Canadian Soldiers in Cyprus:

Understanding the human experience of peacekeeping through oral history.

Camas Eriksson
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Dr. James Wood
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“There’s this myth about Canadians being peacekeepers and that we’ve never been to war. You just have to look at Canadian history, Canada has been at war virtually since our foundation… I was at a dinner party, about a year ago, and someone said: “What was it like serving for thirty years and never having to be in a war?” And I said, “You have no idea what you’re talking about.” I’ve been in seven combat zones where people were shooting, over the years. Somalia, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Congo, Cyprus…. Every one of those places I could have been killed.”

- Colonel John Joly (Retd.)

The involvement of the Canadian military in international conflicts is a topic often left to the periphery of public consciousness. As Canadians, we take pride in our historical role as UN peacekeepers, preventing violence rather than participating in it. However, many Canadians do not truly understand what peacekeeping means for the soldiers involved. The words above, expressed by retired Colonel John Joly, reflect a common sentiment among those who have served in Canadian peacekeeping operations around the world. While researching this paper, I interviewed four men who served in the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) during the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974. Colonel John Joly (Retd), Major-General Cameron Ross (Retd), Captain Terrance Swan (Retd) and Chief Warrant Officer Tom Walton (Retd) each provided an individual perspective on their time serving as part of the Canadian Airborne Regiment in Cyprus. However, all voiced the same concern as Col. Joly, that the average Canadian is unaware of the danger that soldiers encounter during peacekeeping operations. Although these men may not have been involved in fighting a war, the seriousness of the Cyprus conflict and its impact on their lives cannot be ignored.

For historians, a complete understanding of the Canadian role in operations such as Cyprus cannot be achieved without the use of oral histories. In this paper, I will compare three

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sources of information on the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus: academic publications, *Globe and Mail* newspaper articles, and personal interviews with the four men mentioned above. Each source has its advantages, but I will argue that without oral history we cannot fully understand what Canadian soldiers experienced while serving in Cyprus. These interviews provide some indication of what it meant to be a peacekeeper and they enrich the current historical record that has largely ignored the role of Canadians in international conflicts.

The history of Cyprus has been one of turbulence, caused primarily by the ethnic divisions between the Turkish and Greek Cypriots on the island. Cyprus’s strategic location in the Mediterranean has made it the prize of many a conquering force; first with the Ottoman Turks in 1571 and later, in 1878, with the rule of Britain following a British-Ottoman alliance. Although originally an Orthodox Greek population, Cyprus was settled by Muslim Turks while under Ottoman rule. Over the three centuries until British rule, the Turkish settlers established themselves as local Cypriots. These two populations, consisting of an eighty percent Greek majority and a twenty percent Turkish minority, never gave up their ties with their perspective home lands and continue to maintain different languages, religions, and cultural practices. This has prevented the two communities from establishing a sense of national unity and they each evolved conflicting political interests. Greek Cypriots wished for *enosis*, unification with Greece and Turkish Cypriots called for *taksim*, partition of the island.

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3 Ibid.


5 McDonald, 9.
When Cyprus was granted independence on 16 August 1960, it was not long before the new republic descended into civil war. In December 1963, fighting erupted between Turkish and Greek militia groups and the United Nations was forced to create UNFICYP, which was established in Cyprus by March 1964. The mission, mandated under UN Chapter 6 of the UN Charter, was “peacekeeping” rather than a Chapter 7 “peacemaking” operation. UNFICYP’s mandate was, “in the interest of preserving international peace and security, to use its best efforts to prevent a recurrence of fighting and, as necessary, to contribute to the maintenance and restoration of law and order and a return to normal conditions.” UNFICYP’s role was not to enforce peace, but rather maintain it. The force consisted of contingents from Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Sweden and Britain, totalling about 6,500 men by 1964.

Canada’s involvement in Cyprus has been a long and drawn-out operation. The Canadian Royal 22nd Regiment, commonly known as the Van Doos, was one of the first to arrive as part of UNFICYP. Canadians soon made up the second largest UN contingent, comprised of about 575 men. Their assignments were to oversee the area of Nicosia and to establish a presence on the Green Line—the demarcation zone between the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities within the city—and maintain it as a neutral area. By the end of 1964, the situation had quieted enough that Canada began to rotate its troops home every six months, using the operation as an

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6 Ibid., 10.
7 McDonald, 10-11.
10 Alan James, “The UN force in Cyprus,” International Affairs 65, no. 3 (Summer 1989): 482.
11 James, 487; J. L. Granatstein and David J. Bercuson, War and Peacekeeping: From South Africa to the Gulf—Canada’s Limited Wars (Toronto: Key Porter Books Ltd, 1991), 223.
12 Granatstein and Bercuson, 223.
13 James, 488; Granatstein and Bercuson, 223.
14 Granatstein, 223.
unofficial training ground. For the next ten years this situation remained and a Canadian presence was maintained at about half the strength that it had in 1964.

