous female singers, one Dane, one Norwegian and one Swede. I'll never forget the look on our soldier's faces when they arrived at the outpost for a show. Spike transported the girls in his Jeep: the Danish girl in the front took off her top for the journey into the desert – she was wearing a push up bra and short shorts. The Norwegian girl was also wearing short shorts and a bikini top while the more demure Swedish girl had on a sundress. As Spike would say of the troops "their eyes were out like organ stops." Women, real women." We were a bunch of horny young guys at this stage of the game. I think they sang well. I have a picture of the "babes" surrounding Spike at the wheel of his Jeep. He was presented with an enlargement back in Canada and when I visited him at his home in Annan, Ontario in 1985, he still had the picture.



*Major Spike Malone delivering the three lovely Scandinavian entertainers and providing an operational briefing at Ft. Mann*



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In 1962 bottled water was not yet popular so we drank a lot of beer mostly either Carlsburg or Amstel. We couldn't get Canadian beer except for Canada Day when a bunch of Carlings Black Label arrived but it was "skunky" as it had sat in the sun on the dock in Port Said for days. We didn't drink the water as it was heavily treated; there wasn't any milk and beer was really cheap. We would probably drink 4 – 6 beer a day each. There was grape cool-aid though as it masked the taste of the water somewhat. My wife Jean says that almost every photo I sent home had a picture of me, and others, with beers in our hands and that really impressed my tee-totalling parents.



We had our own Squadron messes. The Officers' Mess consisted of two marquee tents joined along the side and it was lined with UN Blue cotton material. One side was the dining side and the other was drinking/lounging side. We had a Palestinian bar steward named Gemma who was a very discreet person and being an Arab he didn't drink. He was completely trustworthy, courteous and helpful. I often think of the Bedouins and our Palestinian help – where are they now? How many are still living and how have their lives changed? I wonder, for the better or worse? We relied on our Palestinian help a lot – they were our gardeners, cooks, batmen, interpreters, etc.

The CO had his own little "cabana" and Ali his batman. The rest of the officers, when in camp, lived in quarters two to a room except for the captains who each had their own room. Two of the subbies were always out in the desert anyway. When in main camp Our Day would start with the batman bringing us a cup of coffee or tea and a friendly

"good morning seer" We would then crowd into the ablution room shower, shave and use the special bottle of "tooth" water for brushing teeth. The toilets were a novelty to us, the European type called "Best Niagara" made in Beirut. After doing one's business one simply pulled the chain and most of the residue was washed down the drain. Not as efficient as North American toilets. Breakfast was usually bacon and eggs and toast and coffee and then to work. We started work at 0700 hrs and worked until 1300 hrs followed by lunch and a siesta and in the afternoon we played volleyball or European handball. I was a runner even then and usually went for a run around the Camp perimeter wire or when in the desert I ran out across the dunes – all alone and I never worried a moment about it. There goes that "Crazy Canadian out in the noon day sun".



*A blurry image of the inside of our tented Officers' Mess*

When in Camp, I sometimes went to chapel on Sundays and although an Anglican I never was confirmed so I took confirmation classes and along with half a dozen other Canadians went by road to Jerusalem to be confirmed in the St George's Cathedral – a little bit of England in the middle of an Arab city. In 1962 Jerusalem was still a divided city and St. George's Cathedral was on the Jordanian side. We traveled into Israel and Jordan as pilgrims as arranged by another UN agency, The Truce Supervisory Observer group (UNTSO). We went through the Eskalon Gate

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at the North end of the Gaza Strip and towards Tel Aviv. When you go from the Gaza Strip into Israel, one immediately notices the difference. In Israel things are green, there are white lines painted on paved highways, and gas stations. It didn't seem like the middle-east at all. We stopped briefly in Tel Aviv and then headed East through the mountains towards Jerusalem. The approach to Jerusalem is steep and impressive as the hills are all forested in pine trees and there were knocked out armoured cars in the pass serving as a reminder of the 1948 war with the Arabs. Then the countryside opens up and there is Jerusalem on a shining hill – an impressive citadel. We travelled through the Israelis half of the city and entered the Jordanian side at the Damascus Gate. It was a short drive to the cathedral and we entered through a gate on the street and into the rose garden inside the church wall – it was quite lovely. Along with a group of blind Jordanian girls from the St John's Ophthalmic Hospital, we were confirmed by Archbishop Campbell of Jerusalem. We later visited the UNTSO HQ at the old British Governor's House for supper and then headed back to the Gaza Strip. I still have the confirmation certificate tucked into the Bible that my parents gave me when I joined the Army.



*Confirmation at St George's Cathedral, Maj Harbord (RCD), Archbishop Campbell, Jordanian Christian girls and other Cdns*



*CBUME padre and others at the Mandelbaum Gate crossing from the Israelis side into Jordanian Jerusalem*

I remember a couple of pretty exciting moments. On one occasion the troop had just returned to the line after completing a two-month stint as Admin Troop (we all did this rotation). It was now a different season and the sand dunes in the South of our area had changed as the wind was coming from a different direction, and it was easy to lose one's way. This is precisely what happened to Corporal Quinn c/s 1E. He had completed his patrol and was heading over the dunes and strayed too far to the West and into an Egyptian Army forward outpost. He had dismounted and went to the top of a dune to scan the horizon to look for a familiar landmark, when the Egyptian patrol came up de-tuned the radio and apprehended him and his driver Trooper Michelin. They then took them under armed escort back to what was a formation HQ either a brigade or division level, and commenced interrogation as to why they had entered the Egyptian area of responsibility. Corporal Quinn refused to answer their questions unless a UN Officer was present but in the meantime back at the outpost, we had become quite concerned because we couldn't get them on the radio and when we sent out a patrol to search for them – we picked up their vehicle tracks heading due West. I reported this back to SHQ and Captain George MacRae scrambled the standby troop to reinforce us.

Probably an hour or so passed, although it was now getting dark, when we heard a weak radio transmission calling, "Hello 1 this is 1E how do you hear me, over?" We sent out a tuning and netting

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call, got them back on frequency and sent out a patrol to meet them. As it turned out the Egyptians were only asserting their authority as we might have done under similar circumstances. After a while their Intelligence Officer must have concluded that we had no covert interest in their activities and let them go. It did precipitate a UN investigation though.

George MacRae was acting CO when the above event occurred as Spike was in Italy on vacation. George was never one to let an Egyptian Division get in his way so it was either the next day or the day after that George organized a show of strength. We had three troops of jeeps, 21 Bren guns in all, and we surrounded this Egyptian outpost. We had tuned into their frequency and had Gemma along as interpreter. Gemma kept chuckling to himself as there was no love lost between the Palestinians and the Egyptian army. Their call-sign was "blood" and Gemma said he guessed that they thought that to be pretty ferocious sounding call-sign. We had Pierre Lapointe, our LO, up in the RCAF single Otter a/c from El Arish buzzing their tent. The radio waves were also buzzing between this little outpost and its HQ. I'm sure that their artillery batteries were ready to range in on our merry band. We certainly presented a tidy target. After a while we backed off went back to Fort Landell full of satisfaction at scaring the "Gypos". Maybe it worked as we never had any more dealings with them and rarely saw any regular army.

We did have Israelis incursions into our area which we treated very seriously. Once, I remember Corporal Hovey (c/s 1B) discovered a set of tracks from Israel coming across the IF and he followed them for miles back to a dried mud flat known to us as Hawkin's Field which we used as a jeep drag strip and an airfield for recce flights. We assumed that they were interested in the topography and wanted the intelligence for any future operations. Corporal Hovey was very good at tracking and was relentless at it.



*Tpr Stan Michelin, Tpr Stu Jarvis and LCpl Quinn*

Often we discovered camel and human tracks crossing the border and we would usually follow them back as far as we could until they blended into the ancient camel routes that criss-crossed the desert. These were usually Arabs smuggling hashish from Jordan into Egypt crossing Israel at night to avoid detection. We never caught any smugglers but always followed the tracks and reported the incursion to SHQ for onward transmission to UNEF Operations. There were also other Arab militias or police in our area. The Bedouin police had a couple of outposts and we were never sure what their role was, to police the Bedouins, observe on the Canadians, or for no particular reason. They had fast camels though and many of us had our photographs taken atop a Bedouin police racing camel. Once 3<sup>rd</sup> Troop came across one of their arms caches and confiscated their weapons. They could offer no good reason why they needed several .303 Enfield rifles stashed in a pile of grass about a kilometer back from the border. They took the weapons into the Rafah police and the weapons were probably redistributed back to the same area within days. This is what happened when we apprehended anyone crossing the border or males within the 500 meter zone. We questioned them, took them into the Rafah police and soon they were released.

