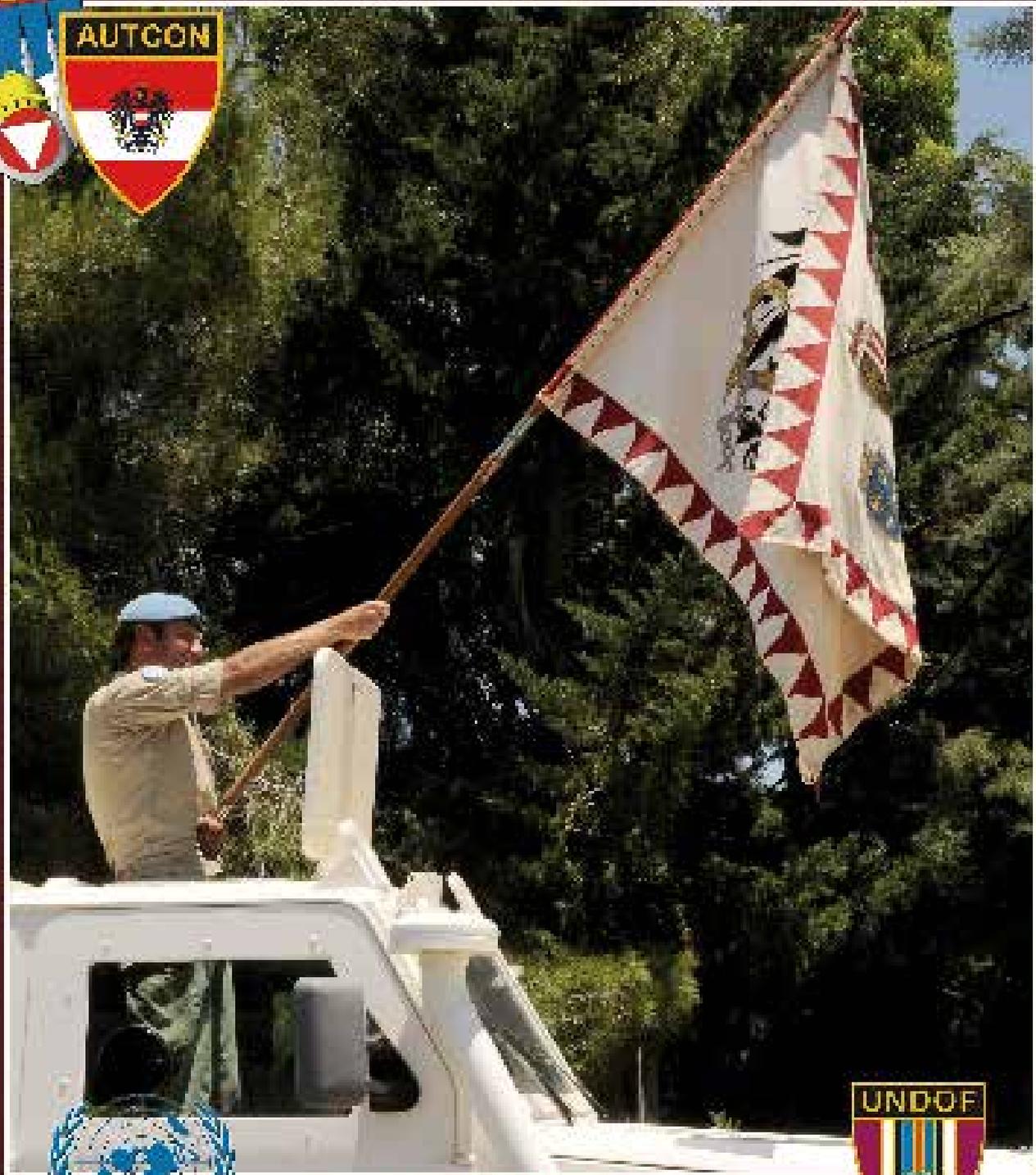


GOLAN

The UNDOF Journal

AUSBATT



April - June 2013
No. 135

DEAR READERS!

As the outgoing Staff Officer Public Relations I have the honor to finally offer you our last Golan Journal. This edition is dedicated to the Austrian Contingent that served 39 years in UNDOF since the mission started in 1974. After dramatic incidents in June, Austrian politics decided to withdraw Austrian peacekeepers, making us the fourth nation to withdraw within one year. Canada, Japan and Croatia left the Golan Heights mission months ago. Now Austria will follow.

Further on it is my big pleasure to handover office to my successor Maj Deborah Wise from Fiji. She had to care about this edition's finalization which was not possible for me due to the unchanged precarious personnel situation in UNDOF.

I have to stress that spending almost seven years in the Middle East was a valuable and important part of my life. I wish to thank everyone who have made it a memorable one.



The Editorial Staff of Golan Journal 135

*From left: Maj Alexandr Unterwegger, SSO Media/PR
Capt Ekkehard Gröppel, SO PR and
SSGT Martin Austerhuber, Force Photographer*

A special thank you to my team Maj Alex Unterwegger, SSgt Martin Austerhuber, Maj Charlotte Jenifer Orda and Capt Dan Michael Millan for their support and teamwork.

*Capt Ekkehard Gröppel
Outgoing SOPR*



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Front (Page 1): March out of the Austrian Banner
Photo by Capt Ekkehard Gröppel

Back (Page 24): Last salute by NCC AUTCON
Photo by Capt Ekkehard Gröppel

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Force Commander's Message

Fellow Peacekeepers!

It has been a rather hot summer for UNDOF and the complexion of the mission has undergone a complete change. Austria has left us after long innings and the 500 strong Fiji contingent has joined the mission. Austrian friends have contributed immensely to the success of UNDOF and being the oldest and largest contributor to the mission, left us with indepth knowledge and experience. Their professionalism is exemplified by the conduct and performance of the outgoing Deputy Force Commander, Brig gen Stephan Thaller, Lt Col Volkmar Ertl (COO) and Lt Col Bernhard (CLPIO) who although spent only three months in the mission, were instrumental in facilitating the HOTO between the Austrian and Fiji contingent in a befitting manner. I wish all Austrian peacekeepers the very best and success in all their future endeavours.



I wish to welcome the Fijians and Nepalese who have arrived into the Mission in record time, to fill the void left by their Austrian counterparts. We have no doubt that they will live up to the standards set by the AUSBATT. As we carried out the line tour of these newly inducted contingents, we found that they had really taken to the mission as fish takes to water and had fully understood the nuances of peacekeeping in Golan.