On 15 July 1974 crisis erupted. The Greek President Archbishop Makarios – fondly known as “Black Mack” by Canadian soldiers serving in the area– was overthrown by the Greek-Cypriot nationalist group EOKA-B and replaced by Nikos Sampson, a former assassin for the organization. Five days later, on 20 July, Turkey responded by sending an invasion force of approximately 40,000 troops to capture nearly half of the island under the pretences of protecting the welfare of the Turkish-Cypriot community.

Col. John Joly and CWO Tom Walton were among those who were posted to Cyprus just prior to the Turkish invasion as part of the Canadian Airborne Regiment. Col. Joly worked as an Operations Officer at the UN headquarters, Blue Beret Camp, in Nicosia. His job involved meeting with the Turkish Liaison Officer to establish communication between the warring forces. He recalls the Greek coup with some clarity:

On the morning of the 15th of [July], 1974, I was sitting, and I had just finished... briefing the CO and organizing the activities of the day. And I walked out of our Joint Operations Center and...we were about a hundred yards from the Ledra Palace Hotel, the big five star hotel in Nicosia, and adjacent to the Ledra Palace Hotel was the Paphos Gate police station. And Paphos Gate was the gate into the old city, [the] main gate, and that’s where the police had their headquarters. Across the street from that was...a ten story building called the Elektra House, that’s where all the telephone and telecommunication switches were located...When I walked out at 8:15, after the morning briefing, I saw a tank go past, right by the front gate of our Joint Operations Center, and it went down to the Pathos Gate police station traffic circle...about a hundred yards down the road, stopped, swivelled its cannon, and I walked out and I looked down the street, ‘cause this was so unusual to see a tank go by, and it started firing at the police station.

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15 Ibid., 224.
16 McDonald, 17; Archbishop Makarios is referred to as “Black Mack” by Col. Joly in his interview at 00:36:34.
17 Granatstein and Bercuson, 224.
18 Joly, Interviewed by Camas Eriksson, 00:45:08–00:46:50.
CWO Walton was posted to Cyprus in April, 1974, where he worked as the Non-commissioned Officer (NCO) responsible for civilian labour, in charge of Greek and Turkish Cypriots who worked for the UN forces. His experience of the coup was similar to Col. Joly’s. He describes being on leave in Famagusta, the Swedish-controlled area of Cyprus, having a drink with some friends when “all of a sudden we heard this bang and we looked over the side and there’s a tank going up the road. It’s a Russian tank, a Russian made tank, but it was [the] Greeks.”

In addition, Walton clearly remembers the Turkish invasion:

We were on role call one morning and all of a sudden these Super Sabers come out of the clouds. Because we weren’t far from the airport we could see the bombs leaving the aircraft, right onto the runway. Shortly after that there was, I don’t know how many, dozens of cargo aircraft went right over our camp. Our camp was on a bit of a rise…they were probably three hundred to four hundred feet above us and we could actually see the paratroopers standing in the door, Turkish Airborne, and then a few minutes later we could see them dropping down out of the plane…So, we figured something was going on then.

The Canadian Forces responded to the invasion by doubling its UN contingent. Reinforcements arrived in the form of Two Commando of the Canadian Airborne Regiment along with support units. Among them were Captain Terrance Swan, a Platoon Commander at the time, and Lieutenant Cameron Ross, Troop Leader of Lord Strathcona’s Horse Light Armoured Recconaisance Troop, which was attached to the Canadian Airborne Regiment for the operation. Both remember the speed with which they were deployed, given only three days notice. As Ross recalls, “we had three days…we got to know each other getting on the bus going

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20 Walton, Interviewed by Camas Eriksson, 00:05:23 – 00:06:30.
up to Edmonton, literally.”

The new, updated, UN mandate gave Canadian peacekeepers the task of holding the Nicosia area as a neutral zone. This area consisted of the Green Line cutting across Nicosia and the Nicosia airfield. This was arguably the tensest area, as “the distance between the two front lines [was] so short that the intervening space [was] in no real sense a ‘buffer.’”

