

# Oral History and the United Nations Force In Cyprus

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Canadian military history often focuses on watershed events, such as the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War, and more recently the war in Afghanistan. Moreover, military historians analyze major wars by employing documentary sources such as letters, press releases, newspapers, etc. In comparison, historians do not as frequently use oral sources such as interviews. Although oral sources offer invaluable benefits, they also possess weaknesses that must be addressed. Though generally not considered a watershed event in Canadian military history, Canada's participation in the United Nations Force In Cyprus (UNFICYP) has helped the UN preserve peace in that country since 1964. An exploration of UNFICYP's historiography reveals a wide range of interpretations, many of them focussing on the UN's overall effectiveness from 1964 to the present. This paper explores the oral history approach to Canada's role in Cyprus through the use of first person interviews with Canadian veterans of the United Nations Force in Cyprus. To this end, Major Gary Del Villano, Lieutenant Colonel Cecil Berezowski, and Lieutenant Colonel Alex Morrison were interviewed, and this essay will explore how each of their accounts add unique information to the historical analysis of the UN in Cyprus. These interviews offer insight into the actions of UN peacekeepers and an eyewitness account of the UN's positive influence on the Cyprus conflict. More specifically, the role and effectiveness of UNFICYP will be analyzed by contrasting oral interviews with the established historiography. It will be shown that oral sources can add a tremendous amount of personal detail to the history of UN peacekeeping operations in Cyprus—something largely lacking in the historiography.

Oral historians must be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of oral evidence in order to capture useful historical material. The major weakness of oral sources often lie in their chronological inaccuracies—especially dates, and this was sometimes evident during my own interviews.<sup>1</sup> However, this weakness can be overcome by cross-referencing oral accounts with documentary evidence. It would be naïve to consider oral sources as pure forms of history, for memory formation depends on perception and is fallible.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, interviewees can be influenced by particular questions, subsequent experience, and other sources such as books and articles.<sup>3</sup> In addition, critics question the degree to which long-term memory may be considered accurate. Evidently, humans possess photographic memory for a short period immediately after an event, but these memories begin to degrade after about one month.<sup>4</sup> As Paul Thompson notes in *The Voice of the Past*; a research project conducted in Norway and the United States revealed that memory alters slightly after a few months, but remains unchanged after six years.<sup>5</sup> More recent biopsychological research supports the notion of long-term memory's stability over long periods of time.<sup>6</sup> Thus, interviewing elderly veterans raises no methodological issues for the purposes of oral history apart from those that would apply to any historical source.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Lofgren, "The Status of Oral History in the Army: Expanding a Tradition," *Oral History Review* 30, no. 2 (September 2000): 144.

<sup>2</sup> John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (London: Longman, 1992), 213.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>4</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 111.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>6</sup> Abraham C. Wickliffe, "How Long Will Long-Term Potentiation Last?" *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 358, no. 1432 (2003): 736.

<sup>7</sup> Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 117.

The use of oral sources can be immeasurably rewarding, for oral history offers an in-depth understanding of the past from those who experienced an event firsthand.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, oral sources add personal and therefore invaluable descriptions, and can at times correct inaccuracies present in documentary sources.<sup>9</sup> In any case, oral history sheds light on the fragmented autobiographies of individuals, as well as giving voice to those who would normally never tell their story.<sup>10</sup> The main strengths of oral history lie in its ability to offer significant and unique information, illustrate individual and collective consciousness, and shed light on how history was remembered and perceived.<sup>11</sup>

A general historical context of the Cyprus conflict will be presented before examining the characteristics of UNFICYP's historiography. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire controlled Cyprus, but the Cypriots wanted to unify with Greece—a reunification they referred to as *enosis*. This demand for union with Greece has since become a major political issue in the Cyprus conflict. In 1878, Great Britain wrested control of Cyprus from the Ottoman Empire and effectively colonized the small Mediterranean island.<sup>12</sup> Over time, both *enosis* and anti-British sentiments gained momentum until 1955-59, when Greek Cypriot terrorist groups began a violent campaign with the aim of achieving Cypriot independence.<sup>13</sup> Great Britain reluctantly began to address the political instability of Cyprus, and thus organized the 1959 London and Zurich Agreements between Britain, Greece,

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<sup>8</sup> Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 214.