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*Bedouin Police Outpost west of Hawkins Field*

Christmas Day 1962 was a time that I will never forget. On Christmas Eve First Troop and Cole Hale's Fourth Troop RV'd at the mid-point on the IF known to us as Oakville. We lit a big bonfire and under that starry night we sang carols and other Christmas songs. We thought of home and of the fact that the First Christmas happened only a few hundred kilometers away from where we were. When Christmas Day dawned, Sergeant Flannery, who was then my Troop Sgt, and I arose and prepared to serve the men hot buttered rums, which we did.



*Our little Norwegian Christmas tree*

We had a tiny Christmas tree in the dining hall provided by the Norwegians and we had decorated it with coloured paper and we had a few gifts to distribute. Soon we had visitors - Spike and the Squadron Sergeant – Major, Harold Wright, arrived at about 1000 hrs. They had been drinking steadily and were already pissed. They had a drink with us, wished us all a Merry Christmas and left for the Northern outpost, Fort Mann. They set off to visit c/s 4 at Mann and we carried on with what was to be a normal operational day for us. Soon however, Kev Troughton, the Battle Captain, called on the radio asking about the CO's (c/s niner) whereabouts and we assumed that he had arrived back in Camp. They hadn't and couldn't be found. I sent out a patrol to look for them with Sergeant Flannery as patrol commander and there were the tracks weaving back and forth all the way back along the IF road. It was easy to follow in the sand. When his patrol arrived at the Main Gate of Camp Rafah, Sgt Flannery's driver, Trooper Graham, lost control of the vehicle, neatly lining up the right front wheel of his vehicle with the pickets of the Provost shack's picket fence just inside the Gate. Sergeant Radcliffe of the CProC



*Oakville marker barrel – inter-troop patrol boundary*

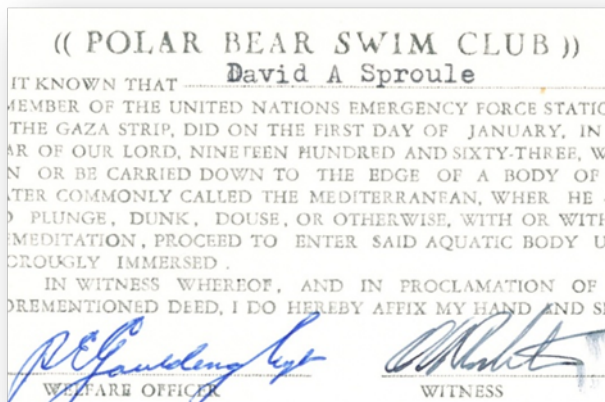
(military police) wasn't amused. I don't think that anything really came out of that event – certainly only the picket fence was damaged. As it turned out, the CO & SSM had made it back, but were too late to serve at the traditional Men's Christmas Dinner. Kev Troughton had been tearing his hair out worrying about where they were and as it turned out that although late, the CO made it back for the dinner. In the meantime while this was going on, Corporal Bancroft and I encountered an Egyptian Army mounted patrol right at the corner of the IF and the Armistice Demarcation Line that defined the

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beginning of the Gaza Strip. This was also our inter-unit boundary with the Brazilians on our left flank and the Canadian Recce squadrons had named this location Granby which was identified by a marker barrel. They apparently were observing the nearby Israelis kibbutz. I spoke to the Egyptian Lieutenant and advised him that he was in an area where he was not allowed to be and I was rebuffed by him. When I pressed the issue, one of his NCOs started to curse me in Arabic and things were starting to get heated up. I wasn't aware at the time but was told years later by Corporal Bandcroft, who was covering me, that weapons were drawn and he correspondingly had the Egyptian vehicle in the sights of the Bren gun. Fortunately they withdrew as did we. There was to be no bloodshed in the sand on that Christmas Day.

When New Years came along my troop was on standby and Pierre Lapointe and I celebrated by going for a swim in the Med and as a result we were made members of the UNEF Polar Bear Club. I have the certificate to prove it.



We had good relationships with most of the other nations in UNEF. We especially liked the Danes who fulfilled the role of a guard company, manning the observation towers around Camp Rafah. Their unit was about the same size as ours and we had fun at the beach or drinking beer in each other's messes. They spoke English and taught us a few Danish words. I became quite good friends with Lt. Steen Jessen, an Officer in King Frederick IX Hussars. He spent some time with me at Fort Landell and gave me a set of his Regimental cuff links as a memento.

The Danes and Norwegians had a combined battalion known as the Danor Battalion. They remained separate from the Swedes who were neutral during the war and feelings about that persisted even in 1962. We found the Swedes very formal. They clicked their heels and bowed when introduced – a little too Teutonic for us Canadians. The only remembrance I have of the Swedes was up-chucking all over their volleyball court after a bout of aquavit and Carlsberg. We had little contact with the Brazilians although we hosted their officers at a party in our mess. Few spoke any English and of course none of us spoke any Portuguese. I do remember that their CO's name was Darcy Lazaro and he wore the MBE among his medals. Spike advised us of a little known fact that the Brazilians had a battalion in Italy serving in the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army. He of course had that in common with Darcy as he (Spike) had served as an SSM in the RCD and he loved to tell us war stories about his days in Italy. I'm sure this explained his love for hot spaghetti sauce and Chianti.

The Indian Army, whose soldiers like the Canadians, also had a year as a tour of duty compared to the other nations who did 6 months, had two different battalions there during our tour. The 2Bn Sikh Regt who were serving when we arrived and after November 1962 it was the 2Bn Maratas. The Sikhs were from the Punjab in the North of the country. Their soldiers were tall and athletic in appearance, whereas the Maratas were from Bombay and were very dark in colouring and short in stature. Most of us had had no previous dealings with Indians and found some of their habits strange. We would see them walking along the Gaza Road - two men holding hands. This was strange to us and many thought their

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Regiment to be full of “queers”. This was 1962 though and such opinions were common then. Actually we had very good working relationships with the Sikhs. I attended a mess dinner at their camp in Der El Bela or Khan Yunis (Gaza Strip towns) and it was not unlike one of ours. They had many British traditions but the food was strange to my palate then but very tasty as I remember. Before they rotated back to India our Squadron did a service for them not officially sanctioned by the UN but we had the tacit approval of the UNEF Commander, Lieutenant-General PS Gyani, (Indian army). On the battalions return to India they were to be posted directly to the North West frontier where the Indians were engaged in a dirty little war with the Chinese. They were receiving new weapons, the FN rifle and the Sterling SMG to replace their aging Enfield and Sten guns. The RCD Recce Squadron NCOs ran a weapons course for them and every soldier in their Regiment fired two rounds of 7.62mm ammo from the Canadian second line reserves. The Commanding Officer of the Sikhs, LCol Kamran, presented a small silver trophy to the squadron in appreciation. It should be in the RCD museum somewhere. The Sikhs also invited our officers to a TEWT (Tactical Exercise without Troops), on the three battles of Gaza during the WW1. We did it right on the ground where the battles were fought and it was very interesting. This came in handy back in Canada where I had to write on that campaign for military history during Captain to Major exams in 1967.

On one occasion when we were on standby troop we received authority to travel along the Armistice Demarcation Line or ADL which defined the Gaza Strip and separated it from Israel. It was a very interesting day trip seeing how the other UNEF nations deployed their troops. As they were all infantry units they were deployed by companies along the border with a two man picket on duty per guard house. We knew immediately that the Recce Squadron had the best job in UNEF. We passed through the Brazilian, Indian, Swedish and the Danish and Norwegian battalion areas to the Eskalon Gate checkpoint into Israel at the north end of the Gaza Strip. On our return we stopped at the British and Commonwealth Military cemetery near Gaza to pay our respects to the Canadians that had fallen in the Middle East. Trooper Allen, of the first recce squadron of the RCD to deploy to UNEF in 1959-60, is buried there. He was killed by an Egyptian bullet on a night patrol in an area to the rear of the Adrep route. Like all Commonwealth cemeteries, the Gaza one is very well maintained.