Fighting between Greek and Turkish forces continued here until 16 August 1974, when the UN Security Council put a de facto ceasefire in place. Following this order, UNFICYP was tasked with maintaining the fragile ceasefire through a system of observation posts and patrols. Canadian soldiers have remained as peacekeepers in Cyprus to this day, an operation that has lasted over thirty years. It wasn’t until 15 June 1993 that the last of the significant Canadian contingent relinquished control to the British. Currently only about one or two Canadians remain in Cyprus as part of UNFICYP.

Academic publications explain the role of UNFICYP after the invasion in detail. Alan James, in his article “The UN Force in Cyprus,” describes UNFICYP as evolving into a force that “interposed itself along and watched over the demarcation line” after the invasion. The role of the UN troops was that of truce maintenance and crisis diffusion, the theory being that their presence alone acted as a “pacifying influence.” James describes one instance in which a Greek Cypriot boasted that he had shot an elderly Turkish woman and would have killed a Turkish

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22 Major General Cameron Ross (Retd.), Interviewed by Camas Eriksson, Digital Recording, March 9 2012, Victoria BC: 00:02:43 – 00:03:13.
24 James, 494.
26 Morton, 259.
27 Ross, Personal communication with the author, March 9 2012.
28 James, 484.
29 Ibd., 490.
Muslim cleric as well if, as he said, “a UN bugger hadn’t stopped me.”\textsuperscript{30} The reader here is given a very good sense of the theory behind UNFICYP’s role after the invasion, but very little time is usually taken to delve into what these experiences meant for the common soldier, let alone a Canadian.

James is a British historian so his oversight is an understandable one, yet Canadian historian Desmond Morton, in his 1985 book \textit{A Military History of Canada}, does little better. He is not concerned with the experience of the Canadian soldier in Cyprus and merely criticises the operation by saying that “Canadians remained because they had become part of the islands economy, not because they kept peace or could deter a Turkish invasion.”\textsuperscript{31} He disregards the many instances where Canadian soldiers upheld the UN mandate, opting to look at the bigger picture, and thereby questioning the usefulness of the Canadian presence. While the economic entrenchment of the UN forces in Cyprus is undoubtedly true – the subject even came up in my interviews – Morton fails to give the Canadian peacekeepers any credit for the work they did.\textsuperscript{32}

It is not until the 1991 publication of \textit{War and Peacekeeping}, by Jack Granatstein and David Bercuson, that the published literature displays a specific interest in the Canadian experience in Cyprus. This work outlines the role that Canadian soldiers played in the maintenance of peace in Cyprus, both before and after the invasion. Granatstein and Bercuson highlight the gravity of the situation in a way that previous academic sources have not. In their words, “the Canadian peacekeepers…came under fire, took some casualties, and dug themselves

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 490-491.
\textsuperscript{31} Morton, 259.
\textsuperscript{32} For clips discussing the UN peacekeepers and the Cypriot economy go to: Terrance Swan, Interviewed by Camas Eriksson, Digital Recording, March 12 2012, Victoria BC: 00:28:44; Ross, Interviewed by Camas Eriksson, 01:18:52.
Interestingly, they augment their history of the event by providing anecdotes, revealing that they have incorporated oral history into their research. For example, Granatstein and Bercuson describe the Canadian efforts to hold the Ledra Palace Hotel, the location of their UN headquarters in downtown Nicosia:

A Canadian officer trying to escort stranded Turkish Cypriots back to their lines came under fire and was seriously wounded. When one of his men tried to give him first aid, he too was shot. Attempts to rescue the pair met with more fire, and the Canadians had to knock out a Greek Cypriot machine-gun post to free their men. After arranging for covering fire, Captain Alain Forand crawled out to the two, singlehandedly dragged the more seriously wounded to cover, and then directed the rescue of the second.34

This episode further enriches our understanding of what it was like to be in Cyprus as a peacekeeper. It features the actions of specific soldiers, demonstrating that peacekeeping was not just a matter of placing yourself between two warring factions and trusting them to refrain from violence.35 Without the use of oral history in writing this passage, it is likely that these details would have been lost.