<sup>9</sup> Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 210.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>11</sup> Lofgren, 148.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

Turkey, and Cypriot leaders. The resulting agreements essentially set the parameters for a Cypriot constitution, most notably in the stipulations that the President must be a Greek Cypriot and the Vice President must be a Turkish Cypriot.<sup>14</sup> Yet the 1960 constitution of the newly created Cyprus Republic was inherently flawed, as too much power was distributed between Greek and Turkish Cypriots who each had different political agendas. The majority of Greek Cypriots wanted *enosis*, but the Turkish Cypriots wanted to form a separate Turkish republic. Thus, political paralysis obstructed the functioning of the Cyprus government.<sup>15</sup> In 1963 Archbishop Makarios, the Cypriot President, proposed constitutional reforms but instead civil hostilities began, largely as a result of ethnic tensions and threats to Turkish Cypriot power. On December 21 1963, fighting spread across all of Cyprus, and war between Turkey and Greece was imminent.<sup>16</sup>

President Makarios understood that a powerful exterior force was required to mediate the political instability of Cyprus. The UN eventually adopted a resolution to send a peacekeeping force to Cyprus under the control of the Secretary General. The resulting United Nations Force in Cyprus began its mission in March 1964. At that time, the United Nations peacekeeping force consisted of Austria, Britain, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, and Sweden.<sup>17</sup> The UN almost immediately created the Green Line in order to separate Greek and Turkish Cypriot territory. UNFICYP's initial mandate was to prevent a recurrence of fighting, contribute to the

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<sup>14</sup> George Stergiou Kaloudis, *The Role of the U.N. in Cyprus from 1964 to 1979* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1991), 26.

<sup>15</sup> Kaloudis, *The Role of the U.N. in Cyprus from 1964 to 1979*, 29.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>17</sup> Stegenga, *The United Nations Force in Cyprus*, 73.

maintenance and restoration of law and order, and encourage a return to normal conditions.<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that UNFICYP's mandate was never intended to force a settlement, but rather to encourage the warring parties to settle the conflict themselves. Although UNFICYP's mandate is considerably broad and open to interpretation, it has remained the overall objective of UNFICYP since 1964.

UNFICYP immediately faced a volatile situation in 1964, for Greece and Turkey were each poised to declare war. Likewise, in 1967 seemingly harmless patrols in the mixed village of Ayios Theodoros set off hostilities between Cypriots that nearly led to war. In any case, war was averted and a period of relative peace lasted from 1967 until 15 July 1974, when Greek extremists overthrew President Makarios in a successful coup d'état.<sup>19</sup> This shift in power led to Turkish insecurity, resulting in a subsequent Turkish invasion of the island on July 20<sup>th</sup> 1974. During this time, UNFICYP could do little more than encourage restraint and assist in the delivery of humanitarian aid.<sup>20</sup> Still, the UN forces declared UN protected zones in an attempt to halt belligerent Turkish advances. The Ledra Palace Hotel and Nicosia Airport are instances where UNFICYP peacefully defended UN protected zones.<sup>21</sup> Since 1974, Greek and Turkish Cypriots have met with UN representatives to agree on a resolution, but the political impasse remains unresolved to this day. As such, UNFICYP's effectiveness has been analysed and at times criticized by academics.

A comparison of documentary and oral evidence reveals the value of the latter with respect to the UN in Cyprus. The existing historiography tends to focus

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>19</sup> Kaloudis, *The Role of the U.N. in Cyprus from 1964 to 1979*, 75.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>21</sup> Robert J.A.R. Gravelle, "Cyprus As A U.N. Protected Area," *Peace Review* 9 (June 1997): 196.

on the long-term and large-scale impact of the UN in Cyprus since 1964, and essentially offers a "top down" theoretical outlook on UNFICYP. This is not to say that personalized and individual accounts have been ignored in these accounts; yet the interviews I conducted reveal personalized details that have never appeared in the historiography. While documentary sources focus on ideas and theories rather than the experiences of UN peacekeepers in Cyprus, these interviews provide invaluable evidence of how UNFICYP really functioned and its contribution to mitigating the Cyprus conflict.

