



The RAN FAA Mission With the UN Emergency Force II

PART 1

by Geoff Ledger &
Greg Morris



This article is set in the Cold War post-Vietnam period covering the time following the fourth Arab-Israeli War of 1973 and the peace talks which led to Israel withdrawing from a 20-30 km zone where the UN Force II was sent and act as a buffer to the combatants.

The Yom Kippur War

Also known as the Ramadan War, the October War, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War or the Fourth Arab-Israeli War, it was an armed conflict fought from 6th to the 25th October 1973 between Israel and a coalition of Arab states led by Egypt and Syria. The fighting in the Middle East had broken out when Egyptian forces crossed the Suez Canal and, in a coordinated move, Syrian troops on the Golan Heights attacked Israeli positions.

The Security Council met the following week to consider the conflict as the war raged on. Both the US and the Soviet Union were watching closely, with both requesting an urgent meeting two weeks after the fighting commenced. Whilst initially caught off guard by the Arab attack, the Israelis hit back hard and crossed the Suez Canal pushing the Egyptian third army towards Cairo.

The Security Council

At the request of Egypt the Security Council was convened on 24th October 1973, and with the non-aligned members of the Council

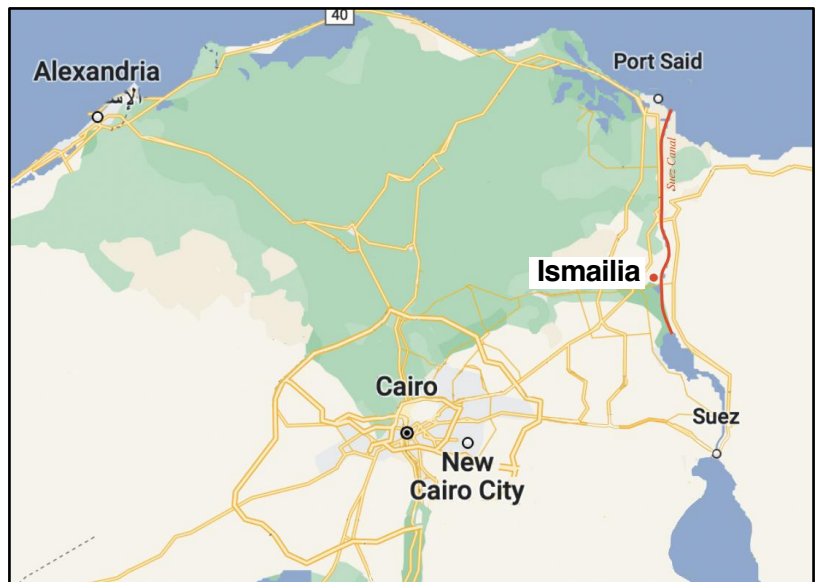
and in close cooperation with the Secretary General, worked out a resolution. It called for an increase in United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) Observers in the area and the establishment of a new United Nations peacekeeping force, which became UNEF II. The establishment and dispatch of this new peacekeeping operation effectively brought the crisis to an end.

By 26th October the guidelines for the operation had been agreed, and that same afternoon advance elements of Austrian, Finnish and Swedish troops arrived from Cyprus and immediately deployed along the front line.

The terms of reference for UNEF II were to supervise the implementation of Security Council resolution 340 (1973), which demanded that an immediate and complete ceasefire be observed and that the parties return to the positions they had occupied on the 22nd October 1973.

In September 1975, Egypt and Israel signed an agreement at Geneva allowing UNEF II more extensive responsibilities and a larger increase in the area of operations. The Secretary General proposed additional aircraft and helicopters to support the four battalions in the Sinai desert provided by Finland on the Red Sea to the south, Sweden on the Mediterranean Sea to the north and the Indonesians and Ghanaians in the middle of the desert.

Right. *Ismailia, a medium size provincial town and the land base of UNEFII, is located about half way along the Suez canal, between the coastal cities of Port Said and Port Suez. The Sinai peninsula, captured by Israel in the '67 six day war, starts immediately to the east of the canal, and was the principal area of operations for the operation.*



Australia's Commitment to UNEF II

In early 1976, the Australian Government agreed to commit forces to UNEF II consisting of two army personnel serving in the UNEF Headquarters for a 12 month period, and a 45 man detachment, from 5 Squadron RAAF, operating four UH-1H Iroquois helicopters for six month rotations. Included in the RAAF contingents during 1977-79 were RAN aircrew and aircraft maintainers. So the adventure began in the desert, a far cry from our last overseas operation in Vietnam. I believe it was appropriate that two of our most experienced ex-Vietnam helicopter pilots and flying instructors were the first in and last out. LEUT Geoff Vidal was in the first rotation to assist in setting up the flying operations at the airbase in Ismailia, and LCDR John "Bomber" Brown was in the last rotation to ensure all our valuable assets and personnel departed the Middle East safely.