Aside from the work of Granatstein and Bercuson, many academic publications do not bother themselves with history from the perspective of the common soldier. They take the bigger picture, providing political and international context for the Turkish invasion and propose means of solving the conflict. Although this perspective is useful for understanding why the Turkish invasion occurred, it lacks the point-of-view on the ground that truly informs the reader as to the atmosphere of the situation. What is often ignored in these sources is that the actions of soldiers

33 Granatstein and Bercuson, 225.
34 Ibid., 225.
35 Interestingly, this specific event is described by Col. Joly who gave the order to knock out the Greek Cypriot machine gun post. Joly, Interviewed by Camas Eriksson, 02:03:02 – 02:22:21.
“profoundly influence or determine the outcome of engagements.”36 Military history at this level becomes about politics, strategic victories and context. There is little concern shown for the grim truth of what it meant to physically carry out these plans. As David Graves writes in his article “Naked Truths For the Asking,” historians often “ignore or simplify the human face of battle.”37

As a Canadian newspaper, the Globe and Mail provided coverage that specifically catered to the Canadian involvement in Cyprus. The Globe covered the Turkish invasion of Cyprus extensively and even gave Canadian soldiers a place to share their stories. The events and experiences described in the Globe are similar to those recounted by CWO Tom Walton, Capt. Terrance Swan, Col. John Joly and MGen. Cameron Ross. However, the interviews provided a closer, more personal, perspective than the newspaper articles which were perhaps overly clean and concise in their descriptions. For example, an article written on 22 July 1974, titled “4,500 foreign civilians are moved out of Nicosia,” (Figure 1) describes UN forces rescuing civilians from the Ledra Palace Hotel:

A UN rescue convoy reached the Ledra Palace Hotel in another part of Nicosia, where about 280 civilians and more than 100 foreign correspondents had been holed up under fire since the Greek-officered Cypriot National Guard set up a military post there on Saturday… At the Ledra Palace Hotel the commander of the Greek Cypriot anti-aircraft unit stationed in the garden at first insisted no one could leave until he had specific orders to that effect. But finally the officer allowed everyone to leave, including the hotel staff...38

Col. Joly was present at this event and his description augments the newspaper article by not only conveying the intensity of the situation, but also providing insight into how the Canadian peacekeepers managed to evacuate the hostages.

37 Graves, 46.
So what happened was Don Manual, Roger St. John, Carol Mathieu and I went to the hotel during the period of the fighting. Gord Louis, our deputy commanding officer, tried to walk into the front door and at the same time a Greek machine gun fired in the hallway of the hotel, right through the front door into the Turkish area and blasted out all the windows around him. He dove for ground and rolled in all of this glass. He had glass in his back and his rear end, he wasn’t hit but he had a stream of French profanity for the next two days referring to the Greeks…

Anyways, I went over with Don and the other guys, as I had mentioned. All of the people in the hotel were in the stairwells in the center of the hotel, because that was the safest place to be…they were afraid if they went to their rooms, which all had open windows around them, that they would be shot. A couple of them had been shot. The first thing we did was we did a head count and we recorded the names, the nationality, passport numbers of all the people…There were thirteen Israelis in the group, okay? And Don Manuel went down to the Greek company commander, a young guy, probably about twenty-five years old, he could speak English, and he basically said, “We’re taking the people out.” The guy said, “No, you can’t take them out. We’re protecting them”… We told the people, “get ready, we’re going to take you out of here…”

...The Greeks refused to allow us to move them. So, Don Manuel walked up, pushed the commander out of the way and, basically, we started moving people out. It was a very tense moment because I thought, “This is what it all boils down to. This is where I’m gonna die. Right in this hotel.”

This episode contrasts sharply with the newspaper article, where emotion is largely lacking and the reader is given only the basic facts. We now see that the Greek commander didn’t just “finally allow everyone to leave,” but was forced to let the prisoners go. Col. Joly paints a complex picture of what it felt like to be in the situation, filling in the details that the *Globe* article ignored.

In the same 22 July issue, an article titled “9 Canadian injured but troops to stay” (Figure 2) mentions that “UN troops have been withdrawn from exposed outposts on the island to safer spots.” The article doesn’t divulge what the evacuation of an observation post (OP) entails.

MGen. Cameron Ross described just such an event:

I recall vividly one particularly hairy extraction and that was right at one of the gates, the old gates, I’ve forgotten the name, I wanna say the Famagusta gate, and we had an OP that

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was being fired on and it was in One Commando’s area. So, Two Commando, Anglophone, was to the West, towards the airport and that part of Nicosia and One Commando was on the –French Canadian- on the East side.

