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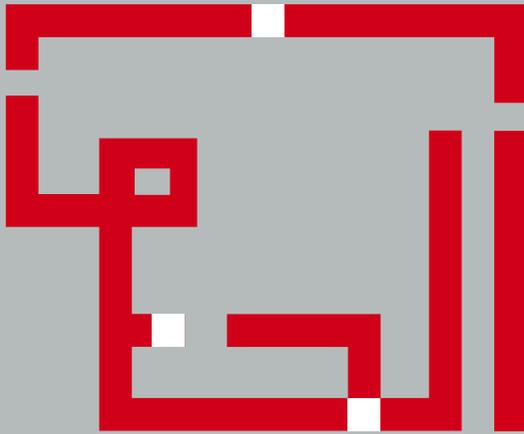
- As Safir -



UNIFIL peacekeepers hoist the UN flag in Naqoura. 15 June 1978



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There is virtue in endurance

Although peacekeeping operations are designed to be short-lived, often their duration is dictated by extraneous factors and unforeseen adversities. UNIFIL, the “interim” force that stayed for 30 years, and counting, is an example.



Mr. Guehenno studies a map of UNIFIL's area of operations during a flight from Beirut to Naqoura 29 August 2006

Following the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon in early 1978, the UN Security Council overcame Cold War antagonisms prevalent at the time and established UNIFIL in an attempt to ‘hold the fort’ on this vital front. But, the intended rampart of international peace and security, surrounded as it was by bastions of defiant armed groups bearing no allegiance to the peacekeeping mandate if not openly hostile to it, was hard to build, let alone hold.

Strong international support in terms of human and material resources for UNIFIL in March 1978 was a testament to the international community's quest for peace. However, UNIFIL was beset by limitations in fully carrying out its mandated tasks. For most of its existence, UNIFIL has been up against a situation where there was no real peace to keep. Early on, the main partner in the peacekeeping endeavour, the Government of Lebanon -constrained by the raging civil war, successive internal political crises and complex regional dynamics- was in no position to exert its effective authority in southern Lebanon, the restoration of which was central to resolution 425 (1978) and the success of UNIFIL.

In the turbulent decades that followed, the multitude of armed groups in the area, coupled with Israeli control -directly or by proxy- over large parts of southern Lebanon prevented the deployment of UNIFIL across the whole of its designated area of responsibility. While Israel withdrew its forces in 2000, political and diplomatic efforts were unable to resolve the outstanding issues that could bring sustainable peace on the ground.

In that context, the proven impartiality of UN peacekeepers was an important counterpoint to the cross-cutting cleavages and divisions in Lebanon during those trying times. The resilience of peacekeepers complemented that of the local population as they found common cause in survival against heavy odds. The resolve of the peacekeepers to act firmly and fairly in unfavourable conditions and their good relations with local communities ensured grassroots support for UNIFIL's mission and helped impart a degree of normality to civilian life. And so this Force, with ‘interim’ in its name, stayed; and alongside it stayed the people of

southern Lebanon in symbiotic co-existence. Notwithstanding the elusive peace, UNIFIL, through its mere presence on the ground, coupled with its humanitarian services, helped alleviate the security concerns of the communities and contribute to more conducive living conditions for the people of southern Lebanon. Moreover, UNIFIL remained as the only credible and impartial witness to events in southern Lebanon, observing and reporting objectively on the developments and thus serving as a deterrent to potential spoilers. In this course, UNIFIL earned the respect of the parties on both sides of the divide.

Over the years, UNIFIL has held its ground, refusing to give way to intimidation and even direct attacks. To date, there have been more than 280 UN peacekeeping fatalities in Lebanon. It has been a heavy price to pay in casualties but in the process, thousands of civilian lives have been saved. There is virtue in resilience against violence; there is credit in perseverance in pursuit of the common good.

UNIFIL's dogged endurance represents the strong commitment of the United Nations to Lebanon and the Lebanese people. UNIFIL's action during the 2006 conflict serves as a case in point. During the conflict, UNIFIL continued to occupy all of its positions and played an active and constructive role under its mandate, at great risk and despite being severely impeded by ongoing hostilities. The UN Secretary-General repeatedly called for the immediate cessation of hostilities and urgent action by the Security Council, highlighting the grave humanitarian consequences of delay in stopping the hostilities. Throughout the conflict, he maintained regular contact with the Prime Ministers of Lebanon and of Israel, as well as other relevant actors and concerned parties, and dispatched a number of high-level missions to the region.

Following the cessation of hostilities and the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), the Secretary-General continued his intensive diplomatic engagement. His efforts contributed to securing the commitments of a number of troop-contributing countries to help stabilize the situation as part of UNIFIL, and to lifting the full aerial and sea blockade Israel had imposed on Lebanon.

In addition, the United Nations assisted

Lebanon's Government with needs assessments and other urgent tasks, particularly in the humanitarian response, ranging from early recovery efforts to providing assistance to the estimated one million Lebanese who were displaced by the conflict.

Under resolution 1701 (2006), UNIFIL deployed its largest force. All parties committed to the cessation of hostilities and to UNIFIL's role and deployment in southern Lebanon. The international commitment to UNIFIL was manifested in UNIFIL's much enhanced strength and equipment, and its robust rules of engagement. Moreover, the decision by all Lebanese parties to deploy the Lebanese Armed Forces to the Blue Line served to further the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory. Thus, the physical presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces on the ground in southern Lebanon, alongside UNIFIL, greatly contributed to establishing a new strategic military and security environment in UNIFIL's area of operations.

In cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces, UNIFIL has succeeded in stabilising the situation and ensuring respect for the cessation of hostilities. As a result of this strong peacekeeping partnership, the past two years have been the calmest period in southern Lebanon since the inception of UNIFIL. The commitment of UNIFIL to support the Lebanese Armed Forces and the people of southern Lebanon remains steadfast.

However, resolution 1701 (2006) entails more than the deployment of UNIFIL. Most notably, it is about achieving a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution to the conflict. Such issues are part of a political process and, as such, are beyond the remit of UNIFIL. That being said, the success of UNIFIL is ultimately dependent on the political context. A peacekeeping operation is to support diplomatic efforts to reach a political solution; it cannot be the substitute for a political solution.

For a sustainable long-term solution in Lebanon, the underlying causes of the many conflicts in the region must be addressed. Until we achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, any one of these conflicts has the potential to erupt and engulf the entire region.

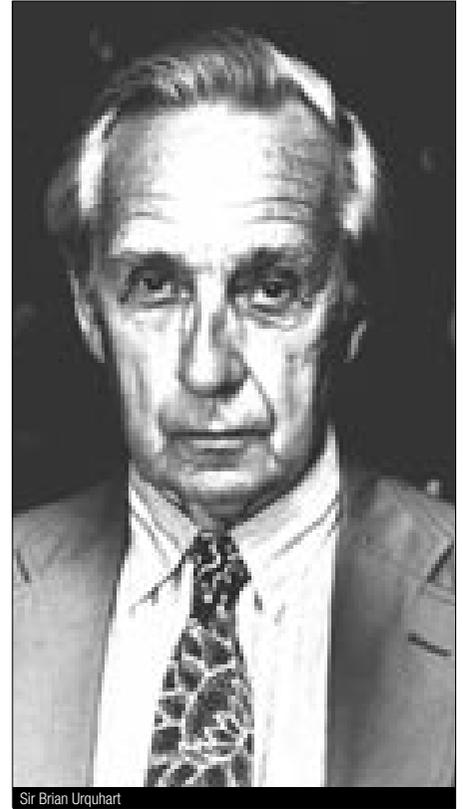
UNIFIL creates an opportunity for peace, but that opportunity has to be seized.

Jean-Marie Guéhenno

Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations

The Origins of UNIFIL

In the early 1970's, after the Black September showdown with the Jordanian army, Fatah, the mainstream element of the PLO, moved into Lebanon. The situation in Lebanon South of the Litani River steadily deteriorated into a guerilla war between factions and villages, the Christian militia under Major Saad Haddad and supported by Israel on the one side, and the PLO and various Muslim factions on the other. The evident intention of the PLO to use southern Lebanon as a base for hit-and-run attacks on Israel evoked Israeli air reprisals. In an effort to monitor this explosive situation and any violations of the Armistice Demarcation Line that was the de facto Israel/Lebanon border, the United Nations, in 1972, set up UN Observer posts along the border.



Sir Brian Urquhart

Israel regarded this situation as unacceptable, and there could be little doubt that it would retaliate strongly on the ground if a proportionate pretext occurred. Such an incident happened on March 11, 1978, when a PLO raiding party landed north of Tel Aviv and commandeered an Israeli bus on the main North-South highway. In the subsequent shoot-out with Israeli forces, thirty-seven Israeli passengers died. On the night of 14/15 March Israeli forces crossed the border and occupied Lebanon south of the Litani, except for the Tyre pocket where PLO resistance was strong.

On March 17 Lebanon brought the Israeli invasion to the Security Council, where wider considerations began to shape the Council's reaction. The Camp David negotiations, which the United States was sponsoring between Egypt and Israel, had reached a critical stage. If the Council took no action on Lebanon, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt could not be expected to continue negotiations with Israel when Israel had just invaded yet another Arab country. The United States was therefore pressing hard for urgent action in the Security Council, and specifically for a UN peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon.

In the Secretariat in New York - I was then Under Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs, in charge of, among other things,



- UN Photo -

The beginning: An aerial view of UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura, 1978



Security Council meets on 3 May 1978 to adopt resolution 427 authorizing increase in the strength of UNIFIL from 4000 to 6000.
Council President Ruben Carpio-Castillo from Venezuela (centre) addressing the meeting. At left is Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim and behind him (2nd row) is USG Brian Urquhart.

peacekeeping- we had been studying the situation in Southern Lebanon for some time. It appeared to be singularly unsuitable for a peacekeeping force. A mixed guerilla conflict was raging there in terrain particularly favorable to irregular forces and hostile to conventional ones. In southern Lebanon there was no civil government or police, let alone elements of the Lebanese army, representing the sovereign authority of the government in Beirut. The existence of legitimate national authority, however weak, is extremely important to the proper functioning of a peacekeeping force.