Pre Deployment Training and Transit to the Sinai

FAA personnel selected to support the 5 Squadron RAAF contingents in the Sinai underwent intensive on

type training at RAAF Fairbairn for both maintenance and aircrew for at least a month before departure. The deployment was for approximately six months, personnel rotated every six weeks using a C130 Hercules with one UH-1H snugly encased inside it, with UNEF II crews also on board, along with about 500 cartons of Australian beer and assorted other essential aircraft spares and tooling. The flight out to the Middle East took 4-5 days depending on weather conditions in Egypt. On my flight, we went via Darwin, Butterworth, Madras, Bahrain and into Ismailia Egypt. The arrival of the Hercules provided a highlight for those members going home and an amazing cultural experience for the inbound crew awaiting six months of adventures. *Continued on page ****

Below. *War wreckage was commonplace, a silent testament to the thousands of lives lost in the brief conflict. (Australian War Memorial)*



The YOM KIPPUR WAR IN A NUTSHELL

What Was It All About?



The Yom Kippur War was a relatively short but brutal conflict fought from October 1973 between Egypt and Syria on the one hand, and Israel on the other. By the end of the conflict at least ten thousand soldiers were dead, and countless others wounded.

To understand the causes of this war it is necessary to go back to 1967, the end of the so-called Six Day War. By the end of that conflict Israel had seized territory three-and-a-half times its own landmass. This included the strategic Golan Heights overlooking Syria, the West Bank of Palestine, and the entire Sinai Peninsula. You can see the extent of this occupied landmass shaded yellow in the diagram above.

Six years later the respective Presidents of Syria and Egypt entered into a secret deal to unify their armies under one command, and to strike Israel in a coordinated attack. The primary aim was to regain territories lost in the six day war. Assad, the President of Syria, saw the coming conflict as a war of retribution (he had been Defence Minister in 1967). Sadat of Egypt was more pragmatic, recognising his country lacked the ability to liberate the Sinai in its entirety. His aim was to focus the minds of the world's superpowers and to force Israel to negotiate a lasting peace.

The Arabs chose to launch their attack on Yom Kippur, a Jewish religious holiday and the only day of the year in which there are no radio or TV broadcasts in Israel, and infrastructure shuts down.

The holiday fell on Saturday 6th October 1973 and just after 2pm the Egyptian and Syrian armies, with advanced Soviet weapons, launched a two-front offensive on Israel from

the north and south. Within a day they had seized significant strategic objectives and inflicted heavy losses on the Israeli forces.

But within 24 hours Israel mobilised two armoured divisions which soon turned the Syrian advance into a retreat. They swept into Syria, causing elements from Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Jordan to join in to face the counterattack. Despite this coalition, the Israelis achieved significant gains, advancing to within 35km of Damascus and occupying new territory to bring to the bargaining table.

Advances were also made in the south, where Israeli forces penetrated Egyptian defence lines and came within striking distance of Cairo, the Egyptian capital city.

The counterattack utterly turned the tide of the war in favour of the Israelis, and the fighting came to a stalemate. By mid October, the Arabs employed a new tactic - an oil embargo. OPEC reduced its production of oil by an immediate 5% and threatened further reductions until the Israelis fully withdrew from all territories captured in 1967. The Arab countries also enforced an embargo on the US, which had been resupplying Israel with arms.

The reduction in oil caused major price hikes around the world, causing the US to reassess its support for the war.

By the last week of October, the two sides were ready and willing to accept a ceasefire deal. This took seven months, with an agreement was signed in Geneva to bring the war to an end after 243 days of conflict. The agreement ultimately led to a lasting peace between Egypt, Jordan and Israel, with those two countries being the only Arab states to recognise the State of Israel. ✈

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Daily Routine

The normal daily routine was Monday to Friday up early with a breakfast at the hotel, and then a drive down to the Ismailia Airbase. During World War II, the airfield, then known as RAF Ismailia or Ismailia Airfield, had been used by the British Royal Air Force and the United States Army Air Force during the North African Campaign against Axis forces.

The airbase was pretty run down, the hangars and ground facilities were old and also not in great shape. Our engineering team made it work.

The maintenance team and aircrew would normally be at the airfield by 0700 preparing for the days flying. The administration staff would arrive a little later. Back at the hotel were the cooks and off-duty crew. With a small number of personnel in the unit, everyone was pretty much aware of where members were. Some were on out of country leave, some local leave, and several were crook with a stomach bug or some other delightful medical condition.

On some occasions there was weekend flying, but this was not the norm. Also, night flying was also not the norm, especially after one of our choppers was doing a night medivac in the desert and as they passed an Egyptian military site, the aircraft was lit up by a missile radar sensor. Thankfully it wasn't launched but after that little scare night flying was not a priority.

Accommodation

Our accommodation was in a run-down hotel called the Sinai Palace Hotel. Sounds impressive, but I can assure you it was not. It was a six storey hotel, no lifts and with narrow stair wells. The accommodation for the members was on the second and third floors, the dining room and bar was on the top floor, and our Egyptian staff and armoury was on the first floor. On the roof of the hotel we had a generator and a water tank to collect fresh water if it decided to rain.

When showering we used the local water, keeping eyes and mouth shut. Any open sores or wounds quickly got infected and turned nasty. Shaving and cleaning your teeth was with fresh bottled water. The rooms were small with ceiling fans, no air conditioning and most had windows which you couldn't open. Mozzies were a worry in the wet season, so sleeping under a net was essential. During Ramadan was also an interesting time and with the call to prayer just on sun up there was no need for an alarm clock!!

