

# UN and the AFP

**Twenty-five years ago this year, Australia's first contingent of police landed on the shores of the Mediterranean island of Cyprus to begin a United Nations mission which is still going on as successfully as it began.**

Today, the 20 members of the 31st Contingent are maintaining that success on behalf of the AFP.

In the early days, police from all States and the ACT played their part in building the reputation of the United Nations Peace-Keeping Force in Cyprus, but with the formation of the AFP, the role transferred to members of the new force.

Since then, 14 contingents of AFP members have kept up the traditions of those early days and brought credit on their force in the international arena.

Operating under the title of UN Civilian Police (UNCIVPOL) their role is one of observers, investigators and reporters. It is a task with fundamental differences from their normal role as investigative or community police in Australia.

They have no powers of arrest and are unarmed while on patrol. They rely on diplomacy and tact to obtain desired results.

UNCIVPOL members patrol the buffer zone which extends the length of the island and separates the Turkish forces in the north from the Greek-Cypriot forces in the south. It varies in width from a few metres in central Nicosia to several kilometres in other parts of the Island.

The AFP contingent covers three sectors in the zone, supporting Danish troops in Sector one, British troops in Sector two and Canadian troops in Sector three.

## **Feats of bravery**

The major policing duties are carried out by the Turkish and Cypriot police in their own areas, while UNCIVPOL members defuse tense situations involving civilian threats within the zone itself.

The risk to life is ever present, although as far as the AFP contingents



*A member of AUSTCIVPOL in Cyprus on liaison duty in the UN Buffer Zone, talks with a local goat-herder.*

have been concerned, it has been related mainly to feats of bravery in the course of these duties.

Three AFP members have received high commendations for actions.

Chief Inspector Jack Thurgar earned his in the Omorphita suburb of Nicosia on 9 October 1979 when a farmer drove his tractor into a minefield and was critically wounded when a mine exploded beneath a back wheel of the tractor. Jack, himself badly wounded by mines in Vietnam, did not hesitate. He picked his way on foot through the minefield, picked up the man and carried him to safe ground. The farmer recovered in hospital. Jack received the Star of Courage and was officially commended by the President of Cyprus for his bravery.

Sergeant Vince Mylett, of Eastern Region, and Sergeant Greg Slater, ACT Region, were presented with UN awards and Commissioner's commendations for their part in saving an elderly woman who walked into the midst of an armed confrontation between UN troops and two groups of angry territorial troops in August 1986.

## **Peace Prize**

Another landmine accident claimed the life of NSW Police Sergeant Ian Ward, who died when his LandRover was blown up on 12 November 1974.

Two other Australian members, Ser-

geant Lew Thomas, of South Australia, and Inspector Paul Hackett, also of NSW, died in car accidents on the island.

In December 1988, the first woman member to serve in the AFP Contingent was selected to represent the Cyprus UNCIVPOL at a ceremony in Sweden to mark the presentation of the Nobel Peace Prize to the United Nations for its dedication to international peace and security.

Sergeant Kathy Burdett was one of three members of the UN Forces in Cyprus chosen as part of a Guard of Honour at the ceremony.

However, Cyprus is not the only place where AFP members are serving in a UN capacity. Two members have been posted for 12 months in Aranyaprathet, Thailand, attached to the UN Border Relief Operation (UNBRO).

They are working with an international policing team of five, including officers from Sweden, Britain and the US, liaising between UNBRO and the Displaced Persons Protection Unit, a newly-created troop of Thai Guards whose task is to improve law and order in border camps housing 300,000 displaced Khmers.

The UN team members are the first western police officers based in Thailand to improve security of Indo-Chinese refugees since the major influx of refugees in 1975. They also help train Khmer civilian guards at the camps.