*Corner of the Gaza Strip, Israel (dark area) and Egypt*



*Brazilian guardhouse located by the corner in the left-hand photo*

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*Patrol along the ADL – Israel left and Gaza Strip right;*



*Canadian Section- Gaza Commonwealth cemetery*

There were several times when we had a lot of fun and usually at someone else's expense. One night in the mess in Rafah a bunch of us subbies and George were sitting around having a few drinks when we concocted the idea of playing a practical joke on the Indians. We phoned up their Orderly Officer and advised him that "this is the SLBO for UNEF, which stood for the Signals Line Blowing Officer. At 2130 hrs we are going to be blowing out the telephone lines as they get all cluttered and dusty with all the talk that has taken place during the past few months we, will be dispatching a runner to you with some plastic bags to put over the handsets of your field telephones, so when we blow the lines, dust won't get all over the place." To the Indian, this seemed official but just to make sure we spoke with the Canadian Duty Officer at UNEF HQ to bring him in on our little joke.



*Trooper Allen's gravesite*

He too called the Indians with the news. We sent one of our RC Sigs operators with the plastic bags to the Sikh Bn as we said we would and then at the precise moment at 2130 hrs we phoned the Indian Orderly Officer and he said, "No, No, I cannot talk to you as they are going to blow out the lines right now and I have to put a plastic bag over this phone. " We collapsed in gales of laughter at how clever we had been and told that story over and over. Certainly one couldn't do that nowadays.

On several occasions we would make our own fun by taping "radio" programs on our tape recorders. Adding bits of recorded music and witty (so we thought) commentary. Again we would laugh at our cleverness. Cole Hale could be a very funny guy as could Pierre LaPointe. One has to recognize that there were no televisions and the only English language radio that we could get was the daily one hour show on Israelis radio by a Jewish Canadian from Montreal, called Yahoudilev.

We also received a request show from the British Forces Broadcast network of the BBC but the music was mostly English songs for sad British boys serving in Nicosia. Such was life before the Beatles.

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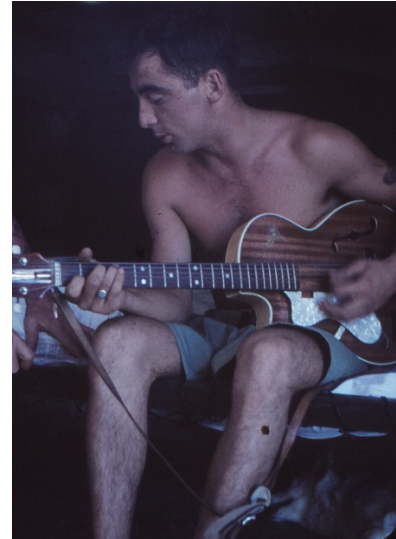
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Even in the desert we played jokes on one another. On one occasion while at the northern outpost, we were about to have Cpl Loisselle of our Sigs Section arrive to spend a bit of time in the Field for it was our squadron practice for all support staff to do a tour of duty in the desert for the experience. We thought we would give him a good start and dressed Roy Payne up as a Bedouin and sent him on foot out into the 500 Meter Zone. When Loisselle arrived we cued Payne and he popped up onto one of the little sand hills. I turned to Loisselle and said, "Looks like your first job – go get that Beddy and bring him back – alive." He took off like 60 bouncing over hill and dale and we could follow his progress as the Jeep appeared and re-appeared at the crest of each little dune. Eventually Loisselle caught up to Roy and jumped out of the Jeep, pistol in hand to make the big arrest when Roy took off the sheet and Loisselle saw that he had been had. We killed ourselves laughing as did he. After that he was one of the boys and he had "sand in his shoes."

On one occasion I had saved a bottle of Chianti for a special occasion and I determined that the occasion would be a troop dinner at the southern Outpost. I thought that it was important to have special occasions in the troop as it was good for morale and troop spirit. On arriving at the outpost, I put the wine in the small kerosene fridge in order to chill it. I think that I made sure everyone in the troop knew it was hands-off. On the night of the special -spaghetti dinner, I took out the wine uncorked it, poured a glass and mmmm, grape cool-aid. It seems the lads took great pleasure in my challenge and carefully removed the paper seal and the cork, drank the Chianti, refilled the bottle with the cool-aid and carefully replaced the cork and seal. I was initially pissed-off but then I figured if they went to all that trouble to have a little fun at their troop leader's expense, so what the hell.



*My Chianti bottle raised high*



*Roy Payne*

Roy Payne was an unforgettable character. He was from Deer Lake, Newfoundland and had an ability to play the guitar, sing country songs and to write songs. We had just great sing songs and sometimes Spike would also drag out his guitar and we would sing good old country or pop songs but being an old cavalry type, Spike also knew all these disgusting pre-war cavalry songs as well which always brought a laugh. Roy wrote a song about our troop about what great guys we all were and one about what assholes the guys in two troop were. They weren't, but every troop likes to think that it is better than the next. Roy's best effort at song writing though came after one of our parties. The Squadron held a "hump party" at the end of July but First Troop was at the Southern outpost and couldn't attend. We vowed to have our own party when we rotated into Camp in August. Well we had one hell of a party and



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again it was during the time when Spike was in Italy on leave and George MacRae came as our guest. Things broke up, at least so I thought, and I went to bed. The next day I went to Gaza to buy God knows what and on my return to the Camp, I noticed that my Troop was on parade in front of SHQ. I leaped out of the Jeep and ran inside and George said, "Sproule your boys have gone too far this time." It seems that George had left his favourite sweater at our party the night before and when he found it the next day it was ripped from the V neck to the waist band. He was furious and was interviewing every member of my troop to find the guilty culprit, but to no avail. Trooper Red Hayes, who was starting to show the strain of being away from his new wife, ripped off his UN armband and threw his blue hat onto the ground and jumped up and down on them like Yosemite Sam in the cartoons and shouted, "I've had enough of this fucking UN outfit" – stomp, stomp. We all stood and stared incredulous of the scene and then I think, the troop sergeant took him aside and calmed him down.

Roy Payne put the right spin on all of this nonsense and wrote a song about these events but I can only remember bits of the first verse and the chorus:

"We were over here for eight months and we up and had a party,  
We had a few beers and we were feeling mighty hearty.  
Dum de dum, dum de dum." *(I can't remember any more words)*

Chorus

"My sweater won't come back,  
My sweater won't come back.  
I've looked all over the damn old place'  
Looked until I'm blue in the face,  
Of my sweater, I can't find a trace.  
My sweater won't come back."

I believe there were three verses but sadly the words are lost, unless out there someone can remember or wrote them down. George eventually heard the song about his sweater and laughed along with the rest of us. Roy went to Nashville later in his life but it was then the late 60's and early 70's. He was a great asset to our troop and I will always remember him. *(I keep in touch with Roy. He lives in Mattawa, Ontario and calls me from time to time.)*

Corporal Bill Hovey often told self-deprecating stories about the days when he had been a policeman in Doaktown, New Brunswick but the best story I remember was the one he told about an event in Camp. He had to get up early in the morning and go to the latrine. "So I'm sitting there, half asleep when the body in the stall next to me slams down the seat in case any scorpions were hiding under the lid, (a common practice) and just then a drop of condensation drops from the tin roof onto my bare back and I thinking it was a scorpion, leaped forward, hit my head on the bejeezly two by four. The seat fell down behind me and I crapped on the seat and fell back in my own shit". Now that's a good way to start your day.