Recreation

The RAAF Welfare organisation supplied some exercise equipment for the detachment. We had a limited set of gymnasium equipment. There was cricket, footy and soccer equipment available. There was also a ski boat that unfortunately spent more time broken await-



Above. By mid-1977 the Australian contingent was housed in the Sinai Palace Hotel; known locally as the 'Sin Palace'. The detachment was housed in the top four floors of the hotel with the top floor being the mess and bar with the lower three floors being accommodation. Although it looked presentable from a distance, it was far from it. In an article in the Sydney Morning Herald a visiting journalist described it as "...a squalid, fifth rate Egyptian hotel ... it is a herring-gutted, grubby, run down, infinitely depressing old building with a narrow dark entrance. There are no lifts - to reach the makeshift Australian mess one has to climb six flights of dingy stairs. The plumbing is primitive and frequently gives up all together. When I visited the unit there were buckets of water standing by the lavatories to flush them. The rooms in which the officers and men have to live are tiny, crude and bare without amenities of any kind except those introduced by their occupants." *Below.* The 'Placky Hut' (HQ) was primarily for Adminos. One techno explained they seldom went into it "for fear of catching something". (Photos: Geoff Ledger).✈





ing spares than operational, but when it was a goer the boys enjoyed a ski on Lake Timsah.

Other fun outdoor activity was sitting on the banks of the Suez watching tankers and naval vessels passing through the canal. Some even did the swim across the canal to catch the bow wave. We played sports against some of the other contingents and local Egyptian teams. One memorable game of soccer on the main Ismailia stadium in front of many locals was against a local Egyptian team. We went down 3-2, our team received 5 yellow cards and Bill Huntriss nearly got a red for drinking water at the wrong time. Our opposition came off second-best injury wise.

Another inter contingent sport was volleyball against the Polish hospital staff. There were some big Polish units, both male and female which made for an exciting game. The Canadians had a weird fetish of trying to knock stuff off from our flight line and hotel. Our boys did a late night raid and stole their McDonalds flag flying on their flight line, which kept them quiet for some time. We also played the Canadians in darts at our hotel. It was a team effort to 10,001. If anyone was sober by the time we got to the last darts, they generally won the contest.

The other opportunity the guys had was to run a show on the local Canadian FM radio station 96.7, Canadian Forces Middle East. We were generally allowed to do Friday evenings and long sessions over the weekend. The Canadians loved the Australian hu-



Geoff on the airwaves at the Canadian Radio station. Geoff and his RAAF crew awaiting UN troops. ➔

mour and music selection. The boys received occasional yellow cards from the station hierarchy for colourful language, but this didn't take away from some entertaining shows and a great opportunity to show some flair on the airwaves.

Flying Operations

The helicopters were manned with two pilots, an air crewman and one technician with a flyaway tool kit. On board the chopper we had additional water, a shot gun to scare the Bedouins away, and most sorties we had a carton of Tooheys under the back seat as a means of thanking overnight hosts somewhere in the Sinai.

Our roles in the Sinai were varied, ranging from United Nation Military Observer patrols of the buffer zone to ensure the former warring nations adhered to the cease fire, through to providing Medivac coverage, personnel movement, equipment and stores relocation. The other task we monitored was the movement of Bedouins throughout the buffer zone. These hardy souls were used by both sides to gain intelligence although they would steal anything that was not nailed down.

The flying in the Sinai desert was incomparable to anything we did on the south coast of New South Wales. It was magical, and always presented different challenges on each sortie. There was an enormous expanse of nothing apart from sand dunes, wadies, and amazing sandstone cliffs down south. There was limited wildlife that could be seen from 500 feet, war wreckage strewn throughout the Buffer zone from previous battles and many nomadic Bedouin families scattered throughout the desert region. The seasons were evident in the middle east, and operations during the summer months were at times in excess of 45°C, and then in the winter months some days temperatures dropped to single digit figures. Most days the skies were clear but during the hot months, sand storms were our biggest danger. Due to these storms, several flights were diverted or landed prematurely to protect the rotor blades and engines from the abrasive sand. The buffer zone stretched from the Mediterranean Sea where the Swedish battalion operated, down to the Red Sea region where the Finns had control. The Ghanaians and Indonesians operated in the heart of the Sinai desert where the conditions were extremely harsh.

There were some days flying the Huey with a full load of personnel; the only way to get airborne was to do a cushion creep take off along one of the few bitumen roads in the desert. During my time we had the requirement for an engine change in the desert. This event showed how versatile and effective the Huey was. Landing next to a road with an engine surge and loss of power resulted in an engine change in situ under some camouflage netting. The helicopter was flying again six hours later. ➔



*Flying was as different from the Nowra environs as it was possible to get, with deserts, flat scrub and spectacular mountain gorges all within an hour or so. **Above.** Rugged mountain ranges bordering the Gulf of Suez, to the south of Ismailia. An overnighiter to FIN-BATT at Ras Abu Rudeis, on the Sinai Peninsula was always a pleasure, both to check out the amazing scenery and pass a "Terror Driving Experience" being taken for a Unimog drive up and down the land patrol area. **Lower.** A small base in the high country above Finn patrolled territory. In the hot months the temperature often exceeded 50°C and the sealed bitumen runway became soft, with boots building up a deposit of tar and the aircraft skids sticking, needing a bit of a wiggle to break free. (Photo: Martin Holland). ➔*