The historiography of UNFICYP reveals a major debate concerning the UN's effectiveness in Cyprus. Although the historiography that I examined is only a small cross-section of the material published to date on the UN in Cyprus, it can nonetheless form the basis of a useful comparison to the material collected in these interviews. Most published accounts have employed documentary sources, such as newspaper articles, periodic reports from the UN Secretary General, UN press releases, Security Council meeting records, and charts, graphs, and tables for calculating numbers such as troop deaths, shooting incidents, etc. Yet the overwhelming majority of authors have avoided oral evidence as a primary source—although one author had served in Cyprus and employed his own experiences in his analysis.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the majority of authors do not fully consider the opinions and experiences of those who served in UNFICYP. Perhaps as a consequence of this, historiography since the 1960's has increasingly shifted

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<sup>22</sup> Gravelle, "Cyprus As A U.N. Protected Area," 193-199.

towards analyzing the UN's peacekeeping abilities, and very often suggesting means by which to increase UNFICYP's effectiveness.

A notable addition to the historiography on UNFICYP is James Stegenga's *The United Nations Force in Cyprus* (1968). Stegenga's overall evaluation of UNFICYP is that it "undoubtedly made a positive contribution to calming the explosive Cypriot communal war."<sup>23</sup> More specifically, UNFICYP is credited with effectively decreasing violence and contributing to a resumption of day-to-day life in Cyprus. James Stegenga criticizes the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities for the continuation of the conflict, arguing that UNFICYP could do little when each side refused to negotiate and compromise.<sup>24</sup>

George Steriou Kaloudis provides a thorough history of UNFICYP in his book, *The Role of the U.N in Cyprus from 1964-1979*. Although Kaloudis argues that UNFICYP was initially met with mixed results, he notes that their success was remarkable considering the difficult circumstances that faced the peacekeepers, which ranged from Cypriot leaders refusing to speak to one another, Greek and Turkish foreign intervention, and a restricted mandate.<sup>25</sup> Kaloudis essentially argues that UNFICYP should continue to observe ceasefires, continue its humanitarian activities, and encourage inter-communal discussions.

Robert J.A.R. Gravelle was a Canadian logistics officer for UNFICYP, and thus experienced the Cyprus conflict firsthand. Gravelle's main argument is that UNFICYP may retain its credibility in the future and aid in the resolution of the Cyprus conflict

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<sup>23</sup> Stegenga, *The United Nations Force in Cyprus*, 149.

<sup>24</sup> Stegenga, *The United Nations Force in Cyprus*, 149.

<sup>25</sup> Kaloudis, *The Role of the U.N. in Cyprus from 1964 to 1979*, 50.

by adopting a more hard line approach in carrying out its duties. The Ledra Palace Hotel and Nicosia airport incidents were cited as successful attempts by UNFICYP to defend UN territories during crises.<sup>26</sup> However, Gravelle notes that UNFICYP has mostly failed to adopt a strong position since 1964.

Farid Mirbagheri examined whether UNFICYP has simply supported the *status quo* of a divided Cyprus since 1964. According to Mirbagheri, criticizing UNFICYP is unsound, for UN peacekeepers cannot force the Cypriot communities to agree on a future settlement.<sup>27</sup> Still, Mirbagheri suggests possible tactics that the UN might adopt in order to discourage Cypriot non-compliance with peacemaking efforts. The two main tactics are diplomatic and economic consequences such as suspension of voting rights in international fora, expulsion from international institutions, and economic sanctions such as those used against Yugoslavia and Iraq in the 1990's.<sup>28</sup> Mirbagheri's article essentially offers UNFICYP long-term strategies to break the *status quo* in Cyprus.

David M. Last offers an insightful analysis of UNFICYP's effectiveness in his article, "Peacekeeping Doctrine and Conflict Resolution Techniques." Last is somewhat critical of UNFICYP's effectiveness, but he does offer suggestions as to how peacekeeping in Cyprus can improve. Peacekeeping, according to Last, is like war in that integration of military operations with tactical, operational and strategic policies is required.<sup>29</sup> He concludes that the military aspects of UNFICYP's

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<sup>26</sup> Gravelle, "Cyprus As A U.N. Protected Area," 196.

<sup>27</sup> S.M. Farid Mirbagheri, "Peacekeeping and Peacemaking: The Example of Cyprus," *Contemporary Review* 288 (Spring 2006): 44.

<sup>28</sup> Mirbagheri, "Peacekeeping and Peacemaking: The Example of Cyprus," 44.