An unfortunate event happened to Cole Hale while he was serving at the Southern Outpost. He was out on a patrol when they came upon a small herd of gazelles and immediately thought fresh meat for the table. They forgot that they were only a few hundred yards from the Yugoslav Company outpost on the El Qusiama road on our Southern boundary. When they opened up with their Bren guns the Yugos thought that the Israelis had crossed the line and deployed their Company into the area only to find Cole

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blasting away at the gazelle. The Yugos reported the incident to the Egyptian Army Liaison office in Gaza rather than the correct route through UNEF HQ and thus an international incident was created. Spike was called to task over this event and was obviously embarrassed by it. He fired Cole as troop leader and put in Pierre LaPointe in his place. Cole was the sacrificial lamb and humiliated over this, but looking back at it I can only think - there but for the grace of God were the rest of us, for we all hunted gazelles. Of course the Yugos and the Gypos were left-leaning dictatorships and were "thick as thieves". They thought nothing of creating a major event over what was really a minor incident – anything to embarrass the Canadians. After a suitable period of time doing penance in Main Camp, Cole got his troop back. This was a humbling experience for Cole as it would have been for anyone.

I mentioned earlier that the Squadron had established a piaster fund by charging an additional piaster on every beer and drink sold at the JRC and Sergeants' and Officers' Messes. The purpose of this fund was to provide soldiers who might have time to go to Cairo or Beirut on leave but no funds to do so with an interest free loan. After a year a sizeable amount of money was in the fund and it needed to get used before the Squadron returned to Canada. Junior officers get tasked with many different tasks but what followed was for me a very unique experience.

I had leave time built up and so in early December, I found myself on the RCAF Caribou scheduled flight from Gaza to Beirut and on my person, I had the Squadron piaster fund in travelers' cheques. I had been advised by George MacRae to check into the Omar Khayam Hotel in downtown Beirut and deal with Alex the manager. You see within Egypt, the Egyptian pound was inflated with an approximate value of \$2.47 US however in Gaza or outside of the country the Egyptian pound was worth maybe \$1.69 US. Obviously there was a benefit to buying cheap pounds. This was my covert mission. On arriving at the Omar Khayam I contacted Alex and explained why I had been sent and asked his assistance in changing the US travelers' cheques into Egyptian funds. He explained that I would have to go to the Chase Manhattan Bank and convert the cheques into small US bills and this I did. I met with Alex gave him the money and off he went to see his money changer and voila I received the pounds back as promised at a more than acceptable exchange rate. I kept up my end of the bargain by providing Alex his fee, a 26er of Johnny Walker scotch whiskey – pricey for him in Beirut but duty-free for me. A few days later I was back on the Caribou bound for the Gaza airport, which also doubled as the local golf course, with Egyptian pounds stashed all over my person as I passed through customs. Back at Camp Worthington, I handed over the stash and my job was completed. The money was used to purchase every man in the Squadron a pewter beer stein with the Springbok, regimental number, rank and name, Reconnaissance Squadron on one side and the UN crest, Sinai Desert, 1962- 1963 on the other side. They were purchased in Cairo.

The Strathcona Advance Party arrived in early January. Lt Walter Reid's troop would replace mine and he arrived to understudy our methods. Walt must have thought that he was on another planet as we were a pretty relaxed but tight troop. After all we had been a troop for two years in Canada and Egypt – a long time for a troop to be together. In the middle of the desert by the Wadi Heredin, Walt would go into the Ablution Hut to prepare for his day. While it took us 10 minutes to shower, shave etc. Walt took at least half an hour and when he emerged he was immaculate. We were impressed but amused at his care and attention to such things. "He'll change – just you wait and see." But those of us that know Walt, knew that this is him. We served together many times thereafter and he was always neat and tidy. He could spend a day in the field and still look spiffy – how he did it remains a mystery. We shared several postings together in Canada but sadly Walt died a few years ago - he was a good friend and a fine officer.

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February 1963 rolled around and we knew it was time to return to Canada. I like others had mixed feelings about this. I wanted to see my wife very much and to hold her and our daughter in my arms and not let go, but a part of me said this is as good as it gets, patrolling around the desert seemed a normal thing to do and as Ron Bancroft advised me recently, each jeep averaged about 63,000 miles and that's a lot of patrolling. We got on the aircraft and as the Egyptian coast line disappeared from view, suddenly the experience seemed to be as if in a dream. It is a peculiar thing how the brain works. The Yukon had to fly into Germany on our return, as UN planes could no longer land in France thanks to President Charles De Galle. We landed in Baden Solingen at 4 Wing, RCAF. We headed for the Mess and rediscovered milk. We drank quarts of the stuff. We had a brief stop at the base PX and once more boarded the aircraft and flew home to Canada.

I had 68 days vacation to use up another long flight to Vancouver and into the arms of my dear, long-suffering wife. It was a difficult adjustment. Although I would not compare the situations, I appreciated what the fellows must have gone through returning home after WW2. It took me time to adjust and to get the experience out of my blood, but I eventually did.

When we all returned to Gagetown the Squadron was split into two sub-units, one part under Spike, conducted trials all summer on an anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) organization while the remainder of us got to work together through one more Summer Concentration as recce with George commanding. I remember that all of our Recce Squadron officers wore our new Egyptian cotton white mess Kit to a Mess dinner and I think we all knew that this would be the last time that we would be together at a Regimental dinner. We had become a very tight group of friends but we must have been insufferable to the other officers. After that summer we were posted to the winds. What an experience. It was the big adventure of my Army career and effected how I viewed almost every other task. I learned a lot about leadership and of my capabilities and everything I learned about soldiers, I learned there. The best part of it all though is that I have many 35mm slides of the desert, sunsets, barbed wire and sand dunes and all these great memories of a time in Egypt long ago to take with me into my senior years. I only hope that I will be able to share these stories with some of my dear old friends again at some future date.



*“Time spent in*

*is never wasted.” Spike Malone*

*reconnaissance*

## **A Bedouin Boy Named Ali**

It is now over 40 years since I served with the RCD Reconnaissance Squadron in the Sinai Desert but it was an important year in my life and I have many strong memories of our time there. Perhaps it is because of the desert and the different culture that we found ourselves in or perhaps it is because serving in an independent squadron on an operational mission was such a unique opportunity. Certainly it is a combination of both of these things plus the fact that it was my only overseas tour in the 18 years I spent in the regular force. Almost to a man, we also had a good fit of personalities. Having discovered the pleasure of writing, I find myself thinking about and writing about the everyday vignettes that played out there and I will write up as many as I can.

Within our sector, which was approximately 35 km from north to south and about 5km in depth, there were three or four Bedouin tribes and during our patrols we frequently had contact with them. Sometimes our contact was of an official nature spent sipping tea with the sheik and his henchmen; sometimes it was at a waterhole or trading for eggs. At our two outposts Bedouin sick parade was held every morning by the gate at our perimeter wire. We treated all sorts of maladies from sword wounds, to broken bones and open sores, transporting the more serious problems to the UN military hospital at Camp Rafah.



*Ali with his juice tin and barbwire "jeep"*



*Ali after the shower*

Our southern outpost was known as Fort Landell, named after LCol Keith Landell the distinguished CO of the RCD who commanded the Regiment through much of WW2. The fort though was very humble and was located about 30 km south of Camp Rafah and about 1 km west of the Israelis border. It was built of shiplap and corrugated iron and scavenged cement blocks and was better than living in tents. The fort

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was situated atop a small sand dune above a dry riverbed known as the Wadi Heredin. The country around was stereotypical desert with lots of sand dunes.

Young Ali was a Bedouin boy of maybe 10 years and was a constant presence outside our perimeter wire. He was always wearing a big smile and pushing his only toy made out of barbed wire and fruit juice cans. It was his “jeep.” Sometimes Ali would bring along one or two other children but usually he was alone. I’m sure he was a bright lad and was curious about the habits of his neighbours. What boy isn’t fascinated with soldiers, jeeps and guns. Sometimes we would give him food and water, or candy and even cigarettes. Canadian soldiers are suckers for kids.

Like most of the children we saw and adults too, Ali was dirty. After all it was such a hard job to find and haul water that personal cleanliness had to be considered an option. On one occasion the boys asked if they could bring Ali inside the wire and offer him a shower as we had plenty of water and the water truck was expected later that day. I agreed to the request and so with some trepidation, Ali came inside and had the shower all to himself. Naturally we left him alone in this water world and when he was finished and clean the boys gave him a clean “T” shirt to put on under his dirty clothes. He retained that joyful smile as we sent him on his way. Outside the wire, he picked up his toy “jeep” and ran home over the dunes.