So, the language of communication was French. Now, I was not bilingual, I understood a little bit of French and when all of us, Anglophone or Francophone, speak in exciting times, we get a little louder and we speak a heck of a lot faster. Well, you wanna believe that it’s pretty darn difficult to understand a Francophone, especially from the Lac Saint-Jean area, who is young and scared, and trying to convince him to slow down, in halting French, and to get out of his OP. I recall my second vehicle in a position of cover facing the Turks, ‘cause it was the Turks that were firing on us. And I raced into the OP…So, as you can see a Lynx only has three hatchets, we don’t have room for passengers. And I beckoned for the guys, there were two of them, in the OP to come out. One did, and he jumped in the back hatch. But the other guy was scared. And I think, I’m not sure, I think I ended up having to jump out and bring him in. Or else, you know, I threatened with my weapon and said “Get the hell into the vehicle.” ‘Cause there were…and a shell coming around you is a scary sound. You can hear, you know what the caliber is because of the sound it makes and the impact it makes close to you. It really causes you to focus on things…Eventually I got this guy out. I remember stuffing him head first in my hatch, which was the biggest one. So I’ve got two feet, you know, kicking in front of me. It must’ve looked like the Keystone Cops…

As amusing as this image is, MGen. Ross is relating exactly what it meant to evacuate an OP. It was not a simple matter of packing up and moving on. The article outlines the general topic but doesn’t elaborate on what evacuating an observation post required on the part of Canadians. It lacks the emotion that is provided by the interview, making it is easy to brush off the significance of this event. However, MGen. Ross’s anecdote brings the situation to life and reveals that these evacuations were not just a task that was carried out easily; they required soldiers to put their lives at risk.

In contrast, on 29 July, an article titled “‘Multiply the worst pain you’ve had by 2’: Canadian UN troops describe their wounds,” (Figure 3) reports the comments of Lieut. Roy McGrath, Pte. Michel Plouffe and Capt. Normand Blaquiere in describing wounds they sustained as peacekeepers. The reporter does not ignore the danger that their job entails and is quite

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40 Ross, Interviewed by Camas Eriksson, 00:23:42 – 00:26:27.
descriptive of their wounds. He emphasises that these men sustained their wounds while carrying out normal UN peacekeeping duties. As he writes, “Capt. Blaquiere, of Montreal, was hit by bullets in the thigh and buttocks during fighting between Turkish and Greek Cypriot forces.”

This statement echoes the words of Col. Joly, who remembers Pte. Plouffe and Capt. Blaquiere returning to the Operations Center:

Plouffe came in and the medic…immediately wanted to treat Plouffe but Plouffe refused to be treated until Blaquiere was sorted out. Blaquiere came in, and we put him right on the table in the Operations Center. His body was covered in, you know hemoglobin congeals, so it was like red Jell-O all down his legs, from the blood. He’d lost a lot of blood, he was in shock. We all thought he was going to die.

When comparing the Globe and Mail articles to the interviews, details are revealed that contribute to a better understanding of the veteran’s narratives. As with academic sources, newspapers benefit from hindsight and the ability to see the larger picture. For example, “Canada is Doubling Cyprus Peace Force,” (Figure 4) an article published in the July 26th issue of the Globe and Mail, describes the overtaking of Nicosia airport by approximately 100 Canadian troops. In particular, it says that “the Turkish soldiers who were threatening to take the airport by force yesterday backed off without a confrontation after a hasty call to the Turkish Government from [UN Secretary General] Mr. Waldheim.” CWO Walton describes the same event:

We moved a hundred people into the airport…Our guys were trying to dig in and trying to find positions around the airport. It’s an international airport. Big place.

So that night we were pretty scared ‘cause the Turks kept saying “we’re coming, we’re coming.” About, I guess about eleven o’clock or twelve o’clock at night we got word that the Royal Air Force had two Phantoms, two Phantom jets, sitting with the pilots in Akrotiri which is about three minutes flying time. So we got a little cocky then. And then, at two or three o’clock in the morning a British Armoured Car Regiment drove up, they were still

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41 Globe and Mail, “‘Multiply the worst pain you’ve had by 2’: Canadian UN troops describe their wounds,” July 29, 1974, pg. 9.
42 Joly, Interviewed by Camas Eriksson, 02:16:10–02:16:44.
wearing their black berets…and as they were getting out of their Armoured cars we were giving them a blue beret. We made them instant UN.

So, I asked the Staff Sergeant…I said, “Have you got anything to knock those tanks out?” and he said, “Yeah, we’ve got a swing-fire missile, that’ll knock out any tank in the world.” So we were pretty cocky then.43

MGen. Ross was outside the airport at the time and he continues the story from a different perspective:

I remember vividly, out at the airport…in this particular incident...[Major Doug Walton] went out to the road, it had a white line or something in the middle…and told the Turks…“cross that line and we’ll shoot and kill you.” Now, [what] do we have?…106 recoilless rifles, which is not much, its open, it’s in a jeep. My 50 cals, we have some Carl Gustavs, which is 84mm, Airborne Battery, all they had was 81mm. Plus, we had some British Swing Fire Anti-tank missiles, pretty rudimentary. That was it, not really much of anything.