Personal Observations

by Greg Morris



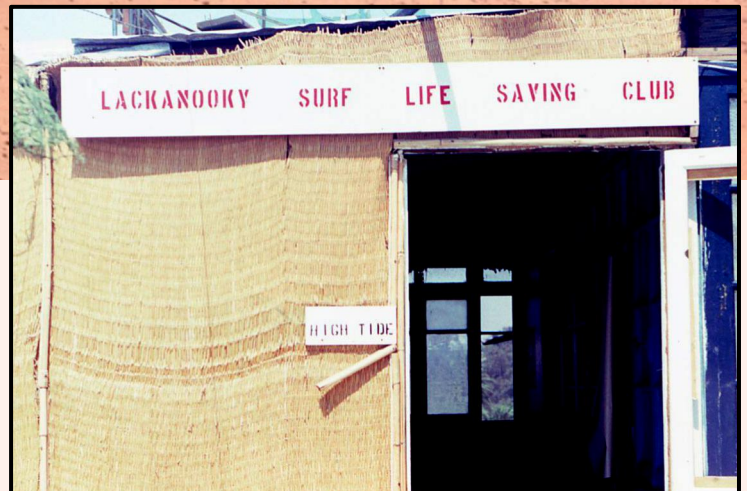
ABATWL Greg Morris aged 21 volunteered to join a few other NAVY personnel and travel to Egypt to support the RAAF 5 Sqn perform duties for UNEF2.

After completing Flight Fitter training at RAAF Fairbairn, myself, LEUT Geoff Vidal and LSACM Ron Macklin boarded a C130 Aircraft to travel to Ismailia Egypt. We were the first NAVY personnel to help out the RAAF and it was a novel experience for the RAAF to have us Matelots working with them. I inherited the nickname of "Seaweed" and that nickname remained with me for the entire tour. The RAAF guys that I am still in touch with 45 years later still refer to me as Seaweed.

The Hercules was loaded up with a UH1H helicopter and as many spares and beer as could be loaded. Our changeover crew was the largest of all the scheduled changeovers for the year. Changeovers happened every six weeks which coincided with an R2 Servicing for the UH1H.

We departed Fairbairn for Darwin landing in hot and sticky weather compared to Canberra where it was winter. We overnighted in Darwin and departed for Butterworth the next morning. After overnighting we departed from Butterworth, we flew a long leg to Bombay, then Bombay to Bahrain where we overnighted again. Flying to Ismailia the next day a short six hour flight. Landing in Egypt we had a large welcoming party of RAAF guys who were excited to see a few pallet loads of Toomey's cans on board and a refurbished UH1H. We headed in to the Hotel which the RAAF had setup as accommodation utilising the top four floors. The hotel was far better than a mess deck

Right. The Australians quickly displayed their talent for not only improving their leisure facilities, but invariably injecting humour into any situation. The "Lackanooky Surf Club", for example, quickly became the go-to place after hours for a cold beer and a chat. (Martin Holland). **Bottom:** One of the three great Pyramids of Giza on the very edge of western Cairo were a popular destination and could be reached by a relatively easy 2-3 hour drive, although Egyptian traffic was totally unpredictable ➔



on board HMAS *Melbourne*, we had a room for two people and I shared with Bass Broom an armourer.

We settled in and the herc departed a couple of days later with all the lads returning home and a broken UH1H. The herc did a very low flyby to farewell us until next time. I swear the Egyptian air trafficker ran from the tower the herc was that low.

We settled into the routine working and carrying out surveillance in the helicopters visiting the different battalions out in the Sinai desert. The desert was littered with wrecked war machinery and also was covered in mines. Lots of mines. One sortie we carried a sharp shooter to euthanize a couple of camels which had walked on mines. Talking mines, we had a UN Beach on Lake Timsah which had supposedly been cleared of mines. One week we were informed not to use the SAFE beach as a row of mines had been found in the water after a local had stepped on one. We had been swimming at the beach regularly. Just lucky, I guess.



The Huey was a great aircraft to maintain and operate. It was very reliable, simple and tough, Bell build great Helicopters. Wednesdays were the busy day carrying out 25 hourly inspections and also for the Lecky we would swap batteries out. The batteries would return to Australia every six weeks for major servicing. We had some small unserviceabilities but never anything major.

Weekends were boring unless you had put your name down to travel down to the red sea on board the two UH1Hs which carried out a Special UN patrol on a Sunday. The RAAF had a beach and boat at the Finnish Battalion base at Abu Rudeis. It was a good setup where we could dive, snorkel and swim in the Red Sea.

FINBAT was an overnigher when doing patrols and the Fins had a few good Sauna baths. We used to drink a cordial mix which was 10 parts vodka and one part cordial. We would then have a hot sauna and there was a competition to see who could stand the hottest. I remember obtaining a Certificate for achieving a set temperature, but can't remember what that was though.

Every six weeks we would have a long weekend and usually we would get a group together and take a Combi to Tel Aviv. This was seen as going back to reality as the Israelis were a little more westernised than Egypt. We would hire a deck chair each on the beach and stay overnight re-hydrating. There were pizza places and everything was safe to eat. The hotels had water that could be drunk safely and the showers were awesome. The people were very friendly and mostly spoke English as well as Hebrew. We visited most of the Holy sites within Israel over our



Top Left. One of the great benefits of the deployment was the opportunity to work with other nationalities, and the Finn Battalion (FINBATT) were no exception with their generous hospitality.