I would also like to congratulate the PHILBATT troops for taking over the critical positions vacated by Austrians. For a considerable period of time, they held on to these positions before the troops from Fiji came in and relieved them. During this period, the Filipino soldiers were baptized by coming under fire and facing life threatening situations but kept their cool and under able leadership, sailed over these tough situations. The Philippine contingent evolved to the challenging situations and was always up to the task. The 13th rotation of the Indian Contingent deinducted from the mission after doing an incredible job over a period exceeding six months. Although they were here to perform logistical duties, the situation demanded much more from them and they rose to the challenges thrown at them including raising of the third platoon for force HQ coy. The 14th Indian rotation replaced them and within a few weeks of their arrival in the mission, they too were baptized by fire when Camp Ziouani came under shelling due to exchange of fire between rebels and SAAF. Despite the odds, the 14th rotation fits into the grooves perfectly and has been living up to the high standards set by their predecessors. They also extended themselves and occupied certain positions till arrival of Fijians.

Over the past few months, the mission has passed through many difficult and anxious moments. However, it looks like the worst is behind us and together we have successfully crossed the bottom of the "U". I hope and pray that the citizens of this country will one day unite and turn the tides to bring about lasting peace in the region including the Golan Heights. Inshallah with arrival of Nepalese and Irish contingents, we shall again fly six flags.

Thank You, Danke, Salamat, Vinaka, Dhanyavad, Shukran, Toe Dab!

Lieutenant General Iqbal Singh Singha
Head of Mission & Force Commander UNDOF

Deputy Force Commander's Address

Dear UNDOF Peacekeepers!

It is my pleasure and great honor to address you in the Golan Journal as the first Deputy Force Commander in UNDOF's history. Since my deployment in mid-April this year, I have found the opportunity to realize and manage the changes of the mission's character since I left UNDOF in 2001 as Commanding Officer of the Austrian Battalion.



On 6th Jun 2013 the situation completely changed for all Austrian peacekeepers who have served in UNDOF since its beginning in June 1974. After 39 years in the service of peace, doing a great job day by day and representing the mission's 'backbone', as it was mentioned by the Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, the Austrian Contingent was ordered to withdraw because of a political decision. While serving with the United Nations on the Golan Heights, Austrian peacekeepers have always tried to accomplish their tasks with an as high as possible level of loyalty, integrity and professionalism. We hope that our efforts have been successful – for the benefit of all personnel of UNDOF and people in this region!

Austrian soldiers' last – and at least mentally most difficult – mission is now to hand over all our knowledge and experiences to our successors, soldiers from Fiji and Nepal. UNDOF warmly welcomed the new contingent from Fiji and Nepal and have witnessed that both have stepped into their predecessors' footsteps with an extraordinary high degree of experience and motivation.

It has to be mentioned specially that I had the distinguished privilege to serve under LtGen Singha as Force Commander and Head of Mission. Dear General Singha, Sir! I want to express my deepest thanks to you for your outstanding leadership and camaraderie. It was a big honor for me to serve as UNDOF Deputy Force Commander under your command!

Dear fellow Peacekeepers! Time has come to say Goodbye; the Austrian contribution to UNDOF will finally come to an end at the end of July 2013.

I am absolutely convinced that for a future solution in this part of the Middle East, UNDOF will be called upon further on to be a major player in helping this region to move towards an everlasting peace. UNDOF peacekeepers will always have a very important role to play in the weeks, months and may be even years ahead.

All the best and God bless you!

***Thank you very much! Vinaka Vakalevu! Maraming Salamat!
Bahut Bahut Dhanyavaad! Dherai Dherai Dhanyabad!
Herzlichen Dank!***

Brigadier General Stefan Thaller
Deputy Force Commander UNDOF

Chief of Staff Words

Warrior Peacekeepers!

Our experiences here in Golan Heights are really one for the books. Every Contingent in this Mission during the present time has a story to tell. We have heartwarming and gripping stories that could be told and retold to other incoming contingents, to the other peacekeepers around the world and to our fellow soldiers back home. Ours are stories that would document our passion for peacekeeping. The folding crisis in Syria which resulted to the hostage taking of our own troops not only once, but in four separate occasions, the artillery impacts near our Camps and Positions, the roadblocks and restrictions of movements and the pull-out of some TCCs were literally “weathered” by all of us. We have proven that we are “Warrior Peacekeepers” that fear no guns and faced bravely the dangers in the forefront in order to fulfill our mandated task of peacekeeping. We did not cower in fear even when our safety and security were put at stake.



In spite of the elevated security measures in the performance of our day to day tasks, we still had to endure the temporary setbacks. We had successfully overcome all the difficulties through the collective efforts of all people of goodwill who share the same values of peace for the sake of the common good. We braced the odds and continue to serve as a response to the indispensable needs of time. Amidst the very challenging moment in UNDOF history, we stood our ground and displayed the kind of “Warrior Peacekeepers” we are. The hostile environment in our area of responsibility allowed us to make a strong and clear statement of courage and dedication for peace for the entire world to see.

We met the unprecedented challenges in the mission area that posed a near-to-impossible chance to fulfill our mission. The governments of the TCCs who are anxious of the security situation in the Mission Area have withdrawn their forces. I am personally aware that the troops have left with heavy hearts. I am sure they will always cherish the memories of this mission – perhaps an experience that they will never forget. Had they been given the choice, a good majority should have decided to remain in the Mission. But in the military there is almost always someone in rank above us, whose orders we must follow. Certainly, subservient Peacekeepers tag along the directions of their superiors to go back home.

To all the “Warrior Peacekeepers” who are left behind and to the new Contingents joining the Mission, I urge you to carry out the zeal of commitment in serving UNDOF with pride and honor. We shall continue to selflessly work for peace. We shall make a mark worthy of emulation by the rest of the peacekeepers in the world.

By God’s grace, we did what is right and good and avoided what is evil. “The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). It is indeed wisdom that brings true peace.

ONE MISSION - ONE TEAM - ONE GOAL

Colonel Cirilito Sobejana, Chief of Staff UNDOF

Visits to UNDOF



Mr. Michael Spindelegger, Austrian Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister with party visited UNDOF and met with FC UNDOF (12th Apr 2013)



Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, Director of Asia and Middle East Division in DPKO, visited UNDOF and met with FC and DFC UNDOF (5th May 2013)



Mr. Gerald KLUG, Austrian Minister of Defense and Sports, visited OP 51 and Position 22 of UNDOF (9th May 2013)



Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Undersecretary General for Peacekeeping Operations in DPKO, visited Camp Ziouani and met with FC and CMS UNDOF (12th May 2013)



LtGen Noel A COBALLE, Commanding General of Philippine Army, visited PHILBATT (26th – 30th May 2013)

• Dr Peter Greener, Dean of New Zealand Defence Force Command visited UNDOF from 19th - 23rd May 2013.



The new Deputy Force Commander

BGen Stefan Thaller was born on 25th May 1961 at BIBERBACH, lower Austria. He is the youngest officer to be promoted to Brigadier General in the history of Austrian Armed Forces.

