

British Forces Abroad

# Our Man in Cyprus

by David Johnson (*Cyprus reports up to and including 23rd May*)

## Political Situation

Two events transformed the political climate in Cyprus. Firstly, a referendum to decide the re-unification of the island resulted in an overwhelming rejection of the UN sponsored Annan plan by the Greek Cypriot electorate whilst the TRNC (The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus), supported and solely recognised by Turkey, voted for it. Miffed at the decision of the Greek Cypriots, the EU and USA are considering ways of 'rewarding' the TRNC with aid and quasi recognition. A remarkable volte face as the north was invaded and occupied by Turkey in 1974, with over 35,000 Turkish Troops still in situ.

From a military perspective the US has important strategic interests and assets at stake in Turkey which might help suggest why the US did not particularly like the outcome of referendum.

Secondly, the Cyprus Government joined the EU on the 1st May. This coincided with the surprise referendum result on reunification. Not surprisingly the EU does not particularly welcome the idea of only half of Cyprus joining the EU. They had expected all of it.

## Dhekelia – Queens Lancashire Regiment Probe

The Resident Infantry Battalion in the Eastern Sovereign Base Area is the Queen's Lancashire Regiment (QLR). Allegations of prisoner abuse in Iraq against QLR have resulted in an MOD imposed news blackout with soldiers restricted to the garrison environs. Fleet Street hacks have descended in force to Cyprus but little information is available pending the outcome of the MOD inquiry.



The RHF in Iraq

CO Lt Colonel Jorge Mendonca briefed the Battalion not to talk about the accusations and not to feel downhearted. There is a genuine sense of bewilderment that the battalion could have been the victim of what are clearly fake photographs. It is hoped the SIB report quickly and clearly clarifies on this issue.

Separately, WO2 Darren Leigh, QLR, was awarded the Military Cross for courage under fire whilst wounded

in Basra. Leading Burma Company on August 9th last year as CSM with 30 soldiers confronting a serious civil order riot involving 300 people, WO2 Leigh led the subsequent baton charge forcing the crowd to disperse. The CO described the award, the first since 1967, as a piece of regimental history. Married with a young daughter, WO2 Leigh tragically collapsed and died in Cyprus on the morning of the official announcement.



The P2000 patrol vessels off Cyprus

### The Royal Navy

From the 1st April, the Royal Navy became a permanent feature of the BFC landscape with two P2000 patrol vessels deployed at Akrotiri's Mole harbour providing force protection for the maritime flank, in addition to Police and Customs support and S&R duties. The Senior Naval Officer, Lt Commander 'Nobby' Hall explained a procurement request had been made to the MOD to consider replacing the P2000's with larger craft to provide extra speed and a wider firing arc.

### Episkopi

#### 1st Battalion Royal Highland Fusiliers – special report from Iraq

The 1st Battalion the Royal Highland Fusiliers (1 RHF), deployed to Iraq on 1st April replacing 2 Para for 3 months.

The main body arrived by Hercules after an 18-hour marathon journey taking in the sights of Qatar and Basra airports. Home is the Shaibah Logistics Base, the dusty, sprawling, ex-RAF station which can only be described as in the middle of nowhere some 45 minutes southwest of Basra.

A COY provides escorts for supplies.

B COY is providing border sentries to Kuwait as well as escort duties and camp guard whilst C COY flew from Shaibah to Al

Amarah on 3rd April for five weeks. Elements keen to destabilise the region have used high profile demonstrations as cover for small arms and rocket propelled grenade attacks on coalition forces.

#### Reporting from Baghdad, Capt Stu Allen 1 RHF sends a further update:

Several members of C COY 1 RHF are deployed to Baghdad undertaking high profile tasks in the Iraqi capital for the last five weeks. The Green Zone is the home of the military command and Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). The home of the British Support Unit (BSU) overlooks the Tigris. The BSU supports the senior military officer in Iraq, Lt. Gen J C McColl CBE DSO and his staff at BSU."

1 RHF soldiers have a variety of responsibilities. A small group are based at Camp Victory to the West of the city and are tasked with protecting VIP's.

A crucial role for the Fusiliers is protecting the high profile Mande House from attack by dissidents loyal to the old regime.

#### Salt Lake Site

The giant 'Pluto' Antennae systems are both operating simultaneously to the continuing chagrin of local politician Marios Matsakis, veteran anti-bases Cypriot and MEP candidate. Matsakis's contention that the antenna poses an environmental

health hazard is scientifically unfounded and emission monitoring equipment was installed in May to further allay local fears.

Below: Monitoring equipment being installed at the Salt Lake Site > The Salt Lake Site