Of the two strongest groups in the South, the PLO was under no formal authority and restraint, and Major Haddad's Israeli-supported militia had been declared illegal by the Lebanese government. The Security Council was very unlikely to agree on a large enough force with a strong enough mandate to deal effectively with such a situation. Moreover the Israelis would certainly demand some stability in the area before they would agree to withdraw. Overall, in March 1978, southern Lebanon constituted what might well become a UN peacekeeper's nightmare.

Such precautionary views were unwelcome to the influential members of the Security Council who were demanding immediate action. (It was only 28 years later, in 2006, that UNIFIL acquired at least some of the

essential features that were lacking in its original set-up.) The Security Council went ahead and, in Resolution 425, established the new force with a mandate to confirm Israeli withdrawal; to restore international peace and security; and to assist the Lebanese Government to restore its effective authority in southern Lebanon. All efforts to include in the mandate the means to deal strongly with illegitimate military incursions or activities in the UNIFIL area were rejected in the interests of speedy action as being too controversial. The generalities of UNIFIL's original mandate papered over very real disagreements among the members of the Security Council. They had little relation to the real and rugged problems that would face the peacekeepers.

Let me end by saying that with the willingness and courage of the original contingents - from France, Nepal, Norway, Iran, Sweden, Canada, Senegal and Nigeria, not forgetting Italy's essential helicopters - UNIFIL, under the command of General Alex Erskine of Ghana, established itself swiftly in southern Lebanon - within less than three weeks of the adoption of Resolution 425. With its inadequate strength and mandate, it did infinitely better than any of us believed possible at the time. In the tumultuous years that followed UNIFIL was an essential

In March 1978, southern Lebanon constituted what might well become a UN peacekeeper's nightmare... The generalities of UNIFIL's original mandate papered over very real disagreements among the members of the Security Council. They had little relation to the real and rugged problems that would face the peacekeepers.

element of stability and assistance in a particularly troubled region of the world. To this day, in its newest form, it remains so.

Sir Brian Urquhart

Sir Brian Urquhart was Under Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs responsible for peacekeeping operations in the United Nations Headquarters in New York during the establishment of UNIFIL in 1978.



From left to right: Secretary-General D. Kurt Waldheim with Ambassadors Mac Henry, USA, Ghassan Tuéni, Lebanon, Abdel-Maguid, Egypt, Beshara, Kuwait, and Andrew Young, USA (back to camera)

My greatest achievement was resolution 425

Ghassan Tuéni, a leading figure in Lebanese journalism and politics, currently Member of Parliament and publisher of the daily *'An-Nahar'*, was Lebanon's Permanent Representative to the United Nations during the establishment of UNIFIL in 1978. *Al Janoub team* visited him in his Beirut office to find out how he negotiated the corridors of diplomacy in New York. **Excerpts:**

AL JANOUB: During the establishment of UNIFIL in 1978, you were closely involved in the negotiations in the Security Council. How do you recall the experience?

TUÉNI: We had to make a choice between two options - establishment of UNIFIL or condemnation of Israel [for its invasion of South Lebanon]. We could not achieve both in the Security Council. We chose UNIFIL. This was not without apprehensions among Lebanese political leaders that bringing UN troops to Lebanon will not be very popular here. My contention was that with UNIFIL, we are not bringing colonial occupation to Lebanon, but peacekeepers and an international guarantee of Lebanon's "territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence".

The Security Council vote on the resolution took place at midnight. I urged quick action. "People were dying in Lebanon every minute of every hour," I told the Council, "as the Israelis were still advancing." We managed to convince the President of the Council to call for a

vote immediately without the customary debate on the subject. The members agreed to relinquish their right to speak until after the vote. Interestingly, the Russians and Chinese went along -the Russians abstained and agreed not to use their veto-power, but the Chinese ambassador actually raised his hand in favour of the resolution. We hadn't even canvassed him to vote. It was an unbelievable sign of universal support.

As a result, the peacekeeping forces came down to the south instantly and the Israelis stopped on their tracks.

Did it happen as smoothly as that? Actually no. The wording of the resolution [425] was unprecedented in that it called on Israel to "withdraw forthwith" its forces from all Lebanese territories. Ultimately, Israel gave a schedule for their withdrawal from Lebanon. All went well, or almost, until the last phase of withdrawal on the 13th of June.

We expected the Israelis to hand over

to UNIFIL. But as I watched on TV, to my surprise I saw the Lebanese flag, not the UN flag, go up in Marjayoun on the main barracks of the Lebanese Army that had been occupied by the Israeli Army. I knew there was something fishy going on. Indeed, the Israelis did physically withdraw, but they turned over their positions in the vicinity of the border not to UNIFIL but to the South Lebanon Army (SLA).

So then did you think resolution 425 was worth your efforts?

Yes, my greatest achievement was resolution 425, particularly the paragraph that restored the sovereignty of Lebanon. But it did not mention Sheba'a, since Israel and the US argued that we were only discussing territories occupied by the March 1978 invasion.

There were several draft resolutions that we worked on. But it was difficult to attribute with any precision, prerogatives to UNIFIL enabling it to "use force in self-defence, including resistance to



Ambassador Tueni with Lebanese Army Commander Gen. Khoury (left) and UNIFIL Force Commander Gen. Erskine (centre)

The wording of the resolution [425] was unprecedented in that it called on Israel to “withdraw forthwith” its forces from all Lebanese territories... my greatest achievement was resolution 425, particularly the paragraph that restored the sovereignty of Lebanon.

attempts by forceful means to prevent it from discharging its duties.” I had endeavoured to include in the various resolutions extending the mandate of UNIFIL, clauses allowing prerogatives and the capability to use force officially without moving from the “defensive” character of “peace-keeping”, as stated in Chapter VI [of the UN Charter], to the “offensive” character of “peace-enforcing” as authorized by Chapter VII. This whole phenomenon was described as Chapter ‘six-and-a-half’.

We finally “formed” the proper wording that described the right of self-defence “with muscles and teeth” in resolution 501 (February 1982). But it all stopped there, until this same debate came up most recently while resolution 1701 was being negotiated.

How do you recall your negotiations around these developments with your interlocutors in the UN?

In fact the most difficult Ambassador was not the Palestinian as one would expect, but the Syrian. Once, as we were getting Israeli rockets on Lebanese villages in retaliation of Palestinian fire from an area called the ‘Pan Handle’ -a strip of land adjacent to UNIFIL’s area of operations- I proposed that we deploy the UN in that “no man’s land”. The US, UK, France and even China, I believed, agreed. But the Soviet Ambassador told me to go talk to the Syrian Ambassador first: “If he is convinced by the plea, I’ll go for it,” he said. The US delegation as a whole was very supportive in the UN at the time. They went as far as offering to sponsor resolution 425 and actively persuaded members of the Security Council to vote for it. This shows that if you talk to the US

delegation rationally, not merely seeking condemnation at every moment, you can expect a better response from them. But then I was taken by surprise when, without my knowledge, Washington negotiated an agreement with the Lebanese Government to deploy a Multi-National Force (MNF) later in 1982. I could not understand what would be the relationship between the MNF and UNIFIL: why we were not developing the role of UNIFIL, instead of creating a new international force outside the UN framework, with similar terms of reference, but totally independent from the original force which we had had no reason to thus condemn.

The first Israeli Ambassador I had to deal with -but never talking to each other except across the Council table- went on to become President of Israel. In the first debate in the Security Council, he claimed that the Lebanese Ambassador was not speaking for the Lebanese but for the Palestinians. To support his argument, he showed a number of cables allegedly received from residents of Marjayoun stating that they did not agree with me. I brandished a photograph printed in the morning’s New York Times that showed young men from Marjayoun thrown around a tree, blindfolded and hands tied behind their backs, while Israeli soldiers stood around them playing violin. I asked him whether these were the same people who signed the cables. His only reply was that “he had not seen that photograph”.

Is there a recipe for a successful Security Council resolution?

You see, the UN is a very useful and effective instrument. If you want to be able to use it you have to work constantly in a spirit of conciliation, and never seek an

absolute “victory”. Sometimes it is better not to get bogged down by too much detail, nor reject harmless concessions, to salvage the essence of your case.

For example in August 1982 when there were intensified clashes between Israel and different armed groups in Lebanon, the Security Council adopted a resolution [516] demanding immediate ceasefire in Lebanon and across the Lebanese-Israeli border. This was one of the shortest resolutions in UN history. The British Ambassador, who drafted it, said: “If you are asking for a resolution that would settle all that is at stake between this and that party, it simply won’t work. What you need is just a ceasefire. We will address the other issues later, hopefully with a functioning ceasefire on the ground.”

On the other hand, I remember the difficulties of negotiating with the Soviet delegation. They had a specialist who would run around carrying a bag full of documents. “I have here not only every resolution, but every line we have ever approved,” he said, “We will not agree to any new document that so much as adds a comma to any past resolution that we have accepted. If you insert any innovation, it shall have to go to Moscow for approval. (ad referendum). Even if we approve it here”

So you have to work through complex dynamics: For instance, whereas the Arab ambassadors were intent on inserting a phrase condemning Israel, for the US anything that read like a clear condemnation of Israel was taboo.

Such were, and probably still are, the complexities of UN daily life.



Reflections by UNIFIL's 1st Force Commander

UNIFIL Force Commander Major-General Emmanuel Erskine inspects Dutch peacekeepers at their Battalion Headquarters, Haris May 1980

As required by Security Council Resolution 425, UNIFIL's area of operations had to be defined through negotiations with the parties. The political shuttles to achieve this objective commenced immediately. Lt-Gen Ensio Siilasvuo, the Chief Coordinator, and I held meetings on 20 March 1978 with Israeli Minister of Defence Ezer Weizman and IDF Chief of Staff Lt Gen Gur. The following day, we flew to Beirut for meetings with Prime Minister Selim el Hoss, Foreign Minister Fouad Butros and General Victor Khoury, the Army Commander. On 28 March, Dr James Jonah from the Office of the Under Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs joined me to meet the PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat.