<sup>29</sup> David M. Last, "Peacekeeping Doctrine and Conflict Resolution Techniques," *Armed Forces and Society* 22 (Winter 1995): 188.

peacekeeping efforts have been well developed, but more energy must be spent on problem-solving techniques such as arbitrating disputes, 'go between' negotiations, and holding meetings. These techniques pertain more to UNFICYP's contemporary peacemaking strategies.

Although most scholars consider that the Cypriots are to blame for the perpetuation of the Cyprus conflict, Nicholas Sambanis directly criticizes UNFICYP. Sambanis immediately states that his aim is "to debunk the myth of UNFICYP's success by elaborating a new conceptual framework to define peacekeeping success and evaluate UNFICYP's performance during the 1964-1979 period."<sup>30</sup> In addition, Sambanis states, "UNFICYP could have been more effective if it had interpreted its mandate less conservatively, used stronger strategies, and maintained an impartial yet non-neutral position."<sup>31</sup> Sambanis concludes that UNFICYP's ineffective peacekeeping contributed to the calcification of the Cyprus conflict.

The historiography on UNFICYP overwhelmingly notes that a *status quo* exists in Cyprus to this day. Although the blame is sometimes directed towards the Cypriots, many authors tend to focus exclusively on how UNFICYP could improve as a peacekeeping force. Though many suggest possible peacemaking improvements for UN peacekeepers, others, such as Nicholas Sambanis, directly criticise UNFICYP. And yet the majority of this historiography focuses on major events and disregards the day-to-day peacekeeping activities of UN servicemen. Moreover, the prevailing

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<sup>30</sup> Nicholas Sambanis, "The United Nations Operation in Cyprus: A New Look at the Peacekeeping-Peacemaking Relationship," *International Peacekeeping* 6 (Spring 1999): 79.

<sup>31</sup> Sambanis, "The United Nations Operation in Cyprus," 102.

focus on UNFICYP's shortcomings and failures has a tendency to unjustly detract from its peacekeeping abilities and achievements.

In pursuing this topic, I conducted three interviews with Canadian veterans of UNFICYP in order to understand the UN's role in Cyprus. Each of these veterans experienced a unique six-month tour in Cyprus. In comparison, the secondary sources describe the role of UNFICYP since 1964 in broad terms, and offer very general conclusions as to its effectiveness. As mentioned earlier, the existing historiography lacks descriptions of what peacekeeping was actually like in Cyprus. These interviews consequently provide a more individual and personal perspective on the Cyprus conflict. Though each veteran served in Cyprus for a relatively short time period, their experiences were unique and their recollections filled with detail.

In the fall of 1965 until the spring of 1966, Gary Del Villano was a Lieutenant in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Canadian Guards armoured reconnaissance unit. His armoured troop was dispersed into various elements—convoy, reserve, maintenance, and quick reaction.<sup>32</sup> In addition, Del Villano served liaison officer between UNFICYP and Cypriot, Greek and Turkish military units. He was tasked with travelling around in a jeep to “do reconnaissance of all parts of the island.... I would have to keep track—map—marking possible problem areas, maybe a wooden bridge that doesn't look too good.”<sup>33</sup> He remembers one occasion when, as liaison officer, he had to visit an irate Greek Cypriot Colonel:

We drive out to his headquarters location—maybe ten kilometres away...he would then proceed to accuse the Canadian contingent of—you name it—we got accused of it. Whatever it was, 'you're siding with

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<sup>32</sup> Gary Del Villano, Interview By Author, March 11<sup>th</sup> 2011, 31:30.

<sup>33</sup> Del Villano, 46:48.

the Turks'...The first thing I would do is pull out my book and stop and say 'excuse me but can you spell your name?' And what I was doing was breaking their train of thought.<sup>34</sup>

Diffusing tense situations was a major component of peacekeeping. In addition, Del Villano remembers that along the Green Line there was "periodic shooting, periodic sniping, periodic injury or death...and in fact the headquarters building—the little headquarters building we had for the squadron—half the roof was gone. We had a canvas across the roof because a mortar round had hit the roof."<sup>35</sup>