In 1991 he graduated from the National Defense Academy in VIENNA with Masters (Magister) in “National Defense – Higher Leadership” from the University of Vienna. He has held the appointments of Director of Operations Preparation Division in Austrian Ministry of Defense; Director of Operational Requirements Directorate; and Deputy Director General of Directorate General IV (Operations).

BGen THALLER has served three tour of duties with UNDOF and one tour of duty with OSCE as an Election Supervisor 1998 (Bosnia & Hercegowina).

BGen THALLER is happily married to Gabriele, and they are blessed with a son, Peter (21), and a daughter, Lisa (15). His hobbies include table tennis, running, skiing and listening to music of any kind.



The new Special Adviser to the Force Commander

Cornelia Frank joined UN peacekeeping in October 2000 in Kosovo as Political Officer in the Office of the Chief of Staff/O-SRSG in UNMIK (until 2004). Prior to joining UNDOF, she worked in various capacities: desk officer UNIFIL, UNTSO, UNDOF and Special Assistant to the Director of the Asia & ME Division (DPKO/ Office of Operations) 2004-06; Snr Political Affairs Officer in UNIFIL (2006-12), Snr Security Sector Reform Officer in UNIOGBIS (Guinea Bissau, West Africa), a Special Political Mission.

Before joining peacekeeping, she worked for the Jordanian Embassy in Washington DC during the Oslo ME peace process negotiations, on an EU project in Gaza, and for UNRWA, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, in the Gaza Strip. She studied Political Science and History in Mannheim and Tuebingen in Germany, and earned her MA in Arab Studies from Georgetown University in Washington DC.



The new Chief Military Information Cell (CMIC)

Lt Col John O'Neill was commissioned to the Infantry Corps of the Irish Defence Forces in 1979. He has served as a Platoon Comd, a Company Comd and as a Battalion Commander. He also served as an Instructor on NCO Career Courses. He further served as Ceremonial Staff Officer in Defence Forces Headquarters for three years and as Brigade Operations Officer before being deployed to UNDOF.

Lt Col O'Neill has served overseas in UNIFIL (P1 Comd and FHQ), ONUCA (UNMO), UNTAC (UNMO), UNMEE (Coy Comd), MINURCAT (FHQ), ONUCI (FHQ). He served in Bde HQ, KFOR as Staff Officer and he trained Irish ISTAR Companies for the EU Nordic Battle Groups in 2010 - 2012.

He has completed the Command and Staff Course in the Irish Defence Forces Military College and has a Bachelor of Commerce and a Master's Degree in Leadership and Defence Studies. He is married to Muriel and has three teenage children- Tommy, Colin and Ruth. His interests include Modern History, Gaelic Games, Rugby and Golf.



The new Chief of Operations (COO)

LtCol Volkmar Ertl was born on 24th Sep 1962 in Spittal, Austria. He joined the Austrian Armed Forces in 1981 and graduated from the Austrian Military Academy in 1985.

His 28 years active military career has been spent mostly in the field as a Commander and Staff Officer. He began as a Platoon Leader in an Engineer Battalion and up to Deputy Battalion Commander of 25th Airmobile Infantry Battalion.

His latest assignment was as G3 of 7th Infantry Brigade. LtCol Ertl gained experience in missions abroad, both with UN and NATO. His last appointments were from 2007 until 2008 as Battalion Commander in Kosovo and from 2011 until 2012 as COO in HQ UNDOF.

He holds a Master's Degree in Defense and Security Management. Besides that, he is also trained as a Military Mountain Guide and a Paratrooper.

LtCol Ertl is married to Ursula and has two sons, Thomas and Clemens. He enjoys travelling and sports, preferably climbing and cycling and scuba diving.

The new Chief Military Personnel Officer (CMPO)



LtCol Antonio Lastimado was born on 17 January 1965 in Julita, Leyte, Philippines. He was commissioned as an Army Officer upon his graduation from the Armed Forces of the Philippines Officer Candidate School in 1988.

He began his military career with the Special Forces Regiment (Airborne) of the Philippine Army and has held many appointments including that of the Deputy Operations Officer of the Special Operations Command of the Philippine Army as well as an Intelligence Staff Officer. He also served as Military Assistant to the Undersecretary for Policy of the Department of National Defense.

He is a graduate of Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering and holds a Masters Degree in Defense Analysis from the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in Monterey, California, USA. His military awards and decorations include the Distinguished Service Star, Bronze Cross Medal, and various Military Merit Medals and Commendation Medals for combat and administrative accomplishments. He is married to Cristina Rey Teano-Lastimado and their union is blessed with three children – Aldrin Carlo, Christopher Anthony, and Michael Francis.

The new CO LOG BATT



LtCol Mumuksh Mehra was born on 2nd Aug 1975 at New Delhi. He is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy and Indian Military Academy and was commissioned into the Regt of Artillery in 1998. In 2001, he volunteered for the Army Aviation Corps and served as a helicopter pilot up to 2011.

During this period he has flown approximately three thousand hours on various types of single and twin engine helicopters in varied terrain including super high altitude areas of Greater Himalayas and Karakoram. He is also a qualified flying instructor and has imparted basic and advanced training on both single and twin engine helicopters. He is a recipient of the Chief of Army Staff Commendation for flying operations in North East India.

As a Gunner he has performed the duties of Gun Position Officer, Observation Post Officer and Battery Commander and prior to his present appointment he was performing the duties of Second in Command of an Artillery unit performing Infantry tasks in active Counter Insurgency/ Counter Terrorism areas. LtCol Mehra is a keen sportsman and has represented the services in the game of squash.

He is married to Mrs. Komal and has a daughter, Gouri aged 7, and son, Raaghav aged 4. His hobbies include golf, music, travelling and photography.



The new CO FIJIBATT



LtCol Sitiveni Tukaituraga Qiliho was born on 30th December, 1969 in Suva, Fiji. He was enlisted into the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) in 1988 and was commissioned as an Officer in 1989. He was promoted to LtCol in 2007.

LtCol Qiliho is a graduate in Masters of Science Degree in Defence and Strategic Studies, Madras University, India. He has held several command appointments with the RFMF which include Chief of Staff RFMF. He has served and held command appointments with the Multinational Force & Observers [MFO] in Sinai, United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon [UNIFIL], United Nations Transitional

Administration East Timor [UNTAET], United Nations, Iraq-Kuwait observer Mission [UNIKOM], and United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq [UNAMI].

In addition to his peacekeeping medals, LtCol Qiliho also holds the General Service Medal (GSM), the Fiji Meritorious Service Decoration (MSD), and the Fiji Command Medal (FCM).

LtCol Qiliho is married to Esther Blake Qiliho and has two sons and two daughters.

" A new contingent has arrived"



Shortly after midnight on 28 June 2013, 182-strong Fijian Contingent arrived at Beirut International Airport.