The presence of UNTSO Observers, in particular the Israel-Lebanon Mixed Armistice Commission (ILMAC), in South Lebanon since 1972 was immensely beneficial to the establishment and initial peacekeeping operations of UNIFIL. In practical terms, Military Observers of ILMAC, which was later split into Observer Group Beirut (OGB) and Observer Group Lebanon (OGL), served as the advance party of UNIFIL, doing a lot of organizational work for the in-coming contingents.

Contributions by member states was commendable. On 23 March, only four days after the resolution, I received the French Contingent at the Beirut International Airport; two days later, the Norwegian Contingent flew into Tel Aviv. The last contingent to arrive was the Iranian, on 9 June.

The French constituted the largest contingent - an Infantry Battalion, with its HQ in Tyre, as well as Engineering, Logistical and Transportation services; Norway provided an Infantry Battalion, with its HQ in Ebel es Saqi, a repair and Maintenance Company and a Field Hospital at Naqoura; Canada sent a Signals Company; Irish Battalion provided a detachment for the security of UNIFIL HQ

in Naqoura; Italy provided the air capability; Ghana later joined with a battalion and additional Engineering Services and Sweden came in to replace the Norwegian Medical Company. In 1979, France withdrew its combat unit and was replaced by the Dutch. Senegal, Fiji, Nepal and Nigeria also provided troops. On 22 March, two reinforced Infantry Companies (Iranian from UNDOF and Swedish from UNEF) moved to South Lebanon to strengthen the operations of UNTSO Observers.

The strength of UNIFIL was increased from 4000 to 6000 as a result of our discussion with the Secretary-General, Dr Kurt Waldheim, during his maiden visit to us in April 1978. Force Standing Operating Procedures (SOP), developed earlier by ILMAC Military Observers, facilitated deployment and military operations of the in-coming contingents.

Force SOPs from which Battalions developed their Unit SOPs emphasized the imperativeness to stop all incursions by IDF/DFF ("De Facto Forces", the Israeli surrogate Christian militia under Major Haddad, a defector from the Lebanese Army), and infiltrations by Armed Elements, i.e. PLO and other armed Lebanese fighters, into UNIFIL's Area of Operations.

Our mini-war in At Tiri, which cost us a few men, demonstrated the vital principle of firmness by a peacekeeping mission.



Irish peacekeepers on look-out duty at Hill 88 overlooking At Tiri May 1980

Consequently, Check Points were well fortified to provide maximum protection for the troops, mobile and foot patrols were conducted day and night and movements of people were observed from well fortified Observation Posts. These activities constituted the principal duties of UNIFIL troops and in view of the hazards associated with them, in particular the checkpoint duties, UNIFIL suffered some casualties from time to time. Nevertheless, in the formative years of the mission, they had to be vigorously pursued.

UNIFIL demonstrated the professionalism of an effective and efficient Peacekeeping Mission when it came to the use of force in defence of its mandate. When in April 1980 the DFF attempted to take the village of At Tiri by force, UNIFIL mobilized its Force Mobile Reserve, including the Dutch TOW anti-tank missile, into action. Our mini-war in At Tiri, which cost us a few men, demonstrated the vital principle of firmness by a peacekeeping mission. It succeeded because of the professionalism of the troops, the unswerving support of the Secretary-General and the contributing governments and the effectiveness of unified command.

UNIFIL has had its fair share of political, operational and administrative difficulties in the Lebanese crisis. The failure of the IDF to hand over to UNIFIL the stretch along their border inhabited predominantly by Christians, giving it instead to the DFF during their final withdrawal on 13 June, represented the principal political obstacle to UNIFIL fully implementing its mandate.

We suffered our first casualty when Master Warrant Officer Karl Oskar Johansson of Sweden went over a mine in the area of Khardala Bridge during the early deployment period and, on the day following their arrival, three Senegalese soldiers were killed when their jeep went over a mine.

Troops have been murdered, abducted and fired upon; Force HQ in Naqoura had deliberately been shelled and Battalion HQs had come under bombardment from time to time. Firing on UNIFIL was always in retaliation to the mission performing its legitimate duties. Naqoura was heavily shelled on 12 April 1980 because Major Haddad and his DFF had been humiliated at At Tiri. I had been physically assaulted in the course of my negotiation at the meeting with Haddad and his DFF personalities for the release of my three Dutch soldiers who had been abducted and held hostage. As per our SOP, we always fought back.

Movement by UNIFIL personnel using the coastal road to Beirut for the collection of logistical supplies were seriously hampered by the myriads of checkpoints mounted by various armed groups involved in the Lebanese quagmire. This was our principal administrative difficulty.

One of the most important but difficult assignments we had to undertake was to bring Lebanese Army troops from Beirut to our area of operations. Their presence was seen as a challenge to the image and authority of Major Haddad and his militia. Violent opposition to the Lebanese Army deployment was demonstrated in the shelling of Norwegian HQ in Ebel Es Saqi,

the Nepalese HQ in Blat and the Lebanese troops in Kaukaba. In spite of these difficulties, UNIFIL, with the support of OGL on 1 August 1978, succeeded in bringing the Lebanese Army troops down to operate side by side with UNIFIL contingents.

Humanitarian services were not envisaged by the architects of our mission, but we realized that we could not accomplish our mission without helping the poor Shiites to return to normal life. During the Secretary-General's visit to Damascus in mid-July 1978, I raised the issue with him and he readily agreed. Consequently, humanitarian services became a major function of UNIFIL operations. Medical facilities were made available to the people. We provided them with water. The engineers assisted with the restoration of electricity and helped in demining farms to facilitate the return of the farmers to their main source of livelihood. It was heart-warming to see the displaced people returning to their homes and the children going back to school.

UNIFIL's presence has been absolutely necessary not only to stabilize South Lebanon, but also to provide a peaceful environment conducive to the peacemaking process. It is my hope that UNIFIL will continue to make an impact on the peacemaking process in search for lasting peace. I seize this historic opportunity to pay my highest tribute to all servicemen, women and civilian staff, both international and local, who have served, and continue to serve the cause of peace through UNIFIL.

Lieutenant General
Emmanuel A. Erskine



UNIFIL's newly arrived French contingent on way to Tyre in south Lebanon shortly after their arrival at Beirut airport 24 March 1978



The Commander: General Khoury inside a tank

A realist and a strategist

He was at the helm of the Lebanese Armed Forces during the critical years between 1977 and 1982, part of it as the Minister of National Defence during 1979. An unenviable command to hold of a divided Lebanese Army in the midst of an ongoing civil war, PLO armed activities and Israeli occupation. He found solace in the deployment of UNIFIL troops in south Lebanon.

A military strategist who quotes liberally from Clausewitz and Churchill, **General Victor Khoury** talked to *Al Janoub's* **Denise Abou Zeid** at his villa in the picturesque hills of Amchit. Now nearing 80, the stocky General whose passion for horse-riding matches that for his country, reminisced for hours about the historic days when the concept of peacekeeping was instituted in Lebanon. **Some excerpts:**

ABOU ZEID: How did you receive the adoption of UN Security Council resolutions 425 and 426 that established UNIFIL?

KHOURY: It was unbelievable. I remember the very interesting phone call I received from Ghassan Tuani [Lebanon's Permanent Representative to the United Nations]. It was around midnight when he called from New York to say that the Security Council had adopted resolution 425. They were working on resolution 426 and he was urgently trying to contact President Sarkis or [Foreign] Minister Butros, but could not get through to them. Back then

my office had the only telex that worked! I advised him to send me the document by telex and I would convey it to them.

President Sarkis was happy about the resolution. But Minister Boutros had his doubts; he was a person who always saw the glass half empty. I, for my part, could not believe that for the first time we were facing up to Israel and forcing it to withdraw. I welcomed the resolution because in my opinion it gave legitimacy to the government and to the Army. I was excited and ready to deploy the Army because I had served in the South as an

We had excellent coordination with UNIFIL and there were liaison officers appointed from both sides. In fact we worked like one force. In 1979, when the deployment of the Lebanese Army with UNIFIL was initiated, our units were integrated with UNIFIL battalions and were even given UNIFIL identity cards.

officer for 20 years.

As Commander of the Lebanese Army at the time, what were your major concerns? When I took over command of the Lebanese Army in 1977, it was a divided Force - there were as many as nine armies. My first priority as Army Commander was to try and achieve some form of unity in the armed forces. It was particularly important for me to unite Christians and Muslims in the Army because I believed there should be an accord between the citizens, and that anyone who refuses to live with the other is a traitor.



The strategist: General Khoury (right)

After careful consideration, we agreed to send the Lebanese Army south. It was undoubtedly a hard bargain since we had to consult with the different Lebanese parties in the South. In fact at one point we even tried to use the good offices of the Vatican to communicate with the Christians.

How did you reconcile this with the requirement of resolution 425 to deploy the Lebanese Army along with UNIFIL in south Lebanon?

You see, I trained in the best military schools, and I learned to believe in what Clausewitz once said: that if you gather an army around a grand idea, you can bring opposite poles together. That was the principle I followed during my service.

We were indeed very concerned about sending foreign troops and the Lebanese Army into a divided area. The people of the South had been fighting among each other for a long time, so how would they embrace strangers among them?

After careful consideration, we agreed to send the Lebanese Army south. It was undoubtedly a hard bargain since we had to consult with the different Lebanese parties in the South. In fact at one point we even tried to use the good offices of the Vatican to communicate with the Christians.