Captain J. Cecil Berezowski served as General Staff Officer Grade Three (GSO 3) from August 1965 to February 1966. Upon arriving in Cyprus, Berezowski met with his commander and enquired about reporting to the rest of the General Staff Branch, expecting assignment to a team of several majors and captains that would normally be found working in a typical G branch. As it turned out, Berezowski was the sole member of an entire General Staff Branch, and he recalls that "suddenly here I arrive in Cyprus, and I'm a G-Branch of one."<sup>36</sup> His first assignment was to write a comprehensive report on the history of the Cyprus conflict, how it evolved into a crisis, and the UN's subsequent involvement.<sup>37</sup> In addition, Berezowski was placed in charge of the security for a CBC Concert Party who performed in Cyprus, "I briefed the folks...and I said don't go any place alone... And I said the Green Line is that Street there. If you happen to look up and see a rifle pointed out of a window from the second story the last thing you want to do is point at it...because they'll

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<sup>34</sup> Del Villano, 57:32.

<sup>35</sup> Del Villano, 30:40.

<sup>36</sup> J. Cecil Berezowski, interview by author, March 10<sup>th</sup> 2011, 17:04.

<sup>37</sup> This Report is located in the Special Collections section at the University of Victoria McPherson Library.

probably take a shot at you.”<sup>38</sup> In addition, Berezowski was required to collect signatures for General Thimayya’s *In Memoriam* book. Thimayya was the commander of UNFICYP before he died in 1965 due to health complications.<sup>39</sup> Cecil Berezowski was responsible for meeting and collecting the signatures from a staggering number of diplomats. In general, he often dealt with human relations tasks during his service in Cyprus.

Captain Alex Morrison served in UNFICYP headquarters for six months in 1968. Morrison explained, “one day I got a telegram from Ottawa that said you’re posted to UN headquarters in Cyprus.”<sup>40</sup> According to Morrison, “at that time in the Canadian Military there was no specific training for peacekeeping. If you were an officer and you were well trained to date—I was a captain when I went there—you were deemed to be able to know how to work in a large headquarters, so I received very little briefing.”<sup>41</sup> Morrison worked in the Nicosia UN headquarters during his service period in Cyprus,<sup>42</sup> which he recalls as being “open twenty four hours a day, so we worked various shifts. During the daytime most people were there, and it was a very normal working atmosphere.”<sup>43</sup> A typical day for Alex Morrison began “at seven in the morning and finished at one...I travelled all around the island during the six months I was there and saw virtually every place.”<sup>44</sup> Morrison adds that “we had freedom of movement...so I would get a land rover from the transport

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<sup>38</sup> Berezowski, 44:49.

<sup>39</sup> Berezowski, 47:46.

<sup>40</sup> Alex Morrison, interview by author, March 4<sup>th</sup> 2011, 1:07.

<sup>41</sup> Morrison, 1:21.

<sup>42</sup> Morrison, 2:20.

<sup>43</sup> Morrison, 4:45.

<sup>44</sup> Morrison, 8:58.

compound and drive up to Kyrenia or down the British areas.”<sup>45</sup> When passing Turkish, Greek, or Cypriot military units, Morrison recalled “saying hello to them when you drove by, when you went through the checkpoints.”<sup>46</sup> The majority of Morrison’s experience consisted of displaying the UN’s presence to the Cypriots.

In terms of general duties, Morrison explains: “My title was SO3 Special Projects—Staff officer 3 special projects...each one of the captains on staff did two things, one you were a watch keeper, that is you were on duty during the day listening to the radios, listening to all the reports...the other thing I looked after was the training areas.”<sup>47</sup> There were two weapons training areas within British bases in Larnaca and Limasol.<sup>48</sup> One of his duties was to travel to British bases “with a list of which contingent in the [UNFICYP] wanted to use which range.”<sup>49</sup> Alex Morrison reflected that overall “most of peacekeeping is just everyday normal routine.”<sup>50</sup> Moreover, he recalls how his experience as a peacekeeper later helped him as a member of the Canadian mission to the United Nations: “The fact that I had served in Cyprus served me in good stead when I was in New York from [1983-1989].”<sup>51</sup>

Each veteran addressed the current political situation in Cyprus; today the UN remains stationed with no resolution in sight. In Gary Del Villano’s view, “We had no idea that we would be there—the Canadians...for twenty seven years.”<sup>52</sup> Yet when questioned on the effectiveness of the UN, each veteran answered that

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<sup>45</sup> Morrison, 41:11.