The following morning Ali was back at our wire complete with smile and “jeep” but not wearing the new “T” shirt. I guess he had to give it up to someone else in the tribe. Most of us could speak a few words of Arabic but not enough to carry on a conversation and so we never found out much about Ali. If he is still living today he would be in his 50s. He would have traded in his “jeep” for a camel and he would have at least one wife and probably grandchildren about age ten like he was then. I just bet that as I remember him, he in turn remembers the Canadians and would tell his grandchildren about the day he stood under that shower.

March 2006

## **The Independent Reconnaissance Squadron**

### ***Canada’s Contribution to UN Peacekeeping***

We often hear in the media that Canada’s great contribution to international diplomacy is peace keeping. Certainly it was the brainstorm of Lester Pearson when he was serving as Canada’s external affairs minister in 1956. Most of us have forgotten how fearful we all were during the cold war, of the threat of nuclear war and of the potential of Soviet aggression. Two very real examples come to mind, the Middle-East Crisis in October 1956 and the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962.

In October 1956 Britain and France invaded Egypt to protect their national interests after Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal and simultaneously Israelis troops raced across the Sinai Peninsula attempting to link up with the British and French forces on the canal. Rushing to the defense of its ally Egypt, the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev stated that unless these countries withdrew their forces, Soviet missiles would be landing in Paris and London. John Foster Dulles of the United States as also encouraging its allies to withdraw as well.

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Enter Lester Pearson. As a way of ensuring that all parties were able to withdraw their forces and therefore not precipitate any further conflict, he proposed that a multi-national force under the United Nations, be sent to Egypt thereby allowing the Brits, the French and Israelis to withdraw. The UN Force would then occupy positions along the Armistice Demarcation Line (ADL) demarking the Gaza Strip and along the International Frontier (IF), the boundary between Egypt and Israel. The force was named the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF).

Initially Canada was to send the Queen's Own Rifles but the Egyptian President, Gamal Abdul Nasser, objected as the regiment's name sounded too British. The battalion was on board the aircraft carrier the HMCS Magnificent, when they were recalled to Halifax. This must have been a disappointing moment for the entire battalion. I can imagine the scurrying that went on in the halls of the old "B" Building at Army HQ in Ottawa for none of our Canadian infantry regiments would really pass muster name-wise. There was the RCR, the PPCLI, the R22eR, the Canadian Guards, RHC (the Black Watch) all with the "royal" designation in their titles so I think you get what I mean. Canadian General ELM Burns was the first UNEF force commander and he wanted a Canadian combat presence in the Sinai and so it was decided to send a composite reconnaissance squadron cobbled together from troops from the Royal Canadian Dragoons and the Strathconas with the new designation of 56 Recce Squadron. All other Canadian units bore this numeral designator as well including 56 REME Workshops and 56 Signals Squadron thereby getting around the too-British problem. In 1956 Canada had two battalions of all of the above infantry regiments and had just completed including the 8<sup>th</sup> Royal Canadian Hussars (8CH) into the RCAC regular orbat. Our commitments to NATO were a brigade group so we had plenty of troops to offer the UN.

Now in 1956 there were no recce elements in regular armoured regiments. On paper there was a recce troop made up of light tanks on each regiment's establishment. In our Canadian way we stumbled into peacekeeping by providing a makeshift and unproven organization that had not trained together prior to its deployment to the Sinai in January 1957. They were equipped with Ferret scout cars which were a fine recce vehicle but proved to be too heavy and unsafe in the soft sand and so after a couple of fatalities, the squadron was re-equipped with M38 Jeeps which did the job very well.

Various nations contributed contingents including the Sweden, Denmark, Norway, India, Brazil and Yugoslavia as well as Finland and Indonesia early in the life of UNEF. With the exception of Canada and Yugoslavia, all of these nations deployed along the ADL on the Gaza Strip and operated from static inter-visible guard posts. From what I observed this was pretty boring soldiering and it was not the sort of duty that Canadian infantry are cut out to do. On the other hand the Canadian recce squadron and the Yugoslav recce battalion patrolled the Egyptian/Israelis border from Rafah in the north to the Gulf of Aqaba in the south. The Canadians patrolled the first one-third of the border and the Yugoslavs the remainder. The Canadian sector was mostly sand dunes and rocky desert with very little vegetation and was populated by various Bedouin tribes. We operated from two troop outposts and each troop consisted of seven jeeps armed with Bren guns. Each troop patrolled an area along the border of approximately 20 kilometres in length and up to five Km in depth. This was an ideal job for a recce squadron.

In the history of the Canadian army it should be noted that this was the first time that a reconnaissance squadron had operated completely independently and to the best of my knowledge it is the only time in all of the UN and NATO deployments since, that a Canadian sub-unit has operated independently from any other Canadian units or HQ. The recce squadron CO, a major, reported directly to the UNEF

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commander a Major-General. Canadian squadrons performed this role from January 1957 until March 1966 when the recce squadron was withdrawn. A total of nine recce squadrons rotated through UNEF including 56 Recce, 3 x 8CH, 2 x RCD, 2 x LdSH (RC) and 1 x FGH. UNEF was unceremoniously kicked out by Egypt just days before the start of the Six Day War. In all subsequent deployments in which Canada has participated, infantry battalions have taken the lead role with attachments from the other combat arms. In a few cases armoured and artillery units have deployed in the infantry role such as happened in Cyprus.

Reconnaissance is something that we do well, for it takes a well-trained and intelligent person to be a good recce soldier and one has to be curious, relentless and a bit of a sleuth as well. What recce squadron OC wouldn't give his right arm for the opportunity to command an independent squadron in an operational theatre.

The RCAC soon realized back in 1956 – 57 that it needed reconnaissance as one of the roles as the emerging tactics of the nuclear battlefield and the independent Canadian brigade group demanded a formation level recce. Within the year all three regular armoured regiments had recce squadrons. It was however several years before the doctrine caught up to organization. Thanks to the experience provided by wartime officers and NCOs the Corps got on with the job. It is therefore somewhat ironic that we stumbled into both peacekeeping and reconnaissance. Peacekeeping, the icon for many Canadians, as the role that the Canadian Forces seems well suited for and reconnaissance a task we take great pride in undertaking and now thoroughly established within our armoured lexicon.

June 2006

### **Hassan**

Over the 40 plus years since I served with UNEF in Egypt, I have often thought of my batman Hassan and wonder what became of him and the members of his family. Hassan was a Palestinian and lived in the town of Rafah. When we arrived at our base known as CBUME (*for Canadian Base Units Middle-east*), all of the officers were assigned a batman; the CO, Major Spike Malone was assigned Mohammad, the two captains were assigned another, whose name I have forgotten, and the subalterns shared Hassan.

Back in Canada, I had a batman when I lived in the officers' quarters. Usually three or four lieutenants, a.k.a. subalterns, shared a batman. For the brief time that I lived in quarters, I was assigned Trooper Jim Gilles, who was later in my troop in Egypt, and he proved to be a better soldier in the field than a batman. A batman's duty was to wash and iron your uniforms, bring you coffee or tea when he awoke you in the morning and to clean and tidy our rooms. A batman was in effect a servant. I expect that officers have not had batmen since the '60s which is probably a good thing. Because of my egalitarian ways, I always felt uncomfortable having someone serve me.

"Good morning effendi," Hassan would say as he awoke each of us. "Here is your chai seer," chai, being the local Arabic word for tea. As there were always two of the five "subbies" out at the troop outposts, Hassan had three of us to look after. While we struggled awake and made our way to the showers, Hassan and the other batmen worked away outside pressing our uniforms and cleaning our shoes. The

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steam iron had not yet made its way to Egypt and so the batmen used a unique method of ironing clothes – they took a swig of water and with lips pressed tightly together they sprayed the water onto the item being ironed. This method worked just fine.

Hassan and his wife had a large family and I have wondered how they managed to live on the meagre salary that he earned at the lowest end of the UN pay scale. I remember that several of us asked for his wife to make Bedouin costumes for us to take home. We provided the approximate measurements and a few days or weeks later, the costumes appeared. The women's dress was made of a black cotton material and was heavily embroidered. The outfit was topped off with the headscarf and decorated with old Turkish coins. The men's is the typical long robe and Arab kafia and egal headdress. We still have ours and have worn them to costume parties a few times over the years.