Lt. Col. Abdid Saad was to command the task force in the south. But despite our best efforts, our detachment came under heavy 155 mm shell fire near Kaukaba. The Israelis wanted that the Lebanese Army deployed in the south should have an equal mix of Christians and Muslims, and that the command should be with Saad Haddad. Later I formed a special detachment of handpicked officers, both Christians and Muslims, for the purpose. I confined them to a camp in Baalbek and forbade external contacts until they were deployed in the south.

And how was your coordination with

UNIFIL?

We had excellent coordination with UNIFIL and there were liaison officers appointed from both sides. In fact we worked like one force. In 1979, when the deployment of the Lebanese Army with UNIFIL was initiated, our units were integrated with UNIFIL battalions and were even given UNIFIL identity cards.

The situation was fluctuating. The army was divided and left on its own. Our relations with UNIFIL were based on information exchange and they handled things for the Army. UNIFIL also helped with soldiers' rotation using their helicopters, because the coastal road was blocked.

But we did not undertake joint operations because the Lebanese Army lacked confidence at the time. The Lebanese Army was not strong and we were under no illusions on what we were up against. The Lebanese soldiers knew that the Israelis would create problems between them and the Lebanese Resistance. Soon enough Israel attacked and they had to withdraw.

When the invasion began, were you afraid that UNIFIL would leave?

Of course I was. UNIFIL protected us and, like I said before, the Lebanese army was not that strong to handle the invasion alone. That was the truth and like Winston Churchill said: In wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies.

But even before, UNIFIL was not able to deploy at the borders, why?

This tells you that Israel did not really want them to be here. Israel had redesigned the

borders after the Sykes-Picot agreement and reviewed the places where there are problems. Israel wanted Shebaa Farms and the water of the Wazzani River, and only through Shebaa could they access their ski resort at Mount Hermon.

At one point they were discussing adding more forces to UNIFIL. My answer was: "Put a Russian on one side of the border and an American on the other, and the Israelis will not dare to hit". What I meant was that if you really want to prevent aggression, you should have either equal or stronger forces.

Between then and now, what do you think about UNIFIL?

Back then the peacekeeping theory was very new to us. We did not understand why a UNIFIL soldier coming from Ghana for example would risk his life in a different country. It was of course for the cause of peace. We also had to understand that these are soldiers who were trained to fight, but serving under UNIFIL, they have to defend themselves and solve any problems through negotiation, that is by talking. This is what peacekeeping is about.

As for UNIFIL today, I think it has gained a wider sense. UNIFIL are helping to bolster the economic situation in the South with their presence and contribution. Through cooperation between them and the Lebanese Army, they are introducing us to more developed strategies and systems. The continuing aspect to that relationship is the social interaction, manifested in social activities and in knowing each other's customs and traditions.

In search of the missing peacekeeper

In the spring of 1981, Private Kevin Joyce of UNIFIL's Irish Battalion was nearing the end of his tour of duty. Come May, he would be flying out to Dublin, on to Galway on the west coast, from where a 90-minute ferry ride would get him to the Aran Islands where his parents lived. Hailing from one of the last remaining Gaelic areas of Ireland, his native name was Caoimhghín Seoighe. As one among five siblings, young Kevin could expect a hero's welcome - a peacekeeper who had done the family proud. But that was not to be, for in the late afternoon of 27 April, 20-year old Kevin was kidnapped while on duty in a remote part of south Lebanon- never to be seen again.

On the fateful day, Private Joyce accompanied the newly arrived Private Hugh Doherty to 6-22D, UNIFIL's esoteric denomination for a daylight observation post off the village of Dayr Ntar, north-west of the Battalion headquarters in Tibnin. Located atop a rocky outcrop, 6-22D provided a vantage point that allowed complete observation across the surrounding wadis.

They had been visited that afternoon by their Battalion Commanders, outgoing and incoming. Some time between then and 6pm, when they failed to show up at the rendezvous point for pick up, the post came under armed attack.

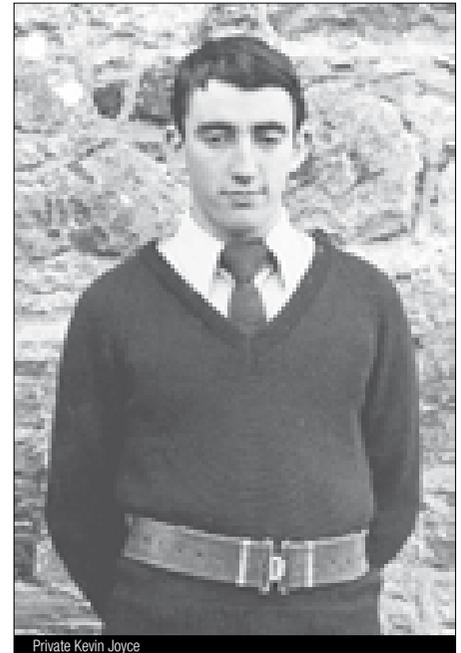
The search party found Private Doherty, shot to death. But there was no trace of Private Joyce, or of any of his equipment. What precisely happened there? No one could tell, for the perpetrators were never identified and the two peacekeepers were not around to tell the story. Efforts to find Private Joyce were manifold, and for many years; every investigative lead was followed, but to no avail.

On the ground, the conditions were then not conducive for an effective search. The surrounding terrain was mountainous with deep ravines. There was widespread conflict in south Lebanon and Dayr Ntar

As years pass by, chances of the missing having survived diminish. But hope lingers, among their loved ones, as they continue to live through the misery of the loss day after day.

was at the edge of an area known as the «Iron Triangle» where Palestinian, Israeli and a number of Lebanese factions were fighting, severely restricting movements.

On the day of the incident, UNIFIL reported intense hostilities across its area of operations: 'Firing in the north-eastern sector was initiated by the de facto forces [South Lebanese Army and associated militias] and IDF in the morning and lasted until the next day. Approximately 800 artillery, tank and mortar rounds were fired by them. During the same period, armed elements [mainly PLO and the Lebanese National Movement] fired approximately 340 artillery and mortar



rounds and rockets, some impacting in Israel. In the western sector, armed elements fired 41 rockets, most of them falling into western Galilee. In that sector... IDF shelled the Rashidiyah area. Israeli jets conducted heavy raids against the Tyre pocket and other targets north...'

Nor were Privates Joyce and Doherty the only UNIFIL casualties in the period. The UN Secretary-General in his report to the Security Council in June 1981 stated that since December 1980, as many as 15 members of UNIFIL had lost their lives, eight of them from hostile actions, and 49 were wounded, 24 from hostile actions.

Death is tragic, but each one of the missing is a living tragedy for their families: besides Private Joyce, many people from south Lebanon disappeared during this time. As years pass by, chances of the missing having survived diminish. But hope lingers, among their loved ones, as they continue to live through the misery of the loss day after day. They need to move on, they need closure: they need to know -sometimes tragic news is better than no news at all.

'Al Janoub' appeals to its readers for information on Private Kevin Joyce, the peacekeeper -Missing in Action, presumed dead- who came from a little island off the coast of Ireland to serve the people of Lebanon.

Neeraj Singh

If you have any information on Private Kevin Joyce please contact 'Al Janoub' office at +961 1 827 020 or +961 1 827 068; email: unifil-pio@un.org; fax: +961 1 827 016



The UNIFIL Cenotaph (above) located in the Mission headquarters in Naqoura, is a memorial to the UNIFIL peacekeepers who have sacrificed their lives in the line of duty.

On the 25th of March every year, the United Nations observes the International Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing Staff Members. The observance intends to draw attention on the United Nations staff members who have been arrested, detained, abducted or disappeared while in the service of the Organisation, and the importance

of staff safety and security.

The day marks the abduction by armed men in 1985 near Beirut airport of Alec Collett, on assignment for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The fate of Mr. Collett, a journalist and former

Director of the United Nations Information Centre in Accra, has never been determined.

This year, as the United Nations marked the 23rd International Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing Staff Members, at least 40 staff members remained under arrest, detained or missing around the world.