<sup>46</sup> Morrison, 41:39.

<sup>47</sup> Morrison, 6:24.

<sup>48</sup> Morrison, 7:18.

<sup>49</sup> Morrison, 7:23.

<sup>50</sup> Morrison, 43:05.

<sup>51</sup> Morrison, 12:12.

<sup>52</sup> Del Villano, 17:21.

UNFICYP was definitely a positive influence on the Cyprus conflict. UNFICYP effectively did its job and was necessary to prevent needless bloodshed. The interviews offer a personalized account of UNFICYP's role in the preservation of peace in Cyprus. For example, Gary Del Villano explained how UN convoys were subjected to hostility: "Things could get clutchy...there were some pretty nasty people in the mountains who would very happily [shoot] around at the convoy. We did get shot at but it was by accident...it was Greeks and Turks shooting at each other."<sup>53</sup> The UN protected convoys in order to limit the chance of hostility when Greek and Turkish Cypriots entered each other's territory. In addition, Gary Del Villano and Alex Morrison elaborated on UNFICYP's role in overseeing troop rotations, and noting the movement of Cypriot, Greek and Turkish observation posts. UNFICYP essentially monitored the situation and limited the chance of hostilities whenever possible. The precarious peace that UNFICYP maintained on a daily basis fails to appear in the historiography. In short, the interviews reveal a descriptive account of UNFICYP's tangible influence in Cyprus.

A major duty that UNFICYP carried out was convoying either Greek or Turkish Cypriots into the other's territory. For example, Del Villano noted that the UN ran a convoy of about fifty vehicles in the morning and afternoon from Greek territory into Turkish territory.<sup>54</sup> He recalls convoying Greek Cypriot families into Turkish territory to pick olives: "I would go up to the Turkish position ahead of time, and I would tell them 'this is what they're going to do, we don't expect any problems do we?' And they were very good, because the Turks knew that without us [UN] the

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<sup>53</sup> Del Villano 34:52

<sup>54</sup> Del Villano, 32:30.

possibility of massacre was always there.”<sup>55</sup> Yet the potential for conflict never disappeared entirely during these convoys.

Cecil Berezowski remembers that UNFICYP ran similar convoys from Nicosia to Kyrenia, and at times the Turks would disrupt the convoys. This was highly aggravating for UN peacekeepers because Turkish and Greek military units were ordered to remain one hundred yards away from UN convoys. According to Berezowski, “One day a call came out from one of the scout cars that there was a Turkish infantry rifle company that had set up some sort of a barricade on the highway.”<sup>56</sup> A 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant from the Canadian Guards investigated the incident in order to remove the Turkish company from the highway. Berezowski heard shortly after the incident that as the young subaltern spoke with the Turkish roadblock, he heard a Turkish sergeant cock his rifle in a threatening manner. The second lieutenant stood his ground and indicated that he had the support of a UN platoon in the event that any complications occurred.<sup>57</sup> Subsequently, the Turkish company backed down, and the UN retained its credibility as a stern force. The 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant was recommended to receive a medal for bravery from the Canadian government, but the process was abandoned. Berezowski explained that the Turks would have labelled the incident as British propaganda, and it was paramount that the UN remain neutral. Cecil Berezowski recalled that UN peacekeepers in Cyprus regularly worked with “that kind of political influence on the ground.”<sup>58</sup> Sometimes their

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<sup>55</sup> Del Villano, 19:38.

<sup>56</sup> Berezowski, 1:04:06.

<sup>57</sup> Berezowski, 1:05:43.

<sup>58</sup> Berezowski, 1: 09:02.

efforts were recognized, but very often their contributions to maintaining the precarious ceasefire went unnoticed.