From Beirut, the contingent was transported by road via the Masna'a border crossing to Damascus, where they were received by Chief Mission Support UNDOF, Mr. Bernard Lee. The first group of around 60 soldiers and their equipment, headed by the FIJICON National Contingent Commander LtCol Sitiveni Tukaituraga Qiliho, proceeded in an armored convoy directly to Camp Faouar, where they were welcomed by Deputy

Force Commander BGen Stefan Thaller and Commanding Officer AUSBATT LtCol Paul Schneider. The remaining group stayed overnight in Damascus and were taken in two separate convoys to Camp Faouar the following day.

All contingent members received an initial orientation and induction session conducted by their Austrian predecessors in the course of 29th and 30th June in Camp Faouar. Immediately thereafter, 120 members of the Fijian contingent were deployed to the positions of the former second and third AUSBATT Companies in the northern part of UNDOF's area of operations.

The hand-over/take-over process was supported by the outgoing AUSBATT leadership, with a focus on providing details on UNDOF procedures, SOPs, and introduction to key personnel in the area of operations. The intention is to complete this process by 5th July when another 56 AUSBATT peacekeepers will leave the mission area.

Once the Fijian troops have taken over responsibility on their positions, the PHILBATT and LOGBATT peacekeepers will be fully redeployed throughout their respective UNDOF Positions. This will ensure a return to a less strained and more sustainable operational strength and normalcy following the void left by the departure of AUTCON.

“It is time to say Goodbye!”

After 39 years in the service of peace Austrian politicians declared the withdrawal of the Austrian Contingent from UNDOF. Since the beginning in 1974, Austria served as permanent troop contributor to UNDOF, sending more than 26.000 soldiers; then in June 2013 their mission came to an end.

The situation in UNDOF’s Area of Separation changed dramatically on 6th Jun 2013 when anti-governmental forces attacked the Bravo-Gate in Qunaitra in the early morning hours. Position 27, Headquarters of the 2nd Company AUSBATT reported at 04:30hrs that there were ongoing fire fights with rifles and machine guns and two heavy detonations in the position’s vicinity. Two hours later when the fighting moved more southwards, LO-Alpha Maj Georg Gruber informed the Joint Operations Center in Camp Faouar that personnel from MP Charly-Detachment had been evacuated. The situation seemed to be still volatile due to several indirect fire impacts inside Camp Ziouani near the International Kitchen and as a result of that the landline was broken too.

On the same day afternoon, Austrian Chancellor Mr. Werner Faymann and Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister Mr. Michael Spindelegger mentioned in a press conference, that security of Austrian soldiers on the Golan Heights could not be guaranteed anymore. Future conflicts between the war parties on a high aggressive level have to be further on expected; therefore the withdrawal of Austrian peacekeepers was determined. At evening time the Austrian Contingent was informed by the Deputy Force Commander UNDOF, BGen Stefan Thaller and the NCC AUTCON and CO AUSBATT, LtCol Paul Schneider about the government’s decision. Immediately afterwards the preparation of the withdrawal as well as the planning of the hand-over/take-over started.

History of AUSBATT

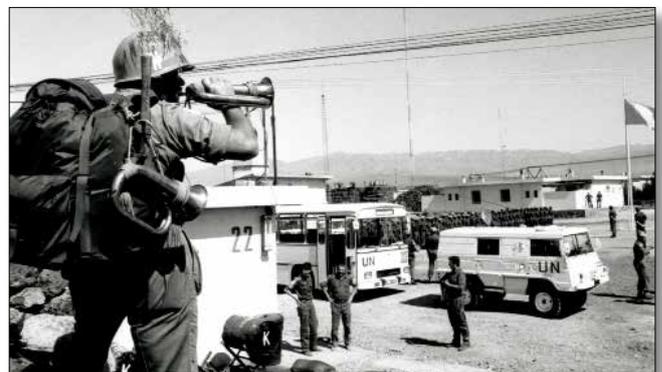
In June 1974 contingents from Austria, Peru, Poland



The first convoy coming from Sinai



Posn 10 in its early days A.D. 1974



AUSBATT Rotation in 1982

and Canada were deployed from UNEF II in Sinai to Syria. After the Austrian UN Secretary-General Dr. Kurt Waldheim (1971 – 1981) has asked the Austrian representative to the UN for a transfer of



troops from Egypt to the Golan Heights, Austrian Government approved that on 4th Jun 1974. At that time the Austrian UNEF II Contingent was still in Egypt, monitoring the buffer zone east of the Suez Canal.

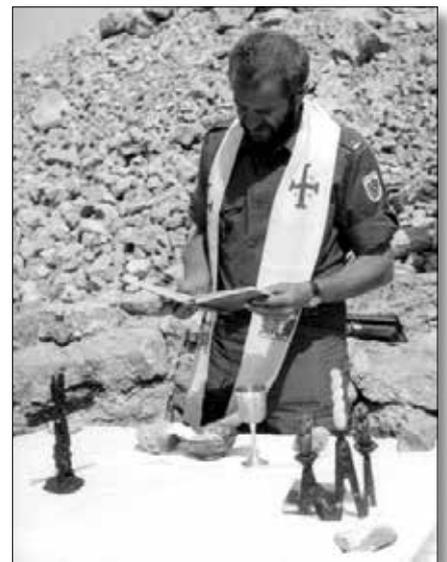
The Austrian Battalion inherited the northern part of UNDOF's Area of Separation (AOS) including the Hermon Mountain area. AUSBATT provided three infantry companies along the AOS. The 1st Company monitored the Mt. Hermon from its newly taken positions, while the 2nd Company controlled movements on the route from Damascus to Qunaitra and the 3rd Company was deployed in the area between around Hadar village. The Battalion's Headquarters and the HQ Company were located in Camp Faouar.

The logo of the 1st Company was the 'Edelweiss', a well-known mountain flower. Four positions were manned with high mountain experienced soldiers and alpine guides who mainly came from the western states in Austria. The positions included the highest permanent manned one in the world, Hermon Hotel, 2,814 meters above sea level. Twice a year the AUSBATT March was one of the traditional events in that area when international guests and peacekeepers together had to make every effort to challenge a mountainous route of 45 kilometers with more than 2,000 meters in altitude, leading up from Posn 27 (2nd

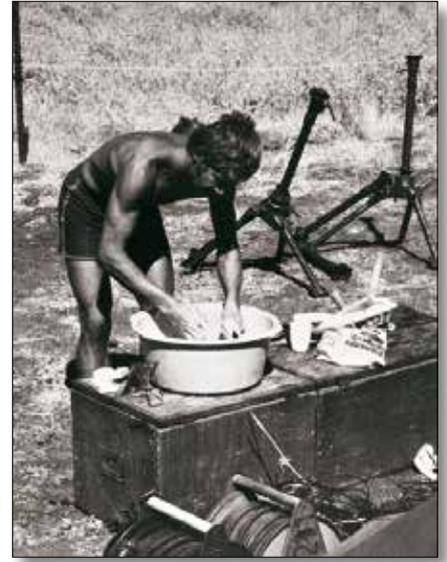
Coy) to the Hermon mountaintop within two days.