Hassan had glaucoma, as many poor Arabs have, and although his was operable, he was slowly going blind. It would have been impossible for him to receive the necessary surgery as it was expensive and he would have to travel to Cairo to see the specialist. All of us chipped in to raise the necessary funds and off Hassan went, had the surgery and could see again. He was not the brightest individual but he was cheerful most of the time and I think he liked working for the Canadians.

Before I returned to Canada, in February 1963, Hassan presented me with a photo of himself and another of him with his family. Almost from the time that UNEF collapsed in 1967 when the Six Day War started, Rafah and all of the Gaza Strip has been in turmoil. I have no doubt that life for Hassan, and indeed all of our Palestinian employees, changed significantly. I expect that neither he, nor his wife survive today and I expect their children have been caught up in the terror that has gripped the region ever since.

I have one other reminder of Hassan. Every day my wife and I place our laundry into a bamboo basket in our bedroom. It is the basket that Hassan bought for me in Rafah and was used for the very same purpose then as now. It remains a useful object.

Most of us that have served on UN or NATO missions have had the experience of working with and knowing the locals that serve our needs and then after several months or a year, we are gone. Their lives turn once again to their families and friends in the towns and villages close to the UN bases and I suspect that life continues to be a struggle for most of them. Just maybe from time to time they think about their employment with Canadians. Maybe they will even have a laugh at some of the unusual things that we have done such as our casual ways, our passion for hockey, or of kindnesses that Canadians have shown to them, particularly to the children. Often military wives groups back in Canada, send parcels of food and clothing, which is distributed by our troops to needy families within the theatre of operations. They will to some extent, have a broadened view of the world. I wonder what the Afghans will think of Tim Horton's.

I wish that I had asked Hassan what his full name was, what his wife's name was and where he had been born and raised in Palestine. Then I was a young lad on a big adventure but nowadays I find that I am interested in these fragile memories from a time long ago. Oh and by the way, nobody has served me coffee or tea in bed since.





*Hassan and family in their UN refugee camp home, Rafah.*

March, 2006

## **The Day the Officers' Mess Burned Down**

The phoenix that sprung from the ashes was a splendid place –also a marquee tent but much finer than its predecessor. The conflagration in our Squadron lines, known as Fort Worthington, at Camp Rafah in the Sinai in 1962 had to be seen, to be appreciated for it was the Officers' Mess that was burned. Now I was not a witness so all that I am able to recount is a second hand account which may be more interesting than a first-hand one. Where was I – probably at an outpost in the desert. If memory serves me right, the fire occurred on a night in July when most of the squadron was celebrating at an “over the hump” party. If this is fact, then it might explain some of the hilarious things that happened as the mess tents immolated themselves.

We had few “permanent” buildings in our camp. Squadron HQ was an old British army building that had been recycled and many others were hastily made out of cement blocks and corrugated iron. The Sergeants' Mess and the Officers' Mess consisted of two or more marquee tents lashed together over a 2x4 framework. Our dining tables were the omnipresent 6' folding variety surrounded by grey metal “chairs folding.” The bar was on the left as you came into the place and the furnishings consisted of various wicker chairs, large leather hassocks, assorted camel saddles and one large brass coffee table. The ceiling had been lined in cotton and it was a pleasant place to be in, but burn it did, right down to the pegs.

I cannot recall how the fire started, probably electrical or maybe a cigarette smoldering away in a cushion, but by the time the fire picket were alerted, it was really blazing. Now our administrative NCO, Sergeant Grant Griffin was organizing the bucket brigade and urging the lads on while on the other side of the canvas was the SSM, Harold Wright was urgently telling the boys to get out of the bloody place. We all know the expression about “Chinese fire-drill,” while it was probably an appropriate description of what went on that fateful night. Somehow stirrup pumps and water buckets just didn't do the job. The following morning, not much remained and thankfully nobody was hurt and what was lost could be replaced. The large brass table was salvageable and somewhere out among the castor bean bushes, the

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peppered-sherry decanter was found “sans” sherry and peppers. What a mouthful of heat that must have been.

When the mess was rebuilt, George MacRae our 2i/c called in all of his favours around camp. We quickly had two new marquees up, all rewired and a new beer fridge was in a place of honour behind the bar but the “piece de resistance” was the ceiling material, yards and yards of UN blue cotton from Stores, cut to length and stapled in place. Bamboo matting made up the lower part of the walls and our brass table although somewhat tarnished, was still useable. Pictures were hung on the wall, fire buckets and stirrup pumps were filled and set in place at the entrances and the mess was open for business. No reality TV home renovation show could have done it better. This mess was our home for a year as it was for those serving before and after us. We had a paved patio landscaped about with eucalyptus trees and castor bean bushes and a pool fittingly shaped like a “lazy D”. No architects, engineers, tradesmen or designers were involved with any of it, just a few recce crewmen, NCOs and officers and of course our Palestinian employees.

Great events happened within those canvas walls. Major General FF Worthington accompanied by Colonel Ned Amy was our guest on Canada Day and those of us that were present will never forget the visit of General Geoffrey Walsh, the Chief of General Staff and his young ADC, Captain John de Chastelaine, PPCLI. We hosted UN bigwigs and politicians and entertainers – remember Tommy Hunter and the Rhythm Pals. The RCD band visited from Germany and trumpeter Sgt. Tommy Lyons played the “Post Horn Gallop” on a .303 rifle barrel. We hosted parties for the officers from all of the national forces that made up UNEF – Yugoslavs, Brazilians, Danes and Norwegians, Swedes and Indians. We in the Recce Squadron were a social group but in our own small way whether it was in our little mess, the Sergeants’ Mess, in the JRC or on patrol in the desert or providing first aid to Bedouins. Day in and day out we did our share to establish the credibility that Canada has enjoyed, since UNEF, as an international fair player. This is where our Palestinian steward, named Jemmah, poured our drinks, wrapped our parcels destined for home and laughed at the amusing ways of Canadians. What a gentleman he was and I cannot help but wonder what became of him and his family in the mire that Rafah became after the 1967 Arab/Israelis war.

October 2005

## **Christmas in the Desert - 1962**

The Christmas season is about nostalgia and our memories take us back to other times. I remember during WW2, my Mother packing up parcels to send to my brother who at the time was a “guest of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich” as a POW near Brunswick and to my sister-in-law in England. The parcels usually contained newly-knit socks, a “flat-fifty” pack of cigarettes, chocolate, other food stuffs and for my sister-in-law, nylon stockings. Simple items that would help raise and sustain spirits in the dark days that remained ahead and bring memories of home and love ones. Since these times I have read in family letters of the joy that these few and simple items meant to my brother and his wife. I have read my Father’s bleak letters of life in the trenches of France & Flanders during WW1 and apart from the horrors of daily existence he found joy and pleasure in receiving parcels from home. A home that he knew he might never return to. Simple material expressions of love received with joy and gratitude.

## ***Off to the Sinai, a remembrance of a year spent as a member of the RCD Reconnaissance Squadron with the UNEF, Sinai Desert, February 1962 – 1963***

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I too remember such moments on my tour with the RCD Recce Squadron as a member of the UNEF in the Sinai Desert in 1962. We could not let Christmas be just another day of patrolling and camp routines. We started on Christmas Eve with the adjacent troop and my troop setting up an RV to meet at checkpoint "Oakville" midpoint on our 40 kilometre area of responsibility along the Israelis/Egyptian border. Under cover of the inky darkness our patrols met, lit a fire made from packing cases, opened a few beers and sang carols under the stars. I remember realizing at the time that we were only perhaps several kilometres from Bethlehem the birthplace of Christianity. In typical Canadian fashion, we drank a few beers and sang carols into the night. It was in a way a sacred moment.

We operated from pretty basic troop outposts. We had two – one about 15 Km out in the Sinai and the second about 30 Km south literally in the middle of nowhere. Each outpost was our home for two weeks at a time and for Christmas 1962, I was at the latter and most southerly outpost. It was named Fort Landell after the RCD Commanding Officer that fought the Regiment through much of Italy and NW Europe. Thanks to the Norwegian Contingent, we had a Christmas tree albeit a meagre one. We had decorated it with hand-made decorations and placed a few decorations beneath its sparse branches and beneath it we placed our presents received from our families across Canada. As per normal we started the day with a patrol at 0500 hrs along the border and then my troop sergeant and I served the troops hot-buttered rums filing us all with warmth against the cool desert morning air.