The UN was also required to oversee rotations of the Turkish army into Cyprus, and Gary Del Villano was present during one of these rotations in Morfu. The Turkish Navy was offshore, and the Greek Cypriots were overlooking the rotation from a ridge.<sup>59</sup> The tension was extremely high and the UN was required to maintain peace. Del Villano remembers:

It was going quite well, when up over the crest came a battery of anti aircraft guns...and they deployed on top of the hill, and started pointing their guns at the Turkish contingent, at which point the lamps started flashing out to sea with all these Turkish destroyers, and the Turk Cyp had a radio and he was talking to a Turkish officer and he told the [UN] General 'if they [Greeks] don't turn those guns away from our ships we'll open fire.'<sup>60</sup>

The UN general—who was a Canadian Brigadier General—subsequently ordered Del Villano to shoot the Greek Cypriot search lights out.<sup>61</sup> Del Villano, understanding that this would increase the tension exponentially, convinced his superior to let him talk to the Greek Cypriot soldiers on the ridge. This was bold move because Del Villano was effectively questioning the orders of his superior. During his interview, Del Villano admitted, “I don't know what I would have done if he said 'you've got a direct order do it now.' Do I disobey orders?"<sup>62</sup> In any case, Del Villano spoke with the Greek Cypriots on the ridge:

There was a captain there, he started yelling and screaming at me...and eventually I said to him 'those ships out at sea, they have six inch guns...they have far more range than you do, and if you don't turn out

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<sup>59</sup> Del Villano, 21:30.

<sup>60</sup> Del Villano, 21:47.

<sup>61</sup> Del Villano, 23: 58.

<sup>62</sup> Del Villano, 25:57.

those search lights and turn those barrels away from the guns, the Turkish army is opening fire in ten minutes.' And he yelled and screamed for a while longer, and then turned out the searchlights and pointed the barrels away.<sup>63</sup>

In addition, Del Villano recalled incidents when the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriot units nearly began hostilities; "we would drive our armoured cars in between them, so that officially they were not shooting at each other they were shooting at the UN."<sup>64</sup> This action literally put UN peacekeepers in the crossfire between Greek and Turkish Cypriots with the intention of dissuading hostilities. On a separate occasion, the Greek and Turkish Cypriots nearly began fighting when a Turkish Cypriot schoolteacher was shot through the head. Del Villano recalled the UN's procedure for calming volatile situations: "there would be liaison officers going to both sides, there would be a blocking force—if you will—in between both sides."<sup>65</sup> UNFICYP, as indicated by Del Villano, constantly diffused high-tension situations with communication, persuasion, and by interposing themselves between belligerents.

UNFICYP likewise had to take a strong stance when Turkish or Greek Cypriots attempted to gain more land at the other's expense. The establishment of new forward observation posts was often nothing more than a land grab by Greek or Turkish Cypriot military forces. Alex Morrison remembered a potential crisis during his service in 1968:

Sometimes one side or the other would try to move its observation post a hundred meters ahead to gain an advantage, so the UN had to know what was going on there, and stop it if it did, and if they couldn't stop it

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<sup>63</sup> Del Villano, 24:57.

<sup>64</sup> Del Villano, 41:22.

<sup>65</sup> Del Villano, 43:36.

then it got reported until finally it came to the headquarters...I remember one time there was a hint that something might happen and the Canadian brigadier Teddy Leslie was Chief of Staff by that time... so he just said to the British who were part of the force reserve, 'take all your vehicles and your soldiers and go to this point and tell folks if they don't stop what they're doing then you're going to push them back by force.'<sup>66</sup>

In addition, Morrison later reflected on UNFICYP's impact in 1968:

The one or two situations that might have developed into something in the summer of '68 were prevented by the fact that the UN said 'we're here to keep a lid on the situation and if you folks get too much out of hand we won't hesitate at all to use force to put you back to where you're supposed to be'...the UN had the potential to use force and was willing to use it, if the situation escalated.<sup>67</sup>

Similarly, the notion of UNFICYP's mediator role is conveyed by Del Villano's experience in observation posts: "we would sit there all night, now if anybody wanted to take us out they were going to take us out...that's the way it operated, it was all based on you get in trouble if you start taking on the UN."<sup>68</sup>

For Alex Morrison, UNFICYP's role was clear, "we knew that the mandate at that time was to keep the two sides separated in order to permit or create or to maintain conditions in which people might be able to find a political settlement."<sup>69</sup> Although the political situation was perpetually static, Morrison explained the intent behind UNFICYP activities during this period:

Within what we call the static environment there was lots of movement. There were always attempts by UN headquarters and by the Special Representative of the Secretary General in Nicosia to bring the parties together. What happened the overwhelming majority of the time is that

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<sup>66</sup> Morrison, 18:07.