The 2nd Company was deployed in the area of Qunaitra. The 'Enzian' (engl. Gentian) was the company's emblem, a violet mountain flower. At the end five positions were under the command of the Company Commander, only one was located on A-Side, Posn 22. This position was temporarily given to POLBATT and came back to AUSBATT in 2009. The main tasks inside the company's responsible area focused on the "Grazing Area" close to the technical fence along the A-Line. Christmas Masses were yearly celebrated as a tradition in the Orthodox Church in Qunaitra as well in St. Paul's Church in Camp Faouar and at Posn Hermon Base by AUSBATT Chaplains. One of the most admired and loved was Salvatorian 'Golan-Pater' Edwin Stadelmann (*1932 - †1991) in AUSBATT's history.

The symbol of the 3rd Company was the 'Lion' but changed to 'Eagle' when 1998 Slovakian troops (SLOVCON) were fully implemented into AUSBATT. Ten years later they were replaced by soldiers from Croatia (HRVCON). After the Croatian withdrawal in March 2013 Austrians again inherited the 3rd Company. The 'Family Shouting Place' was located in their Area of Responsibility close to Posn 16, one of finally five UN positions. There Druze family members who stood on A-Side in Madjal Shams and in



Pater Edwin celebrating on Mt. Hermon



A peacekeeper's daily life





opposite on B-Side, were shouting to each other across the technical fence.

During the last rotation period 379 Austrians peacekeepers served in UNDOF, 360 of them in AUSBATT, 18 Staff Officers in HQ UNDOF in Camp Faouar, 1 Staff Officer in Camp Ziouani as LO-Alpha. Austrians were furthermore appointed in HQ UNDOF to Military Police Platoon and FHQ Company (former name Special Task Service). In total more than 26.000 Austrian soldiers were dispatched from May 1974 until July 2013 to UNDOF. The majority with more than 70 percent came from Austrian Militia Army and joined the mission for quite more than one time. Some of them spend almost ten years in the Golan Heights mission, some even more. 23 soldiers died fulfilling their tasks as UNDOF peacekeeper. Four of them were killed in a tragic accident that overshadowed the early days of the new mission. On 25th Jun 1974, in the mountainous area of 1st Coy, Austrian patrol members on a motorized patrol were hit by a mine. These soldiers were the first Austrian fatalities suffered in a UN mission.

Mission Leadership

The high value of the Austrians within UNDOF was underlined by the delegation of four Austrian Force Commanders since 1974: The first one was MGen Johann Philipp from December 1974 to May 1979 followed by MGen Günther Greindl from May 1979 to February

1981. MGen Adolf Radauer headed the mission from September 1988 to September 1991 and the last Austrian Force Commander was MGen Wolfgang Jilke from January 2007 to February 2010. In April 2013 a new commanding position was established in UNDOF, the Deputy Force Commander (DFC). BGen Stefan Thaller who started his first Golan mission 1984 and held office as Commanding Officer AUSBATT from 2000 until 2001, was appointed as DFC until end of July 2013. During the Austrian era in total 39 Commanding Officers of AUSBATT were deployed.

AUSBATT public relations

Worth to mention AUSBATT cared about charity work in cooperation with Non-Governmental-Organizations in Syria for many years. SOS-Kinderdorf in Damascus, Blind School in Khan Arnabeh, Red Crescent and the International Community of the Red Cross were long-lasting partners of Austrian UN peacekeepers. The NCO Feitl-Club donated in total more than 100.000 Dollars to the SOS-Kinderdorf. In cooperation with the Austrian



*The first Austrian FC UNDOF:
MGen Johann Philipp (1974 - 1979)*

Embassy and the Military Attaché in Damascus, Christmas charities were organized and the donations supported the Red Crescent caring about handicapped children in Qunaitra Governorate.



Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon visited UNDOF in 2007



Handing-over a donation to the Red Crescent in 2008

AUSBATT furthermore provided reliable postal services with its Field Post Office in Camp Faouar which was not only used by Austrians. A camp radio station 'Radio Gecko' was also established by Austrian soldiers and offered broadcasts like music shows, quiz programs, sound exposures for ceremonies and sport events. Welfare and recreational activities in the host countries and beyond their borders reached a high level of professionalism and variety and were solid basis of the soldiers' wellbeing. Troop entertainment was organized by Austria including musicians and artists who played performances in Camp Faouar but also at some positions.



AUSBATT parade in Camp Faouar in 2009

Last Days in UNDOF

In his farewell address on 5th Jul 2013, CO AUSBATT LtCol Paul Schneider highlighted that all Austrians as well as all Austrian peacekeepers could be proud of the long Austrian tradition serving in the Golan Heights. "The efforts of dismantling and handing over responsibilities to the Fijian successors have been done in an excellent and very professional way," he stressed. "After such a long time of successful peacekeeping we leave UNDOF with a certain degree of melancholy".

Austrians left the mission area step by step and flow home from Ben Gurion International Airport with six rotation flights. COO UNDOF and current NCC AUTCON, LtCol Volkmar Ertl stated at last: "Quoting the Force Commander UNDOF, LtGen Singha, that Austrians have been the backbone and the soul of UNDOF for an almost 40-year period of time, we all can finally feel proud, having contributed to an important mission in the Service of Peace."

In agreement with United Nations Headquarters in New York some essential Austrian personnel including UNDOF HQ Staff Officers, Military Police, logistic personnel and the crew of Posn 22 had to remain in the mission area until the end of July.

"We wish our successors and UNDOF comrades all the best for the future!"



"It is time to say Goodbye," LtCol Paul Schneider in June 2013



Austrian Contingent leaves UNDOF after 39 years

*Article and collage by Capt Ekkehard Gröppel,
SOPR*

*Collage and article photos by SSgt Gernot Payer, SSgt Arnold Felfer
WO I Wolfgang Grebien, Sgt Markus Weiss and SSgt Martin Austerhuber*

Further photos © Österreichisches Bundesheer

Philippine Army Chief visits PHILBATT

The Commanding General of the Philippine Army, LtGen Noel A Coballes visited the headquarters of the Philippine Battalion under UNDOF to meet the Filipino Peacekeepers and assess the peacekeeping efforts of the Philippine Army in Golan Heights last 26th May 2013.



The Commanding General of the Philippine Army, Lt Gen Noel A Coballes AFP visited the headquarters of the Philippine Battalion under United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and assessed the situation of Filipino Peacekeepers in Golan Heights last 26th May 2013.