As it turned out it was a day full of activity as later we had a significant confrontation with an Egyptian army patrol operating out of their area of responsibility and testing our Canadian mettle while they attempted to conduct surveillance on an Israelis Kibbutz a kilometre or two across the border. As I learned many years later from one of my NCOs, weapons were drawn while I was negotiating with the Egyptian platoon commander to withdraw from the area.

Later we had turkey with all of the trimmings, pudding and made the best of our holiday – 17 Canadians gathered together among the sand dunes close by the Holy Land.

Over the New Years, I was in main camp in Rafah celebrated more than I needed to and participated in the Camp Rafah Polar Bear swim in the Mediterranean Sea. Not English Bay exactly but cool enough nonetheless. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all Dukes past and present.

December 2010

## **Time Spent in Reconnaissance**

We all grew up with the tried and true. You know; "time spent in reconnaissance is never wasted" or the five "Ps" – "prior planning prevents poor performance." Who can ever forget, "tap the cover, pull the belt, cock twice." At your target in front..." and "ease springs" well that has more than one meaning: shape, shine, shadow, silhouette - whatever. Big 5, mark 5 and high 5. Will this stuff ever leave my brain? Somehow I doubt it.

Whenever I'm in the company of former comrades, expressions from a long time ago inevitably surface and of course the meaning is instantly understood. Have you ever tried, as a civilian, at say a senior

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management meeting when the discussions get down to talking about the bottom line or maybe performance measures, just try throwing in, “well as we used to say in the army, time spent in reconnaissance...” one tends to get looks of amusement or even perhaps amazement. Yet it is sort of the same thing in a way. No apologies folks, remember I was a soldier.

After all the simple act of battle procedure, which starts with reconnaissance, can launch a myriad of actions that are as complex as any management model but tactics is virtual and three dimensional and of necessity orchestrated with as many controls as a flow chart. There are no strings to be pulled once you cross the start line - it's the efficacy of the plan that takes over.

It is great to witness the support for our troops nowadays. There is none of the apathy, disinterest or suspicion that the nation felt towards its cold war army and its poorer cousin UN Peacekeeping missions. Did the Canadian public even know that we had the best little brigade in Germany or that we had several hundred Canadian soldiers in far-flung places like Egypt, the Congo and Cyprus. Oh sure there was a general understanding on the part of the public and gradually they took pride in the work of their men and women in uniform attempting to keep the peace under the UN banner but these activities rarely made the evening news. I remember in Egypt the recon squadron was poorly equipped, each troop having seven jeeps with seven Bren guns, a couple of cases of .303 and 9mm ammo, some #26 grenades and a few smoke grenades and we each had our personal weapon either a Sten Gun or a pistol. As for protective clothing; well when I look at the photos in my journal I am amazed at the lack of protection we wore – khaki shirts and bush pants and a pair of desert boots and a blue UN peaked hat and that was it. Add to this we were about 35 Km out in the desert surrounded by camels, Bedouins and sand. Our flanking unit was a Yugoslav reconnaissance company who couldn't communicate with us and regarded us with as much disdain as we did them. On our Northern flank we had a Brazilian infantry battalion. Same communications problem – “no speakee” and picture this, they had single soldiers stuck in a series of inter-visible one-man guard houses. These poor sods were out there by themselves in the heat of day with no radio and only a rifle and a box lunch. This is how the four battalions of UN troops were deployed along the Gaza Strip's, armistice demarcation line or ADL. It must have looked silly to the Israelis army a few hundred meters away. We'd drive by in our jeeps heading out into the desert and these poor Brazilian buggers eating our dust just gave us a big five and a smile.

On occasion in our mess, we would ask the question, “What do we do if the balloon goes up and either the Israelis or Gypos start to move?” To the best of our knowledge UNEF HQ didn't have a plan and if they did they didn't share it. There was no radio contact with HQ only an insecure landline. We thought that as enterprising Canadians we should at least develop our own plan. We would just go outside our perimeter wire and direct the Israelis tank squadrons through on their way to the Suez Canal again although the Egyptian army had a couple of divisions deployed a few kilometres to the west of our outposts. We thought that the best plan would be to advise c/s 9 that the poop had hit the fan and for our own safety we were going to drive east into Israel get on the nearest highway headed north and drive to Tel Aviv. We would all get together back in Canada somehow. A simplistic but workable plan, issue the order-of-march and we're outa here.

It wasn't something we thought about a lot but each day when heading out on patrol we traversed through more than one minefield. These remnants served to remind us that this corner of the Sinai had been a battlefield many times before. There were a few occasions when we had to prod for mines or had to detonate mines planted on a frequently used track. This always added some excitement to one's day but we were glad to have had the training back in Canada. I remember once when visiting a fellow

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troop leader we heard the defining “karumph” of a mine exploding and when we arrived at the scene we discovered a bunch of Bedouin men laughing their heads off having just detonated a mine by lighting a fire underneath it. It was a different technique but produced the same result. Mines had wounded or killed a few Canadian recce squadron soldiers in this same area both before and after our deployment, so vigilance was essential.

Although it wasn't really policy, one of the most important functions that we performed each and every day was administering to the sick and injured that arrived early at the outpost gate. We would clean and bandage their wounds or sores, and through our kitchen-helper/interpreter we would instruct them what to do. The more serious cases and there were many, we would transport via Jeep to the UN hospital in Camp Rafah. Also we had established a series of watering holes along our ADREP and our water truck driver, Tpr. Norton, took great interest and pleasure in dispensing water to the awaiting throng. Little girls and women would fill their water jugs, hoist them onto their heads and off they would trot across the desert. Otherwise they would have to walk for miles to a dirty cistern, we called Niagara Falls, to fill up on water. Life was a struggle and probably remains so to this day. Canadians also contributed to a women's medical clinic in Khan Yunis and boxes of clothing were sent out from Canada for dispersal to Palestinian families and Bedouins.

Thankfully we didn't have to worry about suicide bombers or roadside bombs as these devices hadn't entered the military lexicon yet. Although we did experience some theft and there were many dangerous creepy-crawlies, our biggest worry was missing a mail run or not receiving a movie on our designated movie night.

I often reflect on our time in Egypt because it was so unique. I cannot recall another Canadian operational commitment where a recce squadron was an independent command. It would never happen today. And so for me the expression “time spent in reconnaissance is never wasted,” has multiple meanings. Of course it implies the importance of efficient preparation but on a personal level it was a year well spent among Canadian soldiers far from home and actually far from anywhere.

March 8, 2007

**Off to the Sinai, a remembrance of a year spent as a member of the RCD Reconnaissance Squadron with the UNEF, Sinai Desert, February 1962 – 1963**

**Toronto Star Weekly Article**

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**THIS WEEK'S NOVEL**

Fear no evil, by Anne Sayre

**COMIC SECTION**

Twenty pages of favorite funnies

**STAR WEEKLY**

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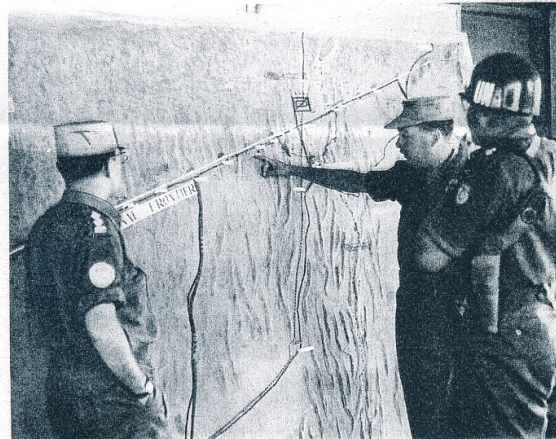
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**LONELY LOOKOUT:** From watchtowers at Camps Mann and Landel in the desert near the Gaza Strip Canadian soldiers attached to United Nations maintain watch for signs of trouble.