Below: LAC Wayne 'Strop' Schofield, one of the RAAF Fitters, decided to test whether the Huey's perspex windows would offer any protection if an aircraft was "set upon by bandits." An aircraft window was set up at the local range and 9mm rounds fired into it. The conclusion was that the pilot would have survived! It caused a lot of mirth and lasting memories of the after-firing range "piss up" at the Lackanooky Lodge. It also served to have a bit of fun with new arrivals, as per the sign. (Martin Holland).



many trips. We also visited the Dead Sea which is unbelievable to swim in although you could not get the water in your eyes due to the salinity. We could float with a can of drink resting on our six packs. We did see some fish swimming in there so the salinity did not affect Life surviving within.

The Israeli soldiers were also very friendly wherever we met them and would often talk to us for ages about the wars and the family members that they had lost in War, very sad.

The track across from Egypt to Israel traversed through the top of the Sinai desert through the Gaza strip. The minefields through here were a sight to be seen. One section of the track meandered through the minefields in zig zags seeming to take forever.

The canal was crossed by a floating bridge which was put in place in between ship changes of direction. It was controlled by the Egyptian soldiers who were not very disciplined; occasionally the bridge would not operate as the soldiers couldn't be bothered. Failures were common as most Egyptian equipment was poorly maintained. It was common to see broken down tank carriers and other war machinery throughout Egypt.

The Canadians were the closest friends we had in Egypt and we had a few sporting competitions with them. The Canuks used to visit the Hotel beach we had created on the top floor of the hotel and the Lack-anooky lodge bar was a great watering hole where lots of Tall but true stories were shared. We met some great friends. The Canuks had Buffalo aircraft and used to fly to Cyprus and other places. Unfortunately, a Buffalo was shot down by the Israelis and all were lost. We used to remember these people on the anniversary of the accident.

While in Egypt I visited many sites. The Pyramids

HMAS Melbourne transiting through the Suez Canal in September 1977 on her return from the Queen's Silver Jubilee cruise. Political sensitivities dictated removal of all aircraft from forward of the Bridge, and all guns be ranged to bear aft. ➔

were an incredible sight. Hard to believe that the Egyptians built them. I did a tour and went inside climbing through narrow tunnels to enter the larger Chasms. You had to hunch up and nearly crawl through the tunnels. Something I wouldn't be doing at age 66.

The Valley of the Kings and Queens was another great sight to visit with Tutuakhamun's tomb being the highlight. We went there on an Egyptian train which sounded like it was on its last legs. I could have walked quicker.

The museum at Cairo was very interesting but unfortunately a lot of the displays had been removed due to the war.

Swimming the canal was another pastime and we used to swim between passing ships. We also had the odd canal party.

During our tour HMAS *Melbourne* and two other warships were passing through on the way back from the Silver Jubilee. Geoff Vidal arranged for us to visit and we joined Melbourne at Alexandria and sailed overnight down to Ismailia where we departed on the pilot boat.

Our time seemed to pass quickly and before we knew we were next to depart back to Australia just in time for Christmas leave. The trip back was not without drama and Herc tail number 67 decided to have an engine issue requiring shutdown just after take-off from Bombay. As such we ended up with an extended stay in Butterworth. So we got to check out a few sights around Penang.

Overall, the tour was quite enjoyable and very eye opening. I did take leave whilst there and did a four-week tour around Europe visited cousins and aunts in London.

With Christmas Day fast approaching a lot of spare time was taken up sprucing up the Lackanooky Lodge all ranks mess, painting, decorating and general tidying up. Tradition for Christmas Breakfast still ran strong with the Officers serving the non commissioned, and I had an Australian Army officer from the UN headquarters, Dave Tresise, who served me my usual green Gatorade. It was the only thing that kept me safe from the dreaded GUT...you had to be careful what you ate.

Once Christmas and New Year were done it was time to get organised to return back to OZ after a memorable six months on duty in the Sinai as a United Nations Peacekeeper. Basically my final tasking was to dismantle the returning aircraft, pack up the blades, transmissions and all the unserviceable spares to be returned for repair. Load the aircraft onto the Herc and fly home.

I was also very lucky to have LEUT Geoff Ledger as my "DO" during my deployment, or SNOCA as he was affectionally known as...Senior Naval Officer in Arabia, and co-author of this article. ➔



Image: Martin Holland



The RAN FAA Mission with the UN Emergency Force II

Part 2

By Geoff Vidal and Bill Huntriss



Geoff Vidal

By the time I arrived in Ismailia in late June 1977 to begin a six month posting to UNEF II (Second United Nations Emergency Force), I was fairly well versed in flying with the RAAF. In addition to pilot's course with the RAAF, I had served with 9 SQN RAAF in Vietnam and I had just completed a posting as SNO instructing RAN and RAAF pilots converting to helicopters at 5 SQN RAAF Fairbairn. Serving with me in UNEF II were pilots who had been with me on pilot's course and /or with me in Vietnam. There were also some younger pilots that I had taught to fly helicopters. Four of the five UH1H Iroquois the RAAF had painted in UN white for the role in the Middle East were airframes I had flown in Vietnam.

My familiarity with RAAF people, procedures and aircraft was not shared by the other two RAN personnel on this first deployment of Navy to the Middle East. Initially, the RAAF were very wary of having a Navy maintainer and a Navy air crewman working with them. However, the skill and professionalism of Greg Morris and Ron Macklin was quickly recognised and their contributions to the contingent were greatly appreciated. It was a real privilege for me to serve with these two excellent ambassadors for the FAA. Ron Macklin was a hero when he prevented what could have been a major incident one night when he discovered and dealt with a smouldering fire caused by someone falling asleep while smoking. Greg Morris was also a hero in "skilful and energetic socialising" and activity planning.