Turks didn’t invade. Didn’t cross. I remember being up there with my 50 cal, which has only got minimal range compared to what the Turks had. Yikes. 44

CWO Walton and MGen. Ross were unaware of why the Turkish troops decided not to take the airport because that was certainly not information they were privy to. As Capt. Swan says, in regards to what the soldiers knew of the politics behind the scenes, “You gotta remember, at our level, we’re talking, you know, privates, eighteen, nineteen years old…none of us had Ph.Ds in political science. We were just soldiers.”45 The Globe and Mail is able to provide us with this information because its reporters benefit from being able to see what was going on behind the front lines. However, it is unable to create a realistic and detailed image of the event from the perspective of a soldier on the ground.

The use of oral history for historical research is a hotly contested subject. Oral histories provide perspectives that are not often valued by military historians. For example, David Graves

43 Walton, Interviewed by Camas Eriksson, 00:23:03-00:25:03.
44 Ross, Interviewed by Camas Eriksson, 00:56:47-00:58:33.
45 Swan, Interviewed by Camas Eriksson, 00:07:58-00:08:12.
criticises military historians, such as British Brigadier General Sir James Edmonds, for having no interest as to the “behaviour or fate of the common soldier.” Many historians are wary of using oral history interviews because they are heavily influenced by cultural, social and memory biases. John Tosh, in *The Pursuit of History*, puts the problem of oral history in these terms:

His or her memories, however precise and vivid, are filtered through subsequent experience. They may be contaminated by what has been absorbed from other sources (especially the media); they may be overlaid by nostalgia (‘times were good then’)…

Each of the men I interviewed has had over thirty years to organize their memories. Their recollections may not be as fresh or raw as they were in 1974 and I only heard the version of the story they chose to tell me. What they remembered in these interviews could have been influenced by cultural and social factors. It is valid to argue that one should be wary of oral history, but that does not discount its value as a historical source. The experiences of Capt. Swan, MGen. Ross, CWO Walton and Col. Joly assisted me in understanding the Canadian experience in Cyprus in a way that neither academic publications nor the *Globe and Mail* were able to.

Tidbits of information were gleaned from these interviews that could never be found in history books. As Paul Thompson wrote in his book *The Voices of the Past*, quoting the French historian Jules Michelet, “My inquiry among living documents…taught me many things that are not in our statistics.” The *Globe and Mail* can recount the political context, but only Captain Swan can describe having to drink his yogurt because there was no electricity in the UN camp:

The other thing I remember is we didn’t have any fridges for awhile. Months, ‘cause there’s no electricity. So we used to drink the yogurt because it was so soft. You know, you

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46 Graves, 46.
drink it like milk. So we used to get British yogurt, or maybe it was Italian, but Yoplait, I think it was. And you just take the top off it and drink it because you couldn’t spoon it out because it was all melted. 49

These interviews provided me with an insight into what it was like to be in Cyprus during the Turkish invasion. The intensity of the situation is best illustrated by personal recollections, such as CWO Walton’s description of an attempt to save a Greek soldier from bleeding out:

Just as we come around the corner they shot them. The prisoners, they just shot them in the… We found one alive there… and one over there, the rest were dead. The one over here, he had been shot in the leg. We thought he’d just had a badly, a real bleeder. Now Buzz had just finished the First Aid Instructors’ course, that’s about four months long. You’re almost a surgeon when you come out of that. So he said, “Tom hold onto his shoulders, I’m going to put some traction on his leg.” He did, and the leg come off. 50

Hearing these words, it is difficult to deny the seriousness of the job Canadians undertook in Cyprus. When faced with the stories of ordinary people, it is hard to not relate to their testimonies. Oral history allows you to enter into the experience of the people who participated in history in a way that secondary sources cannot accomplish. 51

Without the use of these interviews, I would never have been able to fully understand the role that Canadians played in keeping peace in Cyprus. The events as described in Alan James’s article or in the Globe and Mail would have been without colour, lacking the texture and detail provided by anecdotes. However, no historical source is without its problems. As Tosh writes, “our lives are largely spent in situations, from our subjective perspective, we cannot fully understand. How we perceive the world… never corresponds to reality in its entirety.” 52 Thus, in order to fully understand a topic such as the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, and the experience of

49 Swan, Interviewed by Camas Eriksson, 00:39:33 - 00:39:54.

50 Walton, Interviewed by Camas Eriksson, 00:17:04-00:17:44.

51 Tosh, 212.

52 Ibid., 214.
Canadian soldiers during this time, one must utilize multiple sources. Academic articles and books provide you with a “top down” perspective, and the historical, political, and international conditions that led to the conflict. Newspapers, on the other hand, allow you to place what you hear in an oral history interview within a larger context. They, like academic sources, are good at providing the cut and dry facts, such as numbers and dates.