Gen Coballes who arrived at Camp Ziouani at exactly 1300 Local Time was given foyer honors and immediately met Maj Gen Iqbal S Singha, Force Commander, UNDOF and had a short discussion on the general security situation within the mission area. The Force Commander expressed his optimism that the situation would improve and that the mission will continue to perform its mandate as agreed upon by the host countries in 1974.

LtGen Coballes and his party were toured by Col Cirilito E Sobejana, the Philippine National Contingent Commander and the Chief of Staff, UNDOF at the Observation Group Golan's (OGG) Observation Post (OP) 51 and Position 22 of Austrian Battalion (AUSBATT) located at the Israel side for them to have a glance on the areas of operations of UNDOF.

Col Sobejana presented an information briefing about UNDOF and the present situation in the Area of Separation (AOS), while CO, PHILBATT, Lt Col Nolie L Anquillano briefed on the peacekeeping activities of the troops and eventually elaborated the details of the two successive hostage takings of the Filipino soldiers on 06 March 2013 and 7th May 2013.

Lt Gen Coballes talked to the troops and gave advice on how to avoid such hostile situation and presented some solutions to the ongoing problems posed by the security situation in the mission areas. He also underscored the important role of the Philippine Contingent in the UNDOF's mandate. He likewise encouraged the officers to empower the Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) as they are the backbone of the contingent. "I would like you to empower the NCOs for them to do more the manual works while you address leadership and management challenges," Lt Gen Coballes told the officers.



Article by Maj Arnold Gasalatan, PIO PHILBATT
Photo by SSgt Rolybert Pablo, Photographer PHILBATT

Filipino Peacekeepers occupy the highest UN position in the world

After the pull out of Croatian and Austrian Contingents under the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Golan Heights, the Philippine Battalion under the leadership of Lt Col Nolie L Anquillano, occupied the Northern part of the Area of Separation (AOS) including Mount Hermon, which is the location of the highest permanently manned United Nations position in the world, on Sunday, 23rd June 2013.

Mount Hermon is a mountain cluster in the Anti-Lebanon mountain range. Its summit straddles the border between Syria and Lebanon and at 2,814 m (9,232 ft) above sea level, is the highest point in Syria. The southern slopes of Mount Hermon extend to the Israeli-occupied portion of the Golan Heights.

Except during summer time, Hermon Hotel, Hermon Base and Hermon South are the three UN positions in Mt Hermon that are covered with snow and patrols are done through the use of ski and snow vehicle.

The 287 strong Filipino peacekeepers, who were previously deployed in the southern part of AOS only, are now manning the whole UN positions of UNDOF and operationally in control of Golan Heights.

Lt Col Anquillano perceived the situation as an opportunity for the Filipino Peacekeepers to show to the whole world the undying Philippine commitment to UN peacekeeping since its first deployment in South Korea in 1950s during the Korean War.

“This is a great opportunity for us to show to the whole world that the 6th Philippine Contingent to Golan Heights, also known as ‘The Professional Peacekeepers’ are really committed to serve with pride and honor,” Lt Col Anquillano quipped.

With only more than a week of preparation, two probationary companies who are tasked to occupy the vacated UN positions by Austrian Contingent were created and successfully carried out the Hand-over/Turn over activities.

The Philippine National Contingent Commander (PNCC), Col Cirilito E Sobejana encouraged the Filipino Peacekeepers to make the Philippines proud of the trust and confidence accorded by UNDOF entrusting almost all UN Positions in the AOS. “We will continue to do our best in performing our mandated tasks and wholeheartedly keep the Philippine flag waving with dignity and honor in the Golan Heights,”

Col Sobejana said.

Meanwhile, Maj Gen Iqbal S Singha, the Head of Mission and the Force Commander of UNDOF lauded the Philippine Battalion for the smooth assumption of responsibility in the Northern part of the AOS and assured Lt Col Anquillano the full support of UNDOF Headquarters.



Article by Maj Arnold Gasalatan, PIO PHILBATT
Photo by SSgt Rolybert Pablo, Photographer PHILBATT

6PCGH commemorates 115th Philippine Independence

As part of the commemoration of the 115th Philippine Independence, Contingent Commander, 6PCGH, Lt Col Nolie L Anquillano read the message of the AFP Chief of Staff, General Emmanuel T Bautista AFP during the Flag raising ceremony held at the Headquarters, Philippine Battalion, Camp Ziouani on 12 June 2013.



This year's theme 'Kalayaan 2013: Ambagan tungo sa Malawakang Kaunlaran' invites us to march together towards our tomorrow and one national future. Now more than ever, we need to keep the fire of Bayanihan alive; we have to work together as one people for a transformed, peaceful and progressive Philippines", CSAFP said in a message

delivered by Contingent Commander, 6PCGH.

Before the reading of CSAFP's message, Lt Col Anquillano awarded Certificates of Appreciation and Letters of Commendation to 205 deserving personnel for the successful conduct of Medal Parade and for individual and group accomplishment in their respective field.

Lt Col Anquillano in his message congratulated the 6PCGH officers and EP for hurdling the 7-month stint in Golan Heights with commendable successes. "Our sacrifices, being away from our families, are great

contributions for our country," he said. The commemoration was ended with the mass singing of the 6PCGH Hymn, Hymno ng Kawal Pilipino and Pilipinas kong Mahal.

Meanwhile, on 13th June 2013, Col Cirilito E Sobejana, Chief of Staff, UNDOF and the Philippine National Contingent Commander together with Lt Col Anquillano, selected officers of PHILBATT and Filipino Staffs of UNDOF attended a celebration of the 115th Anniversary of the Proclamation of Philippine Independence hosted by the Ambassador of the Philippines to Israel, His Excellency and Mrs Generoso D.G. Calonge held at Exodia Hall, Bnei Efraim, Tel Aviv, Israel.

Then, on 15th June 2013, Lt Col Emerito D Pineda, Chief Military Personnel Officer, PHILBATT and other officers attended the 115th Philippine Independence Day Celebration hosted by the Federation of Filipino Communities in Israel at Bet Dani covered court in Hatikva, Tel Aviv. The celebration showcased the Philippine Traditional Costumes (Terno, Barong Tagalog, Ethnic and Tribal), Cultural Dances plus an array of Native delicacies. It was highlighted by a contest for Mr. and Ms. Independence 2013.



Ambassador of the Philippines to Israel, His Excellency Generoso D.G. Calonge with LtCol Anquillano and Col Cirilito Sobejana



Article by Maj Arnold Gasalatan, PIO PHILBATT
Photo by SSgt Rolybert Pablo, Photographer PHILBATT

Observing through ambiguity

The Countless Sources of Stress in the Ever-Changing Face of the UNTSO Golan Mission...