Operations supporting the UN were fairly straight forward as far as flying in a hot and sandy environment went. However, great care with air defence clearances was needed in flying across boundaries chock full of radar guided weapons manned by tense Egyptian and Israeli soldiers. Good diplomatic skills were also needed working under the overall command of Indonesian Major General Rias Abin who had a rather difficult Canadian as second in command.

The UNEF II consisted of four Infantry Battalions (Swedish, Ghanaian, Indonesian and Finnish) and two support Battalions (Canadian for light logistics and Polish for heavy logistics). Our main activity was to carry Infantry patrols on surveillance missions up and down the Sinai desert paying particular attention



Ismailia in the 70s, with Lake Timsar adjacent and the Suez Canal in the foreground. The wide boulevard in the centre of the photo is actually the 'Sweetwater Canal', bringing fresh water from the Nile with parkland strips on either side. The Sinai Palace Hotel is between the far end of the canal and the lake. The airfield is just visible in the upper desert patch, with the single runway just west of the town.



to the not-very-well-marked northern boundary between the demilitarised zone and Israel.

Most patrols included officers from the UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation) who came from over twenty countries including Argentina, Ireland, Britain, Russia, Australia and Canada. We flew over literally thousands of landmines seen stretching in rows across the desert as the sand shifted in the frequent strong winds. Support missions such as lifting a large radio tower onto a concrete base were a welcome change. Occasional Medivacs were also carried out. However, these were difficult to implement quickly due to the protracted arrangements necessary to gain the required air defence clearance to cross the heavily defended skies above the Suez Canal which lay between Ismailia airfield and UN forces in the Sinai

Greg "Seaweed" Morris has mentioned in the previous edition of 'FlyBy' many of the things which made this a very memorable posting. I would add that a highlight for me was leave in Cyprus. I was flown over

in a Canadian Buffalo aircraft (best described as a jet powered Caribou). I was having a few beers with one of the Australian Federal Policemen serving with the UN in Cyprus when he suddenly said "I know you!" Wondering what past offence had caught up with me, I was relieved when he continued "you were a Subby in MELBOURNE on the trip up top in 1970 and I was the ship's postie".

Often in downtown Ismailia I would encounter old Egyptians who spoke of being friends with some of the many Australian soldiers who camped near Lake Timsah after the Gallipoli campaign in WW I before heading off to fight in France. The Australians were remembered fondly and I would wonder if these Egyptians had met my grandfather who spent about six months there in 1916 on his way to the Western Front in France.

A particularly memorable moment for me was one afternoon in a souk (market) in Cairo when it went from



rowdy and chaotic to still and absolutely silent in an instant. I was expecting something nasty like a bomb was coming but it turned out to be President Anwar Sadat announcing on all the little black and white TVs in the souk that he had just come back from a secret visit to Israel and a peace agreement had been signed. A two year long process had begun to withdraw all Israeli forces from the Sinai and hand it all back to Egypt. That would make UNEF II redundant in 1979.

In 2010, I took my wife, Carol, to see where I had been while she was left home with two little kids for six months (in the tougher days before emails and Face-time made instant contact possible). Our accommodation in 1977, the Sinai Palace Hotel, which was very run down then (I had green stalactites of slime in my "ensuite") looked even more dilapidated and was boarded up. We couldn't get past the formidable sentries guarding the airfield which is now a major Egyptian base. "Georges" restaurant which was about the only civilian place to eat away from our accommodation in 1977 is still there and provided a pretty good meal. The roads along the Red Sea are now fairly good and the oil port of Abu Rudeis, where the Finns had their base and often entertained us overnight, appears to be thriving.



The techos' work space for our 4 UN white Iroquois UH1Hs. The hangar was Canadian controlled and nearby Air Traffic Control was effected by Egyptian military, who managed air defence clearances and airfield control on VHF. The Unit worked with Israeli Army on UHF, UNEF Infantry on VHF FM and UN operations on HF, so the radio work was sometimes a bit frantic. (Martin Holland). ➔

REFLECTIONS OF A FLIGHT FITTER

Bill Huntriss

1. RAAF FAIRBAIRN

In early 1977 I responded to a signal looking for volunteers from the ATC branch to transfer to the RAAF for training and deployment to Ismailia to carry out peace keeping duties in the Sinai. The signal stated an AB or Leading Seaman could apply. After consultation with my family I decided to put my name forward, and as far as I am aware Darryl Nowak was the only other volunteer. He was single and living on board and I was married, so I thought I'd have no chance...a few weeks later I found myself standing in front of my new Engineering Officer, (ENGO), Max Page at 5 Sqdn, based in Fairbairn, Canberra.

His first observation was that somehow either Navy or RAAF had got the dates wrong for my joining 5 Sqdn, as I was six months too early...and what did I want to do? My decision didn't take long, and so began a very satisfying and worthwhile period of my career.

I was indoctrinated into the RADTECH branch and was welcomed into their group. I lived in my own "donga" on base and settled into a life of work in the hangar doing black box changes under supervision. I had to wait for my conversion course to UH1H Iroquois before being let loose on my own. With no duties to keep, life was good. I would commute back to Nowra for the weekends to be with the family.