NAQOURA 1978

30

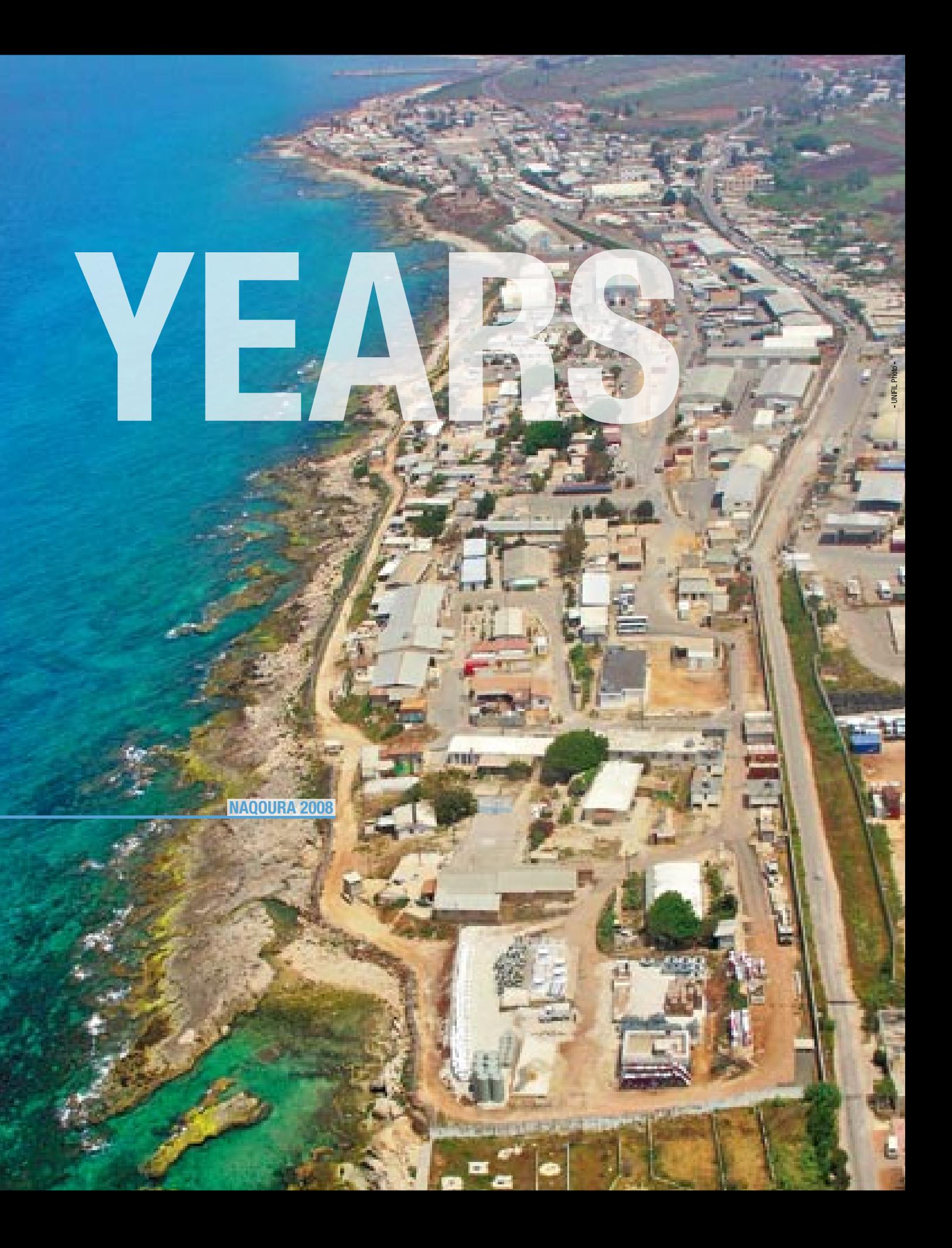
- UN Photo -



YEARS

NAQOURA 2008

- UNFICIL Photo -



1978

UNIFIL is created by the UN Security Council to confirm Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, restore international peace and security and assist the Lebanese Government in restoring its effective authority in the south.



Yasser Arafat with UN officials making a press statement, after his acceptance of the Secretary-General's call for a general cease-fire in southern Lebanon
March 28, 1978



The 34-day war between Hizbollah and Israel
July-August 2006



LAF and UNIFIL on their way to verify the Blue Line
July 20, 2000



Clearing debris from Israeli bombardment of apartment building in Tyre
July 2006



Secretary-General Kofi Annan touring the Blue Line August 26, 2006

- Israel invades Lebanon
- Resolution 425/426
- UNIFIL established

1978

- 2nd Israeli invasion

1982

- Israeli withdrawal from Beirut

1985



Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim visiting the eastern sector of southern Lebanon April 18, 1978



Nepalese peacekeepers chatting with Lebanese boys outside UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura April 27, 1978



Extinguishing fires at the Fijian headquarters at Qana after Israeli shelling April 18, 1996



Conflict of April 1996



Italian reinforcements for UNIFIL arrive on the shores of Tyre August 2006



Lebanese Armed Forces deploy in the south August-September 2006

Outbreak of hostilities

1993



Iranian peacekeepers on parade January 31, 1979



Fijian peacekeepers at Checkpoint Charlie 21 at Qlaley May 1, 1980



A Fijian peacekeeper waves at Lebanese Army troops entering Qana August 9, 1993



Norwegian peacekeepers search for mines November 26, 1990



UNIFIL's Maritime Task Force in action; deployed since October 15, 2006



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and UNIFIL Force Commander Major-General Claudio Graziano in Naqoura HQ March 30, 2007

Outbreak
of hostilities

1996

Israeli
withdrawal

2000



Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar meeting with representatives of troop contributing countries to UNIFIL April 11, 1984



UNIFIL talks with Lebanese and Israeli army representatives in Naqoura December 20, 1984



Urging UNIFIL to stay; one of several public demonstrations in south Lebanon September 18, 1986



Flowers for the peacekeepers January 7, 1986
(colour added by graphic designer)



Patrolling the south June 28, 2007

2008

30 years later, an expanded UNIFIL works to monitor the cessation of hostilities, while collaboration with the Lebanese Armed Forces ensures a new strategic military and security environment in southern Lebanon.

- 34-day war
- Resolution 1701

2006

UNIFIL forces reach 13000 +

2007

UNIFIL turns 30

2008

...

The story of Hassan Siklawi

“You will meet someone called Hassan Siklawi. If you really want to know what’s going on in southern Lebanon, you should speak with him -he’s been there and has seen it all.”

These are words that are often heard by United Nations staff heading to work at UNIFIL. But this is only half the story. As an integral part of UNIFIL through most of its 30 years of operations, Hassan has been a witness and participant to some of the most tumultuous events in the history of the UN mission and of his country.

The Tyre resident has been involved with UNIFIL, in some form or another, since its inception in 1978. Initially, Hassan was covering UNIFIL as a stringer for the news organization Associated Press. This soon led to an offer to work for UNIFIL, which he accepted.

“I am part of UNIFIL’s furniture,” Hassan jokes.

Most of his work has centred on outreach activities, involving the media and the general public.

“I always felt I was the liaison between them and the mission,” he says. “Our relationship with the local media was and has been a privileged one. We helped them in all kinds of ways – they would always be using our resources when the roads were closed or the conflict was at a critical stage and prevented them from getting to their stories.”

Hassan is a walking archive of UNIFIL and its history in southern Lebanon. Accorded respect throughout the area of operations and able to liaise with its people and parties, he has served as the man-on-the-ground for many of UNIFIL’s Force Commanders and senior officials, providing advice and insight otherwise difficult to find.

It has not been the easiest of jobs. He has lost count of the number of times he has

been in danger, describing this as an “occupational hazard.”

Looking back over his 30 years (and counting!) of association with UNIFIL, Hassan says the attack on a UNIFIL compound in Qana was a turning point for him, as a UN employee, as a proud Lebanese citizen, and as a human being. The shelling of Qana took place on 18 April, 1996, when Israeli artillery attacked a UN compound in the village where 800 Lebanese civilians had taken refuge to escape the fighting. By the time the shelling stopped, there were 106 dead and around 116 others injured, including four Fijian UNIFIL peacekeepers.

“Initially we could not believe that they were shelling our camp. Everybody knew that the UN was there and also civilian families with children were living in the base, but we could definitely hear the sound of bombs going off, people screaming asking for help. Suddenly the radio went quiet. As we arrived in Qana we realised the proportion of the tragedy. We were walking on top of bodies, surrounded by smoke and by an unreal silence. We spent hours in trying to recover injured people, but sadly most of the people we could find were already dead,” Hassan says, adding that the images he saw that day are etched in his mind forever.

“This was a UN position, the UN flag was

... the attack on a UNIFIL compound in Qana was a turning point for him, as a UN employee, as a proud Lebanese citizen, and as a human being... But traumatic as the shelling was, it also helped drive home another aspect that had developed between peacekeepers and the people of southern Lebanon over the years -bonds forged amidst the trauma and confusion of war.

there, civilians were living in that compound and all the parties should have respected it. Soldiers are trained, civilians are not. It’s not easy to make sense out of it and continue working,” Hassan says, almost in a whisper.

But traumatic as the shelling was, it also helped drive home another aspect that had developed between peacekeepers and the people of southern Lebanon over the years -bonds forged amidst the trauma and confusion of war.

“Together we were shelled and together we lived. Peacekeepers could get killed as well as civilians. We felt the same, we were the same. The UN peacekeepers came here from far away leaving their families behind, risking their lives for a peaceful future for Lebanon,” Hassan says. “This was really a turning point. UNIFIL was a mission that the people of Lebanon’s south could trust. They were risking their lives for the people of Lebanon.”

Violence, heroism, suffering, endurance... Hassan has seen it all. Not by choice, but because of a desire to do his job and do it well, and because of his love for Lebanon and his sincere hope that Lebanon will once again become a peaceful nation. Looking back now, the aspect of his experience with UNIFIL that provides him with the most satisfaction is the mission’s deep links with the local population. These links have varied. They range from



So many activities started out as private initiatives by individual peacekeepers and national contingents, and those sorts of activities have become part of UNIFIL's humanitarian projects.

activities for the masses, such as providing villages with electricity during long-running power cuts; to the individual, such as the peacekeepers who have volunteered to pay for local children's school fees.

"When UNIFIL first came, we used to have UN check-points and curfews, so villagers had to get permission from UNIFIL to move from village to village and it wasn't an easy process. But then, over time, we saw peacekeepers protecting farmers while they were harvesting olives. And then there would even be times when peacekeepers used to help the farmers pick the olives. All of this was done by choice, by the peacekeepers, not because they were ordered to, but because they are normal people like anyone else," Hassan says.

He adds that this spirit of cooperation -or, as he would say, recognition of our common humanity- has evolved, and for the better of the people of southern Lebanon.

"So many activities started out as private initiatives by individual peacekeepers and national contingents, and those sorts of activities have become part of UNIFIL's humanitarian projects. For instance, the tradition of donating gifts to children for Christmas, with Santa Claus delivering toys to children in the south started as a small initiative by Itlair [UNIFIL's Italian helicopter unit] in 1993. The Italians at that time had no presence on the ground and most of the area was occupied by armed groups, so they decided to organize pizza parties among themselves to raise the money."

"The first time we were able to collect just \$1,000 and we had to buy 500 toys, but that wasn't enough money. So we convinced a shop-owner in Saida to sell us used toys despite there being not enough money. Luckily, the shop-owner believed in the initiative and that's how the first 'Shia Santa Claus' started. Now we



Hassan helps to evacuate a baby from the village of Yater 21 April 1996

are doing it every year for the happiness of the children of the south Now we are doing it every year for the happiness of the children of the south -luckily we have more money for these things now!"

Hassan's time with UNIFIL has seen the occasional short break -namely, for service with the United Nations in Iraq- but he has always found himself back in southern Lebanon where his talents and skills have been put to good use over the years.