**PATROL OFFICER** Capt. Kevin Troughton points out a border trouble spot to subalterns.

**I**N THE pallid half-light of the desert dawn the jeep loomed as a shadowy hulk canted crazily near the top of the sand dune. A sun-blackened man in khaki squatted by the front wheels, smoking, while 20 yards away his companion stood straddle-legged atop the dune and swept first east, then west, with powerful binoculars.

Both men wore blue berets and kerchiefs. The beret badge was a laurel leaf enclosing a miniature world—the insignia of the United Nations. The shoulder flashes on the men's shirts read: "Canada."

This was the dawn patrol from Camp Mann, one of two huddles of prefabricated buildings which stand forlornly yet bravely 10 miles apart on the international border between Israel and Egypt. They are manned by 36 sun-tanned young Canadians, 18 in each. Their job: To watch for signs that either Israel or Egypt are plotting to re-ignite the war which has twice inflamed the Middle East.

Canada has 860 soldiers and 100 airmen in the United Nations Emergency Force of 5,100 which polices the Gaza



## CANADA'S FORGOTTEN LEGION

*For twelve months at a stretch, Canadian soldiers under U.N. command patrol the shimmering desert No Man's Land between Egypt and Israel*

**NOTHING STIRS** on the arid desert except snakes, lizards and an occasional Arab. The road along the Egypt-Israel border which Canadians patrol is nothing more than a track gouged in sand by jeep wheels.

photographs by ROBERT C. RAGSDALE ■ text by ALAN EDMONDS Star Weekly staff writer

Strip, a fertile but otherwise insignificant parcel of land bordered by the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, Egypt's Sinai desert and Israel's Negev desert. The Strip is a temporary home for 260,000 Arab refugees from the Israel-Egypt war of 1948, and, as well as playing watchdog in this territory, the UNEF also patrols the 117 miles of border from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea.

The U.N. force was formed in 1957 after Israel invaded Egypt and broke the uneasy truce signed nine years earlier. Most of Canada's men are with service

corps and ordnance detachments. But there are also the 120 men of the Royal Canadian Dragoons reconnaissance squadron who patrol the 30 miles of border south of the Gaza Strip. Yugoslavs patrol the rest.

The Dragoons are among the 1,000 or so Canadian servicemen under U.N. orders around the world. Before peace came in Northern Laos they sat uneasily between rebel and loyalist forces; in the Congo 10 patrol-strength signals units maintain tenuous communication links for the forces of reason; in bleak

Kashmir six Canadian soldiers are part of a slim buffer between India and Pakistan in the squabble over the territory.

But perhaps the loneliest outposts are Camp Mann and Fort Landel.

From these camps the Dragoons patrol the inhospitable desert, starting at the Gaza Strip. Heading south in the direction of the Red Sea, the border is just a track gouged in the arid land by truck and jeep wheels. Each half mile or so stands a border marker—an oil drum riddled with bullets to make it useless to the Bedouins.

CONTINUED

**Off to the Sinai, a remembrance of a year spent as a member of the RCD Reconnaissance Squadron with the UNEF, Sinai Desert, February 1962 – 1963**

CANADA'S FORGOTTEN LEGION *continued*



**HAZARDS** faced by the border patrol include unmapped minefields laid either by the Egyptians or Israelis. Mine detecting patrols work in parties of four.



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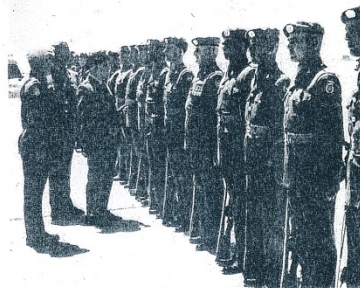


**A WOMAN** is "worth more than a donkey, less than a camel," say Bedouins. So she walks, he rides.

At Gaza, the earth is brown and fertile and the gentle hills are covered with brush, scrub grass and, in spring, fragile yellow flowers. Farther south, the road winds through the parched desert, climbing great dunes and dropping sometimes 100 feet down the other side. Toward the end of the Canadians' patrol area the land flattens out. For days, the patrols—two men to a jeep—see nothing. Apart from the occasional black-robed Bedouin herdsman and his family, little stirs in the desert except the lizards, the scorpions, snakes, the insects—and the Canadians. It's a furnace on the face of the earth where for months the temperature rarely dips below 120 degrees in the shade—only there's no shade.

The Dragoons do two-week patrols in the desert, with two-week breaks at the Canadian base camp at Rafah in the Gaza Strip sandwiched between each patrol. At the desert camps they are fed by Egyptian cooks. Their water is shipped in from the base camp in the supply trucks which every few days also haul new 16mm movies, the mail and newspapers. There are few recreation facilities, and even if there were the men would have little time to use them, for the grinding routine of constant vigil and patrol—with its hazards of uncharted minefields either side of the border, of scorpions and deadly sand asp snakes—is a tension-heavy, full-time job.

CONTINUED



**SPIT AND POLISH** in the desert. Maj. Gen. Worthington and Col. George Stevenson (rear) inspect Canadian guard.

**TRIP FLARES** are set along the border (left) to prevent Egyptian or Israeli forces crossing unnoticed at night.



**Off to the Sinai, a remembrance of a year spent as a member of the RCD Reconnaissance Squadron with the UNEF, Sinai Desert, February 1962 – 1963**

CANADA'S FORGOTTEN LEGION *continued*



**DAWN PATROL.** Every sunrise jeeps, each with two-man crew, set out from desert forts to check border. "When world ends it'll look like this," said soldier.

Back at Camp Rafah the story is different. The camp houses over 1,000 U.N. personnel within four miles of barbed wire. There's a new movie each night. The Blue Beret canteen sells the world's magazines, newspapers and indoor games along with cut-price cameras, tape recorders, radios, record players and records. There's the wryly named Bedouin Golf and Country Club which consists of a nine-hole golf course as bare of grass as a billiard ball; "members" play on the desert and at the "green" smooth the sand with a blanket or an old mattress to make putting easier. There's table tennis, volleyball, handball and baseball. Four miles away there's a private stretch of Mediterranean beach. But the craze this summer is tape recording—"the members of the recording club are so keen they seem to hang around waiting for each other to sneeze to get it down on tape," says one officer. There are no women; just pictures of wives and girl friends, pin-ups and a score or more lifesize cardboard cutouts of The Tuborg Girl, an advertising gimmick for a Danish lager beer. In the Canadian services, Gaza duty lasts

a year, including 30 days leave. Some use it to visit Europe; others spend a few days at a time visiting rest centres in Beirut or Cairo, or go on UNEF organized tours to Cyprus or Jerusalem, Luxor and other Middle Eastern cities. Gaza duty has one advantage: The Canadians receive, in addition to regular pay, a foreign allowance of from \$9 a month for a private to \$37.50 for a colonel. They are also paid a supplementary

\$39 a month for all ranks, plus a special U.N. allowance of 38 piastres (86 cents) a day.

"It's a long year, the longest year in anyone's life," said the young jeep driver at dawn on the desert patrol. "It's fun for the first couple of months because it's different, but by the eighth, ninth and tenth months you're ready to go round the bend. When the world ends it'll look something like this desert."

**THE GOLF COURSE** at Camp Rafah is as bald as a billiard ball; at the "green" members have Arab caddie who smooths the sand by dragging an old mattress over desert. Club thrives without grass.



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**Photo Gallery**



*Heading out*



*All the bugs were big*



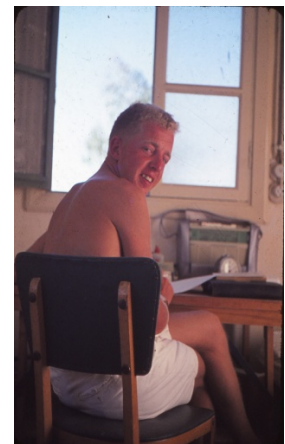
*Taking a break on patrol*



*Kev Troughton*



*Norm Ashton*



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*Bronson and friends*



*Recce Squadron Orderly Room*

*George MacRae*

*Writing home*



*Stan Michelin presenting John Taylor his wings*



*Scoping out the desert.*



*A CBUME Major, Sgt Grant Griffin while Red Hayes casts his vote in the Federal election*



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*Sgt Jack Binns and the Landell mascot – “Nasser”*

*CBUME Paymaster Capt Hovey Tripp RCAPC,  
paying me at Fort Mann*