Without oral history, however, you lose the perspective of the common soldier. There is no substitute for firsthand accounts to provide an understanding of the role that Canadian soldiers played in Cyprus because the majority of secondary sources have not taken an interest in the soldier’s perspective. We cannot deny that these people were involved and, in the words of C.E.W. Bean, “the responsibility for the events described should be attributed to the men actually responsible.”

The interviews with Colonel John Joly, Major General Cam Ross, Chief Warrant Officer Tom Walton and Captain Terry Swan reveal the impact that peacekeeping operations had on those who participated. The Canadian contingent’s job in Cyprus was not static or safe, but a job that involved active participation and risk on the part of soldiers to prevent the fragile situation from erupting into an even bigger conflict.

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51 Graves, 46.
Appendix

Figure 1: “4,500 foreign civilians are moved out of Nicosia,” *Globe and Mail*, July 22 1974, pg. 10.

Guard set up a military post there on Saturday.

The Ledra Palace is on the edge of the “green line” which separates the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities—the scene of some of the heaviest fighting in the capital.

The UN convoy also picked up foreigners at the British High Commission in Nicosia before proceeding to the Hilton Hotel, where they joined the British convoy for the journey to Dhekelia.

One section of the UN convoy met sniper fire as it left the British High Commission.

At the last minute, the High Commission staff could not find the key to the front gate padlock and the leading armored car had to break through the gate to let the convoy out.

At the Ledra Palace Hotel, the commander of a Greek Cypriot anti-aircraft unit stationed in the garden at first insisted no one could leave until he had specific orders to that effect.

But finally the officer allowed everyone to leave, including the hotel staff, and the Ledra Palace was left as a Greek Cypriot military stronghold.

The British Embassy in Athens instructed British tourists to leave Greece but said there were no evacuation plans.

Hundreds of foreign tourists unable to get airline seats out of Greece travelled on crowded ferries to Brindisi in Southeast Italy.

Travel agents in Brindisi said ports in the Greek Ionian Sea were crowded with tourists seeking to get out of Greece.

Meanwhile, many young Greeks living in Italy were reported travelling home by ferry to register under the Athens Government’s mobilization order.
9 Canadians injured but troops to stay

OTTAWA (CP) — The United Nations peacekeeping forces in Cyprus will not withdraw from the Mediterranean island at this time, External Affairs Minister Mitchell Sharp told a news conference yesterday.

The UN forces, including the 480-troop Canadian contingent, were performing a useful function on the island.

Mr. Sharp added that the Canadian contingent was doing very fine work. The troops had worked to stop the spread of fighting and helped to achieve local ceasefires on the island.

He confirmed reports that nine Canadian soldiers had been wounded.


Mr. Sharp said fighting on Cyprus is serious and UN troops have been withdrawn from exposed outposts on the island to safer spots.

The UN Security Council has approved a resolution for a general ceasefire. This could mean even greater responsibility for UN troops in the days ahead, Mr. Sharp said.

The injuries to the Canadians in all cases were slight and in one instance a soldier hit by shrapnel was able to return to duty.

Mr. Sharp said two Canadian consular officers sent to the island “are doing everything they can to assist the estimated 196 remaining Canadian civilians who were not able to leave Friday.”

Messages reaching Ottawa from Cyprus made it clear that Canadian and other UN peacekeeping forces, as well as British forces stationed there, “are taking care of foreign tourists,” Mr. Sharp said.

The Canadian peacekeepers remained at their outposts on the UN green line dividing Greek and Turkish communities in Nicosia for seven hours after the Turkish invasion began.

They were ordered to withdraw about 7 a.m. EDT on Saturday by the UN command because of heavy fighting in the area.

Later in the day they attempted to return to their outposts after a truce was arranged between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, but the ceasefire did not hold.

Defence Minister James Richardson said in a statement, however, that the presence of the Canadian contingent continues to provide “a degree of stability to the situation in Cyprus and the contingent has the respect of both the Turkish and Greek Cypriots.”

Your morning smile

Waiter: “These are the best eggs we’ve had for years.”

Cranky customer: “Let’s have some you’ve had only a few days.”
'Multiply the worst pain you've had by 2':
Canadian UN troops describe their wounds

DHEKELIA, Cyprus (CP) — "Take the worst pain you've ever had and multiply it by two," said Lieut. Roy McGrath of Kemptville in describing the way he felt seconds after being hit by a bullet in the left arm while on peacekeeping duties with United Nations forces.