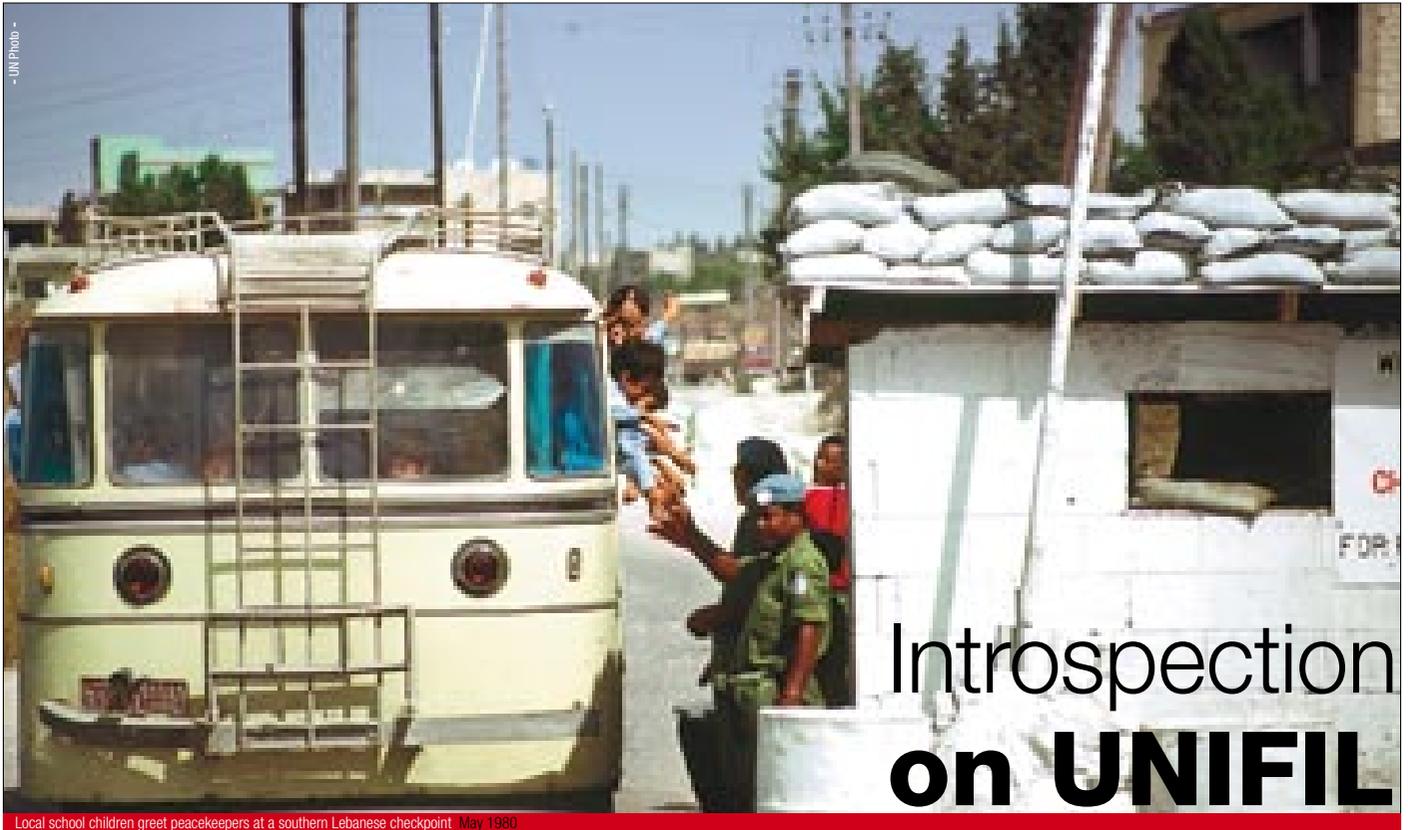
"It's what I know best," Hassan said. "This mission is as much a part of me as

I am of it. Already, 30 years have passed. I am looking forward to..."

And then the interview was over and Hassan has to leave.

A new UNIFIL employee had arrived and was at Hassan's door for an informal briefing on the situation on the ground, as the employee had been told before coming to UNIFIL that "if you really want to know what's going on there, you should speak with Hassan Siklawi."

Ari Gaitanis & Andrea Tenenti



UN Photo

Introspection on UNIFIL

Local school children greet peacekeepers at a southern Lebanese checkpoint May 1980

I joined United Nations Headquarters in July 1978, and UNIFIL was my first assignment. I stayed with it until 1988, including two-and-a-half years of service in Naqoura. I reverted to it again in the 1990s as part of a broader portfolio, which I held until 2001.

One usually retains a soft spot for the first assignment, especially when it involves service in the field, and I am no exception. At the same time, I have to confess to a pervading sense of futility and frustration with the mission during much of that period, given how small a role the United Nations was allowed to play and how little we were able to accomplish on the ground.

At one point, in January 1991, nearly half the expense for all United Nations peacekeeping operations went to UNIFIL, with not enough to show for it. In March 1978, the establishment of UNIFIL had, no doubt, strong international support, as demonstrated by the speed with which troop-contributors came forward and deployed their contingents. But except for the cease-fire worked out with the help of the United States in the summer of 1981, UNIFIL never had the kind of political support that would have been necessary for it to carry out its mandate as written in resolution 425.

How this came about is no secret. In the first years, Israel and the PLO were vying

for influence over the area that UNIFIL was meant to keep free of hostilities. After 1982, the area became the battleground for the fight between Lebanese resistance groups and the occupying Israeli forces and their Lebanese subsidiary. The UN had no right to impede Lebanese resistance against occupying forces and had neither the mandate nor the means to prevent Israeli counter-measures. Nor were there any outside actors willing and able to change the situation. By the time I arrived in Naqoura at the end of 1985, the area had settled into a fragile equilibrium of sorts, in which Lebanese groups carried out small-scale attacks against the occupiers, who usually countered with heavy artillery fire.

The fighting was clearly limited on both sides. This can be easily inferred from the relatively small number of casualties and limited damage as compared to the vast amount of ammunition expended; or from the large number of inhabitants who continued to live in their villages. I wish I could say that this was because of UNIFIL, but I cannot convince myself of this. On the side of the resistance, the main constraint, I suspect, was limited capacity. On the Israeli side, the desire not to be drawn into the Lebanese quagmire again must have ranked high. Manning the forward positions on Lebanese territory with members of the so-called "South Lebanon Army (SLA)", who took the brunt



of the resistance attacks, helped Israel to maintain a semblance of distance.

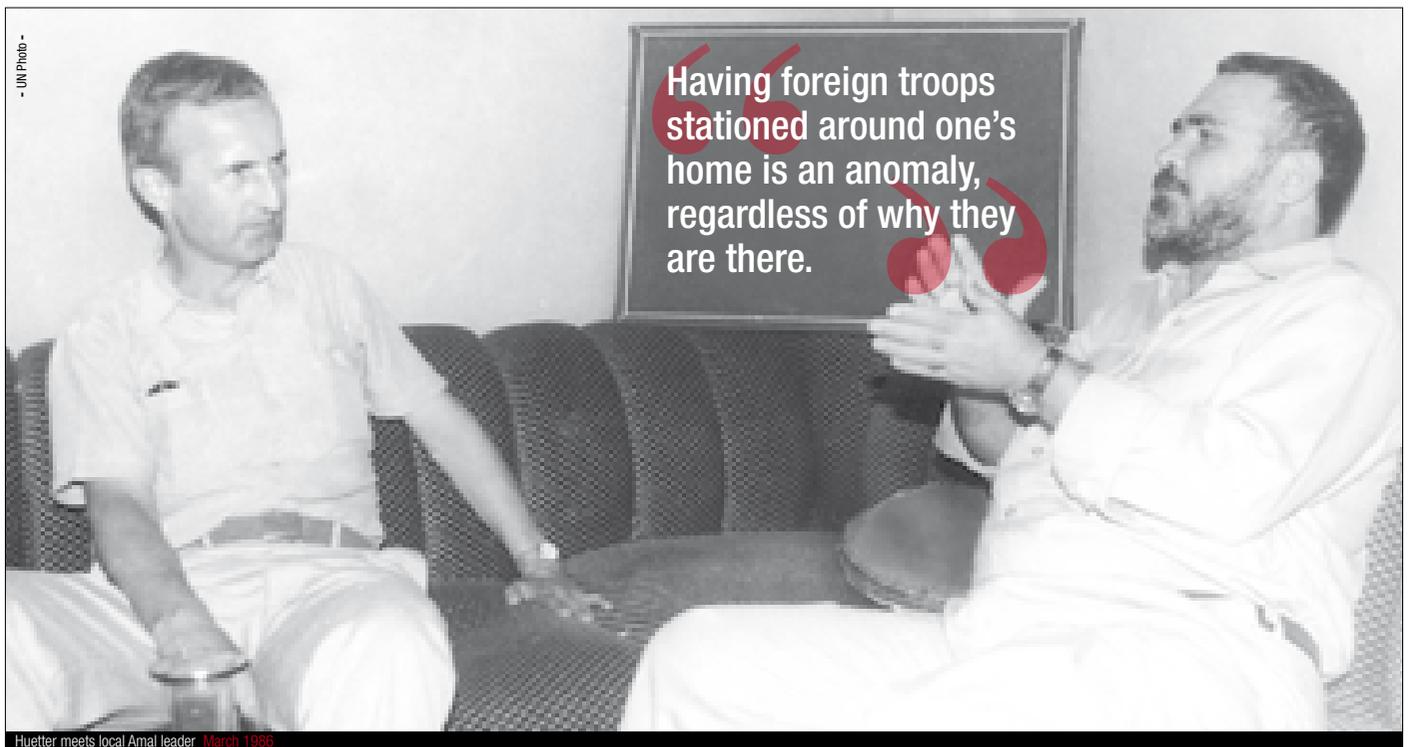
There were other important constraints. Israel had to be concerned that excessive force would cost support at home and abroad, without necessarily being effective, since the resistance did not offer much of a target. The resistance, like all guerillas, needed the support of the inhabitants to function and had to make sure that they agreed with its objectives. This was a key issue in the summer of 1986, when UNIFIL came under sustained attack by Lebanese groups after an incident at a checkpoint in Marakah, during which a UN sentry had killed two Lebanese men. UNIFIL lost 10 soldiers and suffered some

its limited effectiveness, stood for a measure of moderation that would allow them to do so. The latter group included the majority of the population in the area and, at the time, its views prevailed. The attacks on UNIFIL ceased, and it stayed.