No matter how well trained we are or what our personality types may be, the greatest source of stress for us all is ambiguity. Ambiguity has an uncanny way to generate anxiety and stress, to disturb our sense of control, and violate the perceived predictability in our lives.

It is safe to say that for many of our UNMOs, the ever-changing environment on the Golan Heights has delivered an abundance of ambiguity and tested the otherwise resilient natures we have. Stress is a tired and overused word that we often associate with a weakness or lower level of preparedness, as it sits on the opposite side of the continuum to terms like 'control' and 'composure'. No matter the prejudice, it would be naïve to assume that UNMOs may not be affected by stress. This is even more the case in the light of the fact that the sources of stress, over the past months, have been varied, unpredictable and sustained over extended periods of time, leading to cumulative stress.

OGG UNMOs are typically experienced and mature officers who have prior deployment experiences. With these comes a level of composure, intuition, readiness, a long line of heuristics as well as conscious and subconscious coping mechanism, to deal with stress. Nevertheless, the environment in which UNMOs operate is rife with stress-inducing experiences, the effect of which, no matter how controlled we may be, is unavoidable.

The types of the experiences UNMOs have gone through over the past months sound more like a list of pre-cursors to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) than a list of experiences one would associate with the role of an UNMO; especially on a mission with such longstanding and peaceful history. Here is a taste: 'kidnapped', 'break-ins', 'taken hostage', 'direct and indirect fire', 'shelter-bound', 'held at a gun point', 'threatening of UN personnel', 'hostile behaviour', 'hijacked'. UNMOs have had to evacuate and temporarily close down OP, due to safety and security risks in the area; have been subjected to the on-going uncertainty of moving in hostile areas; remained OP-bound for extended periods of time and at best, have had to share their limited living spaces with armed UNDOF soldiers.

Even if you were to assess that these experiences ought to be consistent with UNMOs training, there is an added layer of complexity that can escalate stress. Firstly, one of the most challenging aspects of the role, especially for the likes of infantry officers, is that they are unarmed. UNMOs have no other way to respond to threat or to defend themselves than waving the blue flag and maintaining composure in times of threat. Further, most UNMOs are accustomed to operating within their own contingents. Through shared training, experiences and even elements such as shared culture and language, they develop trust in those they will share challenging times with. On the Golan, UNMOs have to build that trust with others they have never met before, do so quickly and be prepared to rest on others in highly ambiguous and dangerous situations.



From left to right: 1. Capt Alexandrina Bojilova – OP58...then evacuated; 2. Bad road condition; 3. Observation from OP; 4. Mines

Article by Captain Alexandrina Bojilova, OGG UNMO

INDCON CHANGE OF ROTATION



14th rotation INDCON arrived at Camp Ziouani on 25th Apr and 8th May 2013. In order to welcome the incoming contingent, a warm and memorable reception was organized by the outgoing contingent - to the tunes of the “Jai Ho” song, accompanied by water shower from the Smokey vehicle and the waving of Indian Tricolour.

With the change in rotation, INDCON witnesses a change in the core group of the contingent as the 17 Parachute Field Regiment, after having completed its rotations, has been replaced by 315 Field Regiment (Kargil). In addition, like the previous rotations, the contingent comprises of individuals from the Electronics and Mechanical Engineers (EME), Signals, Army Supply Corps (ASC), Engineers, Army

Medical Corps (AMC), Army Postal Service (APS) and Corps of Military Police (CMP). The soldiers are a selected lot who, prior to being nominated for the prestigious UN assignment, have proved their mettle by their exemplary performance while serving in difficult terrain - from the glaciers in Kashmir, the highest battlefield on earth with temperatures plunging to as low as -60oC, to the deserts of Rajasthan with their scorching days and sandy cool nights.

The team took over duties from the peacekeepers of 13th rotation. The change of command and turnover ceremony from outgoing INDCON CO Lt Col Kawardeep Sawhney to the incoming CO, Lt Col Mumuksh Mehra, was held at Camp Ziouani on 3rd October 2012. The parade was conducted with full military aplomb and was appreciated by all present. The parade was reviewed by MGen I S Singha, Force Commander and Head of Mission UNDOF and witnessed by military and civilian staff of UNDOF and some distinguished guests from the host nation.

The parade was followed by signing of CoC documents, address by outgoing and incoming COs and the Force Commander. The outgoing CO expressed his gratitude to all present for making his team’s tenure a successful and memorable one. He handed over the command baton to Lt Col Mumuksh Mehra, and wished him and his rotation the best of luck. Lt Col Mehra sought everyone’s support and assistance in orientation and familiarization to the peculiarities of the mission area. He promised to continue the good work done by the outgoing contingent and resolved to overcome the present and future challenges with the required approach, focus and determination.

The Force Commander during his address appreciated the excellent work of the 13th rotation and facilitated the deserving individuals with commendation cards. He welcomed the new contingent and wished them a successful tenure, especially with the rapidly changing regional dynamics and the evolving challenges.



INDCON CELEBRATES "HOLI"

Holi is the festival of colors and is meant to welcome the spring and win the blessings of God for good harvests and fertility of the land. It is one of the most fun-filled and boisterous of Indian festivals. It is an occasion that brings in unadulterated joy and mirth, fun and play and music and dance. The Indian contingent celebrated the festival of colors, Holi, on 27th March 2013 at camp Ziouani. The occasion was marked by lots of colors and water mixed with a great deal of zeal and camaraderie. For the occasion a special water pit was prepared to welcome everyone. A customary dip in the pit has now become an unwritten tradition to initiate the celebrations. With the mercury hovering quite low, it the chilling water added 'zing' to the festivities. The colors and the water showers made everyone forget the chill and warm up heartily to the occasion.

To make the event more special, the contingent had organized a number of events – including slow cycle race, three legged race, horse riding and dirt bikes. Everyone present made full use of the opportunity and seemed fully drenched with the spirit of Holi. The ground was swept in the Holi spirit with the Holi songs adding to the merriment. A number of guests participated in the celebrations without any inhibitions. A special mention is made of the Philbatt contingent who celebrated the occasion with as much enthusiasm, while a few, it was a new experience as they watched in amusement.

Holi is a symbolic commemoration of a legend from Hindu Myth. The story centers around an arrogant king who resents his son Prahlad, worshipping Lord Vishnu. He attempts to kill his son but fails each time. Finally, the king's sister Holika, who was said to be immune to burning, sits with the boy in a huge fire. However, the prince Prahlad emerges unscathed, while his aunt is burnt to death. On the eve of Holi, bonfires are burnt as its symbolic representation of the victory of good over evil.



The day was an ideal example of bonhomie and camaraderie amongst personnel of the force who despite belonging to a wide spectrum of cultures and traditions, participate in each other's celebrations with unabated passion and fervor. It was a singular experience for everyone who had not previously witnessed the famed 'Festival of Colors'. The Indian contingent was elated on its part to play hosts to an incredible assemblage of friends.