Once my conversion course was completed I became an integral part of the maintenance crew and took my roster at duty crew, responsible for all the daily pre flights and after flights and it was at this stage that I

was able to get a bit more involved and started to form a rapport with the other trades, mainly framies and engines, (Heavy Trades). Footnote here - RADTECHs fell into the group of "Queer Trades" in the RAAF, although I was keen not to be stuck with this tag. By now I was affectionally known as "Seaweed" by all.

I was soon back in the class room doing a Flight Fitter B course, the course that Queer Traders did to be able to do cross trade work up to C service level on airframes and engines. A Flight Fitter (FF), is also able to do fly-aways without having to clear lower deck of all trades as was the case in the former years with Wessex 31Bs. The RAAF system of certifying aircraft (EE500), was so much simpler than the Navy's TA100s.

I was in seventh heaven and had found my niche. I was able to work alongside the "Heavy Trades" and was soon accepted into their social group spending more time with them than the RADTECHs. With my new qualification of FF, it wasn't long before I was doing flyaways and overnights. On these sorties I would cruise up in the rear compartment with the crewie with not too much to do. Once at our destination I would do the refuelling, carry out before flight inspections for all trades, including oil levels and security of main and tail rotors and any other queer trade checks, and then sign everything off ready for flight. Once flying was completed I would carry out After Flight Inspections, tie down the main rotor, refuel etc., and once again sign off on all tasks. All flyaways

were a great escape from the day to day work in the hangar, and the social life was always enjoyable.

Life continued on with working at the RAAF base and commuting. One day the Base Guard Commander approached me noting that I hadn't done any base duties apart from Squadron duty crew. He informed me that I would have to do a duty on the main gate the following Monday. Having done QM duties before I thought this would be a breeze. Anyway, I returned from my weekend with my 1s and fronted up to the gate at 7am and was given my instructions by the person I was relieving... stand by the gate and salute officers as they enter! Obviously pre 9/11 routine!

My QM instincts tuned in and I took things a step further, and as each car approached the gate I made them stop and produce their ID cards! I finished my shift, went to my donga, put my overalls on and headed down to the hangar. No sooner had I stepped over the threshold and the ADMINO was on the blower... "SeaWeed to ADMIN Office". I was duly informed that my security checks were not appreciated, and that from now on I would not be required to do base duties, or attend parades!

2. ISMAILIA, EGYPT.

Finally in July 1978 it was time to embark on a RAAF Hercules transport aircraft and depart for Egypt. It was a comforting thought as the local Canberra temperature was -5°C.

The Fairbairn loadmasters had the Iroquois tucked up in the cargo deck, rotor blade boxes stowed underneath the Iroquois fuselage with the transmission box under the tail boom. The next most important cargo was the slabs of Tooheys stacked all the way aft, leaving just enough room for us passengers on troop seating in the remaining space between the ten-high stack of beer and the outside aircraft frame... not too comfortable I can inform you, especially with a four day flight ahead of us. This event happened every 6 weeks as the UH1H had to be rotated back to Fairbairn for a major D service.

Overnight stopovers were at Darwin, Butterworth and Bahrain and there was nothing for us to do except enjoy ourselves. We all got passmarks for that!

On arrival at Ismailia, local temp 47°C, all hands were on deck to unload the beer and helicopter. The pressure was on to assemble the "new" aircraft, instal the main rotor transmission and rotor blades and ground run the aircraft followed by a test flight to ensure everything was in order before the Herc was turned around with one of the four aircraft

based in AUSTAIR, Ismailia to be returned for a D service at Fairbairn.

There were strict security arrangements with the UN and the Egyptian Government in regards to foreign military aircraft flying in their airspace. RAAF Herc pilots had to follow a strict corridor in and out of Ismailia to ensure they didn't have a SAM missile follow them!

Life as a "PINKY" began.

During the week there were daily sorties to various areas of the Sinai, so our work load was much the same as Fairbairn, and of course there was always duty crew to cover the ranging of the aircraft, hanging around waiting for its return and then putting it to bed. Duty Crew had their own Batmobile, a small four wheel drive open jeep which was used to tow the aircraft from the hangar to the flight line and was the sole responsibility of the duty crew. This was made up of a Heavy trader and a Queer trader, so we were responsible for all movements and flight line operations. The hardest thing to get done was to train the Egyptian tanker drivers to arrive at the threshold once they heard the wok wok cross the Suez Canal...impossible! They were always asleep somewhere, but I conned them to get there early by promising them a Playboy magazine as a reward!!

*Below. Billy Huntriss takes formal custody of inflatable mascot WRAN Darling. The ritual, which was handed down from one detachment to another, was carried out in the bar area of Lackanooky Lodge under the watchful eye of the current Senior Naval Officer in Charge of Arabia, (SNOCA). Other keepers of the doll included **Les Bould** and **Greg Morris**. As the photo shows it was an official ceremony requiring full parade rig...which for the navy personnel was drabs, blue hat and desert boots. Alas WRAN Darling was eventually relegated to the waste bin when the band aids necessary to keep her inflated reached critical mass. (Bill Huntriss).*



Worked a treat. The quicker we wrapped things up on the flight line and locked the Placky Hut (Admin Office) and the hangar, the quicker we got to the Lackanooky Lodge for a cold Tooheys or three.