In the following years, the capacity of the resistance grew, including its capacity to target Israeli territory. However, the tempo of operations remained fairly slow, although the attacks on Israeli military targets inside Lebanon became more effective. Israel realised that it had limited options and often made do with symbolic responses, for example shelling empty terrain. The most significant exceptions were protracted, heavy Israeli

and humanitarian aid. On the other hand, UNIFIL has occupied land, for which the government has always been extremely late with its reimbursements to the owners; it has impeded the free movement of people and goods and subjected them to annoying, repetitive controls and searches at its checkpoints.

UNIFIL had to do this to carry out its mandate, but that did not make it less unpleasant to the farmer bringing his produce to market or the employee trying to get to work on time. UNIFIL's presence has also generated the normal stresses and strains that come with soldiers living in a village society. Having foreign troops stationed around one's home is an



50 wounded, the French infantry battalion was withdrawn, and for a while it appeared as if the Force as a whole would follow.

While Israel could live with UNIFIL or without it, the Lebanese had to consider their position carefully. There were those in Lebanon who were not content with just ending the Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory; they had the much broader aim of ending Israel's existence altogether. They saw UNIFIL as an obstacle, although it could be bypassed, and would have welcomed its withdrawal as a clearing of the field for the larger struggle. Others wanted to get rid of the occupation and then be left in peace. Meanwhile, they had to survive, and UNIFIL, despite

bombardments in July 1993 and April 1996. In 1996, this probably lost the incumbent Israeli Prime Minister the election, underlining one of the political costs associated with using that level of force. By that time, "rules of the game" had evolved which were recorded in an understanding in April 1996. The gist was that the resistance would not fire into Israel, while the Israelis would not target civilians in Lebanon.

I have always admired the great patience the people of south Lebanon have shown towards UNIFIL over the years. True, UNIFIL has been a factor for moderation, has offered a small measure of protection, and has brought some economic benefits

anomaly, regardless of why they are there.

Today, the Israeli forces are long withdrawn, and the Lebanese army is deployed in the south to maintain the cease-fire together with UNIFIL. Both are working to ensure that south Lebanon does not again become a battleground. As in 1986, this is largely in the hands of the people for whom the area is home. At present, it is hard to foresee when UNIFIL's contribution will no longer be needed. I can only hope that it will not take another thirty years and that, when the time comes, UNIFIL and the people of south Lebanon can part as friends.

Joachim Huetter

Peacekeepers

who became one with the people

He typifies UNIFIL in many ways, not the least because, having joined the Mission for just six months, he stayed for 24 years. **Timur Goksel** was thus the public face of UNIFIL for most of its 30 years: from 1979 as Spokesman and, since 1995, as Senior Adviser. After his retirement in 2003, he lives in Beirut and lectures in several Lebanese universities on international politics, the UN and peacekeeping.

He reveals to *Al Janoub's Neeraj Singh*, aspects of peacekeeping that are hard to foresee, leave alone mandate -products of innate human impulses corresponding to uniquely felt needs perceived in community -the real success story of UNIFIL. Excerpts:

SINGH: UNIFIL at its inception had to jostle for space amidst various armed groups, only to find the IDF back in force from 1982. What really did UNIFIL achieve in those years?

GOKSEL: To begin with, it brought normalcy; it brought people back to their homes. When we first arrived, we had only 10,000 people in south Lebanon. In three years, there were half a million.

The very fact that UNIFIL, despite its unworkable mandate and with no political support except for a small group of dedicated UN bureaucrats, turned out to be a resilient force that held its ground despite suffering more than 100 fatalities in action (out of 250 total fatalities) was an achievement in its own right.

But the real and rarely noticed success story was how this force became a part of the land, established close links with the ignored people who had no state services whatsoever, gained their gratitude, enabled them to rebuild their lives and helped to transform an abandoned landscape into a thriving, secure region during the 1990s.

And how did this come about?

We had no military or economic power. People knew that and they understood. We were recycling everything in Naqoura: computers, desks, whatever, we gave it [to the people]. Soldiers went and painted their schools. We ran their water pumps; they had no gasoline for the village pump, so we gave them gasoline.

During the Israeli invasion of 1982, there was a humanitarian



Timur Goksel

crisis in Tyre when the Israeli army confined thousands of people to the beach without food or shelter. It was outside our area of operations, but we organised relief convoys staffed by volunteer UNIFIL personnel to go there and provided them food and medical treatment. That was the start of the relationship between UNIFIL and Tyre. When the Israelis left in 1985, the people of Tyre offered us their houses free of charge. We opened an office there.

1983-85 was a difficult time when the Israelis were conducting operation 'Iron Fist' against the resistance – raiding villages. I would take foreign journalists to villages and that helped impose caution on the Israelis. During a raid in Burj Rahhal village in 1983, the French soldiers stood on the rooftops of some houses to prevent the Israelis from blowing them up.

It was a war of wits in the south. In those days UNIFIL was in the villages, we were living there; these people were our neighbours, we had to protect them.

The partial withdrawal of IDF in 1985 would have inevitably changed the nature of your interactions with the local population. Yes, but we continued to assist the people even in the areas that remained under occupation. A classic example is the olive farmers. Some of the best olive fields in Lebanon were along the frontline between the SLA (South Lebanon Army) and the resistance. The people could not go to their fields as the SLA would fire at them. So we sent UNIFIL soldiers to escort them with UN flags: our 'olive harvest patrols'. On the other side, in the occupied area, there was the village of Bayt Lif, famous for its olive presses, but they had no power. Every year we would provide them a generator to run their presses.

Again, when people got shot along the frontline, no civilian could go there. So UN personnel would collect the bodies and deliver them to the families. People don't forget these things.

Take the Norwegian peacekeepers: they were cut off from the rest of UNIFIL and had to survive on their own. They brought their little Norway here. That was the only area in south Lebanon where we had traffic rules, because the Norwegians insisted on it and the people respected them because of the services and economic benefits the Norwegians brought to the area. Ebel es Saqi village had the best marketplace for jewellery and fashion in Lebanon. There were so many marriages, 70 I think, between the Norwegians and the Lebanese.

Then the orphanage in Tibnin. When there was shelling in the area, the Irish peacekeepers would run to the orphanage to play with the children so that they do not get traumatised by the shelling. That is the most humane thing I have seen in my life.

How did you address the organised resistance in your area of operations?

We had open liaison channels with all the groups. There was no state structure and so we had to deal with them. When friction started between the Shias and PLO in 1981, Amal asked for direct communication with us. We established liaison with them. Amal became very pro-UNIFIL; they fought for UNIFIL.

The 1982 Israeli occupation brought a totally different equation to the south. The



Shia were happy that the Israelis would drive out the Palestinians. But soon they realised that the Israelis were not leaving and decided it was time for resistance.

Hezbollah appeared: they had come from the north and they could not understand why there were these European soldiers having such friendly relations with the people. UNIFIL went through a very difficult period late 1980s: this was when our Chief OGL (Observer Group Lebanon) was kidnapped and killed.

The turning point came with the Damascus accord between Hezbollah and Amal, particularly a year after when Hassan Nasrallah took over in 1992. He was from the south and he knew UNIFIL. The first thing he did was appoint a liaison officer to UNIFIL.

But the big transformation came with the change in generation when the southerners joined Hezbollah. These people had

...the real and rarely noticed success story was how this force became a part of the land, established close links with the ignored people who had no state services whatsoever, gained their gratitude, enabled them to rebuild their lives...

grown up with UNIFIL. A boy who was born in 1980 and became a Hezbollah fighter in 1998, knew UNIFIL for 18 years; he probably went to a school painted by UNIFIL, or had benefited from its services. He would not harm us: there is this innate Lebanese hospitality towards foreigners.

How were things after the Israeli withdrawal in 2000?

The Israelis surprised us by the speed of their withdrawal. We sent out UNIFIL patrols to reassure the people. The Lebanese Army Intelligence sent their personnel in civilian clothes: 20-30 of them, very effective, people respected them. Everyone was expecting rivers of blood to be flowing in the aftermath of the Israeli withdrawal. But nothing happened -no police, no army, UNIFIL driving on the roads but not having to do anything.

About 6,000 people escaped to Israel fearing retribution. But within months they started to return. We would pick them up from the border and take them to the Lebanese Army Intelligence at Naqoura Port. And they were escorted home by the Lebanese Army or even the Hezbollah. Some of them would get a couple of months in jail, that's all. So the Lebanese sorted it out the Lebanese way.

As UNIFIL we did our bit by being around and moving quickly to some villages where we were never before. There was nothing much UNIFIL was expected to do anyway.

Later a Joint Force of Lebanese Army and Gendarmerie were deployed, but under police command. It was a symbolic presence. They controlled the main roads. They ran their show and on that ground there was a move to cut UNIFIL strength down to 1,200. We were heading in that direction when the July 2006 war happened.

Calamity comes in many forms; so does succour

I am alive today because of UNIFIL

take Johayna home. "I could not even die in the hospital because we could not afford an ambulance to transport my body from Beirut to Tyre."

Back at home, Johayna's plight worsened. She would lose consciousness because of the high temperature and started to suffer memory loss. "I woke up one day on a hospital bed. When I asked where I was, they told me it was the UNIFIL field hospital in Naqoura."