<sup>67</sup> Morrison, 28:06.

<sup>68</sup> Morrison, 40:25.

<sup>69</sup> Morrison, 11:22.

if the Greek Cypriots would agree to something the UN said, then the Turkish Cypriots would disagree.<sup>70</sup>

UNFICYP was effectively carrying out its mandate of separating belligerent parties, preserving peace, and encouraging negotiations. Each of the veterans interviewed for this essay believed, on the basis of their experiences in Cyprus, that UNFICYP did its job well. Although some may believe this may reflect only their own inherently biased perspectives, these veterans did, in fact, experience first-hand the UN's role in Cyprus –something that cannot be said of all authors who have stated opinions to the contrary.

The dominant question with respect to UNFICYP today is why has it been stationed in Cyprus since 1964? The conflict has remained unresolved for half a century. Speaking on the basis of his experiences as an officer in UNFICYP, his later role with the UN in New York, and his research on UN peacekeeping as a professor at Royal Roads University, Alex Morrison explains, “from my point of view it’s better to have United Nations soldiers there for decades to come than take them out and risk that these folks will start killing one another again.”<sup>71</sup> Del Villano agrees, but also noted that “there’s a limit to what peacekeeping can do.”<sup>72</sup> In his opinion, the UN cannot force a settlement. With respect to forcing a solution, Morrison asks, “how can the United Nations impose a solution? Are we going to send fifty thousand United Nations soldiers there to run the country? No.”<sup>73</sup> In Morrison’s opinion, peacekeeping can only operate within clearly defined limits: “The use of

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<sup>70</sup> Morrison, 14:22.

<sup>71</sup> Morrison, 20:55.

<sup>72</sup> Del Villano, 1:25:48.

<sup>73</sup> Morrison, 23:16.

peacekeeping might be a conflict resolution mechanism in that it prevents fighting, it allows life to a certain degree of normality, and then it's up to the political leaders to try to affect a solution."<sup>74</sup> In other words, UNFICYP's job is to maintain peace and allow the belligerent parties to resolve their conflict. Therefore, the UN has effectively done its job since 1964.

In terms of an overall evaluation of UNFICYP, Morrison explains: "I think that the presence of the UN affected the situation positively everyday, because if the United Nations wasn't there for example at the strength it was in 1968, then the Turkish Cypriots would have tried to move their observation posts one way, and the Greek Cypriots the other way and there would have been conflict."<sup>75</sup> In addition, Gary Del Villano believes that a situation like the 1974 Turkish invasion was always possible; "they could have done that at any time, for any number of reasons." Remarking on UNFICYP's overall role, he believes that "we did damp it down. We did keep things cool, calm and collected...so that things like the early atrocities didn't happen."<sup>76</sup> In other words, the UN's presence effectively limited hostilities, and guaranteed a degree of normal life within the Cyprus conflict.

The UN remains in Cyprus to the present day. Academics have approached the question of the UN's effectiveness in that country from a number of perspectives, and have more recently focused on ways in which UNFICYP can function more effectively as a peacekeeping force. The prevailing opinion in the historiography has essentially concluded that the onus is on the Cypriots themselves to resolve the

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<sup>74</sup> Morrison, 22:57.

<sup>75</sup> Morrison, 27: 40.

<sup>76</sup> Del Villano, 1:21:26.

conflict, but at the same time UNFICYP has been criticized for inadequate peacekeeping and peacemaking. Yet a contrary interpretation is arrived at by employing oral sources to understand the UN's role in Cyprus. The existing documentary sources and opinions are strengthened by the detail, colour, and first person perspectives gleaned from oral sources. The interviews conducted with Gary Del Villano, J. Cecil Berezowski, and Alex Morrison all shed new light on UNFICYP. Although the scope of the interviews are limited in terms of an overall approach to the UN in Cyprus—spanning only six-month periods in 1965-66 and 1968—the depth of information gained is invaluable. Moreover, UNFICYP's tangible role in keeping the peace throughout the Cyprus can be better understood through the use of these interviews. More interviews would shed invaluable light on the history of the United Nations Force in Cyprus and its role as a peacekeeping force, allowing one to conclude that the oral source method, combined with documentary sources, creates a holistic interpretation of the UN in Cyprus and contributes to a better understanding of how peacekeeping continues to operate in that country.

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