Wednesdays were always busy in the hangar as this was 'C' service day, where all trades got stuck into the servicing, crawling over the aircraft ensuring everything was in shipshape condition. The bonus for the Queer Traders was that they got to do the overnighter to the Finnish Battalion based in Southern Sinai. The Finns were tasked with patrolling the mountain ranges in their all terrain vehicles, and as a Pinky (non tanned arrival), I was given a taste of the terrain they drive over and around. Spectacular doesn't give it the justice it deserves, and a very scary ride.

On the maintenance side, the procedure was still the same, but the UH1H had long range fuel bladders fitted in the quarter compartments and the FF had to stay awake long enough to hear the call for "transfer fuel" from the pilot. This meant I had to reach into the quarter compartment and physically open a valve to gravity feed the fuel from the bladder to the main fuel tank, and THEN go to sleep!

Once the sortie was complete I would carry out all inspections and secure the aircraft for the night on a cold desert sand while the crew retired to the Finnish hospitality, which was always top rate. The speciality was to have a sauna with a Finnish sausage warming on the sauna coals and copious amounts of beer to wash it down...strictly observing 8 hours between bottle and throttle, of course!!

The serviceability rates of the four aircraft were very high and there weren't too many serious problems encountered. However, there was one occasion when an aircraft had to make a rapid decent after an engine failure, but with restricted resources and ingenuity a change was effected in the desert and the aircraft flown back to the airfield.

A lot of the flying throughout the desert was at low level so it was nice to sit in the back and watch the undulating dunes pass by. A funny thing happened on one of these sorties. We were passing through an area where ground patrols were being conducted and as we came across the top of a dune we noticed a jeep with it radio whip antenna pass by underneath. A few days later a pot of white paint turned up in the hangar with a note attached, "please find attached one can of white paint to paint your aircraft, and could you please return 30cm of our radio antenna"!

Max Page arrived as the ENGO on the next Herc (I was no longer a Pinky), so it was just like being back

Right: *The United Nations Emergency Forces' (II) Medal, awarded to personnel who served in that theatre. ➔*

at Fairbairn. He was a very good boss - he had to be to put up with me! Max got heavily involved with the Israeli engineers who also had UH1H Iroquois and I remember him going to a lot of meetings in Tel Aviv for on-going discussions about the abrasion rates on the engine turbine blades caused by the desert sand.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I hope these articles give a snapshot into our role supporting the UNEF II campaign in the Middle East. I couldn't get to all the participants, but I feel we've given a good overview of what the boys thought of their time with the RAAF. I believe the Fleet Air Arm element in each deployment brought with it a different military aviation experience, and enormous enthusiasm. Each FAA member contributed with dedication and to a very high level of professionalism, and I know our Air Force colleagues appreciated this.

Our role with UNEF II on behalf of the Australian Government had a significant part to play in bringing Israel and Egypt to the table to discuss, and finally ratify, a long-term peace deal in the Middle East. That is testament today with those once warring nations solid allies in the midst of a very unstable region.

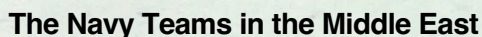
Australia is a founding member of the United Nations and has consistently supported the UN's role in world affairs since this time. Australia was an active participant at the 1945 San Francisco Conference, during which the UN Charter was negotiated.

Australia has provided defence and security personnel to 62 United Nations and other multilateral peace and security operations since 1947. Our small Austair contingent was proud to be one of the more successful operations.

Only recently in Canberra on Anzac Parade at the Australian Peacekeeper Memorial, a commemorative service was held to recognise the participation of thousands of Australian defence and security personnel who served with the UN over the years. The service also paid tribute to those who were killed whilst serving the UN.

It was a great honour and privilege to represent the Fleet Air Arm and serve our country with the United Nations. ➔





The Navy Teams in the Middle East

The following FAA members served in UNEF II and were awarded the Australian Service Medal (1975) with clasp 'Middle East':

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------|
| POA Ron Macklin | - | June – Dec 1977 |
| ABATW (E) Greg Morris | - | June – Dec 1977 |
| LCDR (P) Geoff Vidal | - | June – Dec 1977 |
| ABATA Bernie Gelston | - | Oct 77 – April 1978 |
| LEUT (P) Ron Lawrence | - | Dec 77 – June 1978 |
| ABATA Wally Vink | - | March – Sep 1978 |
| LSATA Les Bould | - | April 78 – Jan 1979 |
| POA Joe Pollard | - | May 78 – Jan 1979 |
| LEUT (P) Geoff Ledger | - | June – Dec 1978 |
| LSATC Bill Huntriss | - | June – Jan 1979 |
| LEUT (P) John Edwards | - | Nov 78 – April 1979 |
| LSATA Rick Serafin | - | Dec 78 – June 1979 |
| LSATW (E) Stephen Tester | - | Dec 78 – June 1979 |
| LCDR (P) John Brown | - | March – Sep 1979 |
| POA Terry Crawley | - | April – Oct 1979 |
| LSATA Glenn Taylor | - | July – Oct 1979 |



Bedouin shelters (Martin Holland)

With thanks to the following sources and contributors:

Geoff Ledger
Geoff Vidal
Greg Edwards
Bill Huntriss
Martin Holland
Les Bould
Sea Power Centre, Australia
Wikipedia
The Australian War Memorial

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