Lieut. McGrath, 26, married and the father of a 2-year-old boy, described his injury as a clean gunshot wound.

But no such understatement applied in the case of Pte. Michel Plouffe of Ville St. Michel, Que., as he held aloft the .303-calibre bullet that pierced the side of his face on another of the recent nights of battle between Greeks and Turks.

Pte. Plouffe said he felt the bullet hit him like a punch in the face.

Reeling, he spit it out along with much blood and several teeth—and went right on giving first aid to Capt. Normand Blaquiere, the most seriously wounded of 10 Canadian soldiers brought from the battle areas of Nicosia to a military hospital on the British base in Dhekelia.

Capt. Blaquiere, of Montreal, was hit by bullets in the thigh and buttocks during fighting between Turkish and Greek-Cypriot forces on July 23.

But in looking back yesterday on the harrowing experiences of all the Canadian soldiers, Lieut. McGrath said his own suffering was worth it.

"If the UN hadn't been there . . . the shooting and the fighting would have been a lot more widespread and savage," he said in an interview.

Later he told reporters of how he was manning a 3.5-inch observation post when suddenly he felt a terrible burning sensation.

Startled by the impact of his wound, he ordered a companion soldier to join him in taking cover and advising headquarters of his injury.

About the same time, Pte. Michel Grenier of Longueuil, Que., was on duty at Canadian headquarters in Nicosia when four mortar bombs exploded near his position in swift succession.

Two of the mortars smashed into various camp buildings and a third exploded near the spot where he maintained guard.

The fourth lifted Pte. Grenier, a 21-year-old bachelor, into the air and flung him back against his jeep.

The result was an arm wound from mortar shrapnel. But, like the other Canadian wounded, Pte. Grenier now is in the best of spirits as British doctors and nurses minister to them here.

Asked whether he feared his first experience under fire, Pte. Plouffe, 19, and engaged to be married, said it was like the first parachute jump taken by members of the unit to which he and his fellow wounded belong—long the Canadian Airborne Regiment based in Edmonton.

"It's not the first jump but the ones immediately after that arouse fear," he agreed with Pte. Grenier that, under battle conditions, "things happen too fast for us to be scared."

Pte. Plouffe, his right cheek swollen from his wound, spoke with difficulty. He took pride in what he and the other Canadian UN troops have been able to do in Cyprus.

As Lieut. McGrath put it, the UN task here is to save innocent lives and minimize fighting.

The lieutenant conceded that even soldiers try to keep out of the line of fire at moments of intense conflict—if only as a reflex action. "But you can't let your job suffer too much simply because there are rounds (bullets) about."

"I was unlucky that one round hit me, but I was lucky in that I was only hit in the arm."

Lieut. McGrath now wears his arm in a sling. But he and Pte. Grenier, his left arm bearing a big plaster patch, should be out of Dhekelia hospital by the end of the week.

Pte. Plouffe, some of his mouth in an internal brace, can be fed only liquid nourishment and may stay here for three weeks.

Capt. Blaquiere seems on the road to recovery and all the Canadians share a single ward in the hospital.

Men of the Airborne Regiment have been in Cyprus for more than three months.

Twelve Canadians were wounded in fighting following the invasion of Cyprus by Turkish forces on July 21.
Events on Tuesday forced the Government to reconsider the number of Canadian troops needed. At Camp Kronberg, Canadian soldiers were caught in crossfire and returned fire, the first time Canadian troops have fired back under attack since the Korean War. The situation also was tense when UN troops that included 100 Canadians took over Nicosia airport.

The result of the move announced yesterday is to increase the Canadian contingent to battalion strength (about 950 men compared with the 466-man force at present) and to give it armored cars and anti-tank weapons. Most of the men will come from the Canadian Airborne Regiment in Edmonton.

Speaking during a break in the Cabinet session earlier in the day, Mr. Richardson said Canadian troops should have surrendered the Nicosia airport rather than attempt to defend it against Turkish tanks when they were not equipped to do so.

"It was never our intention to become a third force in Cyprus," Mr. Richardson said. "They didn't have the equipment to defend the airport and shouldn't have tried."

The Turkish soldiers who were threatening to take the airport by force yesterday backed off without a confrontation after a hasty call to the Turkish Government from Mr. Waldheim.

The Canadian troops at the airport were replaced yesterday by more heavily armed British troops, but Mr. Richardson said the purpose of the change was to free Canadian soldiers to re-establish their positions on the Green Line running between the Greek and Turkish communities in Nicosia.
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