

From The Fourth...

With two weeks left in Cyprus and having just completed a very enjoyable Cambrai weekend, now is the time to begin reflecting on the tour.

Our arrival in the shimmering heat of RAF Akrotiri only five months ago now seems like an age away. The intervening period has been packed with incidents and the tour will remain a talking point in the Regiment for years to come. In essence, although it was successful, the reality did not live up to the high hopes placed upon it.

During the six months, each squadron spent three months as United Nations (UN) Forces in Sector Two of the Green Line dividing the island. The other three months was spent on internal security duties in the Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA) to the south east. The period in ESBA was split into two, six weeks in Dhekelia and six weeks in Ayios Nikolaos, the home of 9 Signal Regiment. As part of the tour each member was given two weeks leave.



Keeping their hand in (4RTR)

For the first three months, life was characterised by one thing, heat. In Nicosia, the capital, temperatures rose quite regularly to 45°C at midday. This sweltering heat combined with that old enemy, boredom, made observation duties and patrolling that much more difficult. Sales of soft drinks within the squadrons were so great that every troop was able to have at least two good nights on the strength of the profits. Barbecues became

a regular feature during the limited spare time.

On the operational front most of the time in the UN was spent on the routine and often very mundane duties of patrolling and manning the Observation Posts (OP). Variety and excitement were provided by the busy period of demonstrations in July, a regular feature of the whole tour. However those in July marked the fifteenth anniversary of the Turkish invasion and were by far the most lively. For the majority of the Regiment, dealing with a real demonstration was a new experience. Any with previous experience felt somewhat restricted by the softly, softly approach of the UN. Fortunately there were no serious injuries but bumps and bruises were commonplace. The Regiment was divided in its appreciation of the merit of life on the UN Line. Any readers who have spent any time with the UN Scout car Squadron can be assured that a dismounted tour is a great deal less interesting.

The flip side to this paradoxical existence was the internal security task. Once blue berets were exchanged for black, squadrons had to adjust to their changed roles. The duties in ESBA were equivalent to those required to

maintain a very high level of security in any British military garrison. As usual, however, the situation was complicated by the nature of the island. The main road in the Garrison also happens to be the major tourist route to Ayia Napa, the most popular resort in Cyprus. On average during the tourist season 5,000 cars per day passed through the Garrison area. This presents obvious security problems.

The variety and unusual nature of these tasks has given ample opportunity to develop the leadership skills of the Regiment's NCOs and troopers. As in Northern Ireland, the majority of tasks rest at section commander level. This has meant adapting rather quickly to a slightly alien type of soldiering. It is a credit to everyone that the vast majority rose to the task. The time in ESBA also incorporated a two week troop level training package, graphically described in the November issue by Lieutenant Chris Hall.

The two weeks leave for everyone has also been an important feature of the tour, with members of the Regiment travelling far and wide. For example, more than 70 soldiers took cruises to Egypt and the Holy Land. In addition the beaches provided opportunities for both relaxation and water sports. The single members of the Regiment also made full use of the close proximity (25 minutes by car) of Ayia Napa.

However, the tour was not without its problems, particularly for an armoured regiment. The attitude of some of the more permanent units and personnel on the island was sometimes not particularly helpful. Being there for only six months made it difficult to integrate into activities like the various sporting seasons. In addition more than 50 new recruits reached the Regiment in Cyprus, all of whom will need further training and experience back in Germany before they can be fully integrated into tank crews.

Communications in Cyprus are still somewhat antiquated. Those with the loudest voices often have the most success on the telephone. Also the road system, when compared to Germany, is almost medieval; Cypriot drivers must rank as some of the worst in the Northern Hemisphere. There are no civilian vehicle Inspections and the sight of a clapped out machine chugging up a steep hill at five miles an hour, causing a major tailback, is commonplace.

Now, however, as our time in Cyprus draws to a close the Regiment is looking forward to getting back to Rhine Army, to doing what it knows best - Tanking. Once back in Osnabruck, training will begin in earnest with the Regiment looking forward to Hohne Ranges and then just a few weeks later pre-Canada training. However, at least the climate of Cyprus will be remembered with affection in the frosty mist of an early morning in Soltau.