The Few...The Proud



Easy Monday Duty: A typical use of the term “Easy” in this context includes the following duties: Convoy Escort to Damascus, Close Protection Unit for the boss’s line tour, 24/7 Fire Brigade Duty, Recce Patrol to Mazra’at Bayt Jinn (And we know who holds this area), Night Guard augmentation in CF, Escort Duty to Beirut Lebanon, a vehicle + driver request, and a 24/7 Force Reaction Group (FRG) Alert Platoon. I was talking to my 2IC and I said, “Today is one nice light duty day, isn’t it?”... Yes sir, it is! my 2IC replied. Counting the number of men in our outfit (32 NCOs present)...we were happy to do the job because that day, no one from the company was on leave, but once they do, it becomes a different story. We were also fortunate as there was a halt to regular (night and day) AOS Patrolling from the edges of Northern

AOR (except Mount Hermon) down to GOB Barrel in the South when Al Jamla, Abdeen, and Mariah Villages were still not overtaken by events. The Force Headquarters Company has been UNDOF’s workhorse with a plethora of mobile and non-mobile operations tasks pegged on the concept of a Force Reserve.

The Company used to operate with three Platoons; First Platoon - AUTCON/HRVCON, Second Platoon - PHILCON, and Third Platoon - INDCON plus a command section, doing all that need to be done in the mission area under the auspices of the Force Commander through supervision by the Chief of Staff. Its Area of Operations extend from Camp Faouar to the AOS, AOL, and as far as Lebanon for Escort Duty when directed to do so. With the pull out of two TCCs, Austria and Croatia, FHQ Coy was streamlined into a Platoon reinforced strength with a remaining Filipino Platoon as core group plus five soldier augmentation from PHILBATT. Assuming the gargantuan task of a unit that works with three platoons is not an easy task but proper motivation and a bit of troop management skills can produce an output of resilience and dedication from the soldiers to get the job done. Objectively, the center of gravity of a Force Reserve is its ability to conduct mobile operations, usually on an exigent situation; therefore, vehicle drivers are a precious commodity in the unit. From the start of the reorganization, we focused on developing additional drivers for Toyota LAV, RG 31 NYALA, and RG 32 Scout, to keep the troops moving... literally.

The Fire Brigade Duty in Camp Foauar was an additional task given to the company on June 2013 with appropriate training conducted by the outgoing AUSBATT Fire Brigade. Indeed, it was a challenge and added responsibility which weighed heavily on our troop resources. The “SMOKY” duty requires a detail of (8) Soldiers with two drivers for a 24/7 standby. With the arrival of new TCC replacing the AUSBATT, it is expected that the SMOKY duty will be assumed by the new Headquarters Service Company. “InshaAla!”

Four months after assuming the chores, the FHQ Company (... or Platoon Reinforced) continuous continue to work silently under the avant-garde circumstances with the modest operational accomplishments.

In conclusion, we have a saying in the Company which was handed down over by our predecessors, at first it was too haughty to give it a thought, but now we have come to use it as an emotional consolation, it goes..... “You don’t have to be crazy to work here... but it helps!” Then again we just stick to our motto: “SEMPER”



Article by Capt Zar Taguba, Cmdr, FHQ Coy

Bunker times for SOPR

“This is Joint Operations Center UNDOF, Captain Ekke speaking.” In the last Golan Journal the challenging business in the JOC was described. Now Staff Officer Public Relations had to take over operational responsibilities.

Monday morning, 08:00hrs, conference room, Pentagon HQ, Camp Faouar. After the briefing of SO Info/Analysis, Capt Michael Pontasch, a new Operations Officer who was never seen before in this position, joins the Morning Update and moves to the desk. “Sir General Sir, Ladies and Gentlemen, the operational situation of the past 24 hours.” Then a ten minutes briefing in detail about past main incidents inside and outside the Area of Separation is presented to the Force Commander as well as military and civilian UNDOF leading staff sitting around the big table. They listen to the presenter who is well known as

knew that more than ten will follow estimated by two until three.

The duties as Operation Officer are scheduled in each 24 hour-shifts called as Alpha, Bravo and Charlie. Alpha, the main duty, starts at 07:15hrs taking over from the predecessor, who switches to Bravo. He is preparing the Morning Update brief, a presentation about operational matters like reported incidents, tactical overviews or operational statistics of the last day. The A-Duty starts with work on the PC, compiling files like the daily situation report, shepherds crossing, patrol statistics, travel

important. Even though you had then realized that there is no sunlight anymore, it's dark! Close to midnight you think about some hours of sleep. But unfortunately the early morning started with a kidnapping incident at UNTSO OP 52. All present Military Observers were threatened by anti-governmental-forces who entered the OP, then they were captured and carried away by them. After hours they could be safely released but you cannot imagine how does an Operations Officer feel when he gets informed to deal with such circumstances. No thoughts of sleep anymore at 02:40hrs, straining the keyboard with the Sequence of Events, dictated by Chief Operations Officer. Hundreds of calls reach the mobiles of Force Commander, Deputy Force Commander, COO, CLPIO and JOC at the same time. In the meanwhile I furthermore prepared a Google Earth presentation that demonstrates the current geographic location and tactical situation. After sunrise, the situation was still precarious but everybody did his best to approach a satisfying solution and a happy end.



Robert, Jemuel and Ekke - temporarily appointed to the Joint Operations Center

Public Relations Officer, but what he has to do with Operations?

As a result of the personnel situation in UNDOF after the withdrawal of Japanese and Croatian peacekeepers, some Staff Officers got a new appointment in the Joint Operations Center because of vacant operational positions. They were Maj Jemuel Angdason, SO Training (at this time no SSO Training was appointed), Capt Robert Kulterer, ITO CF and I, Capt Ekkehard Gröppel, SOPR. I still remember my first shift in JOC at the end of March, nobody

instructions and restrictions as well as the violation protocol about reported incidents by AUSBATT, PHILBATT or FHQ Company. Coordination of traffic and convoys which are in the meanwhile always protected by Military Police is a task furthermore to do.

When you are very busy working with the computer, military maps, telephone calls and special tasks on short notice, the time is passing away like a storm wind. Getting out of the ‘Bunker’ for some minutes – so the JOC is lovely called – is very

At the end of that A-Duty, LtCol Volkmar Ertl, thanked and honored me and my Staff Officer comrades, Capt Robert Kulterer (ITO) and Maj Jemuel Angdason (SO Training) with the well-known JOC/JMAC badge. Then we left proudly to hold office again in our

*Article by Capt Ekkehard Gröppel, SOPR
Photo by Capt Alaric A. O. Delos Santos*



*The Austrian Contingent says Goodbye
to all UNDOF comrades!*