Johayna's mother chimed in: "UNIFIL had an office in Tyre; it was the logistics and public information office. I turned to them for help. I knew that UNIFIL had no burns hospital, but a mother never loses hope. If a foreign doctor could just examine her, I would feel as if I had sent her abroad for treatment."

Two days later, a UNIFIL doctor visited their house accompanied by a translator. "I remember him distinctly," the mother said, "His name was Anderson, he was Swedish. I just asked if he could give her the right treatment at home, but he wouldn't abandon her. He was shaken and crying. He said he would move her to the field hospital in Naqoura. At first I was afraid because Naqoura was in the Israeli occupied area and we had already suffered the trauma of being displaced from our village in Bent Jbeil to Tyre. But the doctor reassured me that UNIFIL would ensure her safe transport. Within hours my daughter was flown in a UNIFIL helicopter to the Naqoura hospital."

"The Swedish medical staff at UNIFIL was extremely nice to me," Johayna recalls, "They would attend to my smallest needs, such as giving me a pedicure and turning on the music for me until I felt I was a member of their family. After just one week, I was out of danger, but after 20 years I am still undergoing surgeries in my neck and hand."

Johayna has so far undergone 25 surgeries. It is only since three years that she started to leave her house again. Now she visits friends, asking around for help to complete the operations on her right hand, which otherwise may require amputation.

Johayna's only wish is to regain normal life so she can be an equal contributor to society. She hopes someone will respond to her call.

Hassan Siklawi



Johayna (right) with her mother at their home in Tyre March 2008

Johayna had a youthful passion for life that defied the crass neglect and destruction that had befallen her town of Tyre - indeed, that had by 1988 become a grim reality across south Lebanon. Still in her twenties, Johayna had seen it all: the wars, the occupation, the displacement, the destruction, the rebuilding; yet more wars and the full cycle over again of devastation and recovery.

The dozens of armed groups fighting each other and the Israeli occupiers alike was baffling to the young mind, but equally mysterious was the motivation of soldiers from half way across the world, who jumped in the melee to make peace. True enough, for one who has grown up amidst senseless violence between neighbours, universal human values that define the United Nations are hard to grasp.

Soon though, Johayna was to be thrown into a rude battle for her own survival that has gone on for 20 years now, and continues. A struggle she has survived as much due to her own resilience born of adversity, a forte of the southerners, as due to the assistance that was provided her by UNIFIL; a struggle that gave her new life and a revelation of the humanitarian impulse that transcends sectarian boundaries.

Curious to know more about her, I visited Johayna at her humble home in the "Almasaken Alsheebya" neighbourhood of Tyre. "If I am alive today, it is because of UNIFIL," she said, even before I could begin my inquiry. A 'simple' fact, plainly stated, the level stare of one who has seen death at close quarters - it took me aback.

"In 1988, I was severely burned as a result of a domestic accident," Johayna continued. She had been admitted to a hospital in Beirut, but the family could not afford the treatment. "We were poor farmers living off our daily toil. My mother had already sold the three cows we owned, our only source of livelihood, and yet we were short of money."

After three months, the hospital administration advised the mother to

My experience with UNIFIL

Memories are short and UNIFIL has been here for long. I therefore often hear people ask the question: what has UNIFIL achieved? As one who has been closely associated with UNIFIL for most of its 30 years, I am more inclined to ask: how would things be in south Lebanon if there was no UNIFIL?

Over these years UNIFIL peacekeepers have stood by us through crises, shared our pains and suffering, helped the best they could to provide succour to the people. Even the smallest humanitarian gestures have made a world of difference and there have been too many to count. But let me mention some of my own personal experiences of the relationship we have shared with UNIFIL.

In 1978, when UNIFIL was first established, I was a Second Lieutenant in the Lebanese Army, serving in the South Intelligence Section. My job was to maintain regular

Later, as head of the South Intelligence Section between 1989 and 1999, I continued regular interactions with the UNIFIL command. In 1998 I moved from the army to the state security where I was appointed as the Lebanese government coordinator with UNIFIL.

Our close coordination with UNIFIL proved useful during the Israeli 'Operation Accountability' in 1993, when thousands of houses were destroyed, hundreds of thousands of southerners were displaced northward and infrastructure including roads, bridges, electricity and water



Brig-Gen Maher Tfaii

base in Qana. Once again UNIFIL was by the side of the people, deploying all its resources to help evacuate the injured, providing them medical and other assistance. UNIFIL also helped in the return of displaced persons, in demining, providing water and generators for the areas and in such other ways.

Following Operation Grapes of Wrath, the "April Understanding" committee comprising the United States, France, Israel, Syria and Lebanon was formed in 1996 to monitor compliance with the agreement between Israel and Hezbollah to end cross-border attacks on civilian targets and refrain from using civilian villages to launch attacks. I was head of the Lebanese delegation in that committee which remained functional until 2000. UNIFIL provided us security and logistics support including a meeting room in Naqoura, transport for delegations, food, medical care and so on.

On the whole, UNIFIL's contribution to south Lebanon goes way beyond its mandated military or security role. It has brought enormous economic benefits to the region. Friendly relations with peacekeepers led over the years to cultural exchange and better understanding of the respective customs and traditions. The Lebanese learned new languages while UNIFIL members learned some Lebanese words, and there were many cases of mixed marriage.

I wish for a successful culmination of this cherished relationship between UNIFIL and the people of south Lebanon.

Brigadier General Maher Tfaii

Former Head of the South Intelligence Section & Head of the Lebanese delegation to the April Understanding Monitoring Committee



Brig-Gen Tfaii with the 'April Understanding' monitoring team in the field late 1990s

liaison with UNIFIL. We would meet with UNIFIL representatives at the emergency centre in Tyre in order to address issues necessary to help facilitate the Mission. We worked to provide assistance in their movement, security, communication with Lebanese citizens and in their humanitarian activities such as medical care and food distribution. Our tasks also included solving the daily problems that emanated between the international forces and some armed groups in that area.

stations were destroyed. UNIFIL assisted in protecting the citizens, picking up the bodies, treating the wounded, providing food supplies, clearing roads and removing debris of demolished buildings.

Some years later in 1996, the Israelis launched 'Operation Grapes of Wrath'. 120 civilians were killed and more than 500 injured, the largest number of casualties resulting from Israeli shelling of civilians taking refuge in the UNIFIL



UNIFIL peacekeeper marks the Blue Line close to the town of Al Hamra May 2001

Drawing the Blue Line

Lieutenant General Jim Sreenan was the Deputy Force Commander of UNIFIL during May 1999-August 2000. With long years of peacekeeping experience since 1967 in Cyprus, the Sinai desert and the Golan Heights, including two previous stints with UNIFIL as Company Commander in 1985 and Battalion Commander in 1994-95, Lt. Gen. Sreenan was just the man UNIFIL needed to oversee the delineation of the Line of Withdrawal following the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000. For his work at this time he was awarded the Medal of the National Cedar in the rank of Commander by the President of Lebanon. A highly decorated officer who held several command positions in Ireland, he retired last June from active service as Chief of Staff of the Irish Defence Forces.

Al Janoub's **Omar Aboud** contacted Lt. Gen. Sreenan for a first-hand account of his sensitive assignment with UNIFIL:



Lt General Jim Sreenan

ABOUD: At the time when the Government of Israel informed the UN of its intention to withdraw from the south of Lebanon, did this decision come as a surprise to UNIFIL?

SREENAN: No, the decision to withdraw did not come as a surprise, a lively debate had been ongoing in Israel on the question of withdrawal for some considerable time and it was clear that Prime Minister Barak favoured withdrawal. In the circumstances there was never going to be a long time from the announcement of the decision until the withdrawal operation but it was

well flagged and we were expecting it. Resolution 425 called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon and for UNIFIL to confirm this withdrawal and so such an eventuality was always included in UNIFIL contingency planning. I am sure nobody at the UN back in 1978 thought it would be the next millennium before the withdrawal would take place and equally when on 17 April 2000 Israel formally notified the UN of its intention to withdraw few if any, even on the Israeli side, could have envisaged that by May 25th Israel would be declaring the withdrawal was complete.

Did the specific situation on the ground, the general developments in Lebanon and the overall regional circumstances lead to the decision of the withdrawal?

As the mood in Israel swung in favour of withdrawal the Israeli proxy army the SLA, not surprisingly, started to think seriously about their future. On the regional front there were still hopes of significant progress on the Palestinian question and of course withdrawal from Lebanon could only facilitate this. On the wider front it is very hard to win international support when you are in occupation of someone else's territory so undoubtedly there was pressure on Israel.

Based on what facts and documents did the UN Cartographic Team determine the

location of the Line of Withdrawal?

Were there reservations from either side?

The task for the UN Cartographic Team was to identify a line conforming to the internationally recognised boundaries of Lebanon based on the best available cartographic and documentary material. From the outset it was clear that the legal basis for the international boundaries such as it existed would be found in any material in connection with the 1923 Agreement between France and Great Britain entitled "Boundary Line between Syria and Palestine from the Mediterranean to El Hamme" and relating to the 1949 Israeli-Lebanese General Armistice Agreement. A trawl for material was undertaken in London, Paris, Washington, HQ UNTSO in Jerusalem and the assistance of both parties was sought.

The difficulties faced by the Cartographic Team are illustrated by the fact that in regard to the 1923 Anglo French Agreement no common map could be found nor could any trace of geographical coordinates and there were slight differences in regard to the lines drawn on the English and French versions. A further difficulty was that only after the Cartographic Section had produced the first working map did the Lebanese side produce very significant material that warranted considerable revision of the first



Am Nahar

UNIFIL and Lebanese Army officers working together on delineation of the Blue Line near Ghajar August 2001

When you complete an exercise with two parties and you end up with both feeling dissatisfied you may consider you were even handed but you cannot be overjoyed at the result. Nevertheless when you get the agreement of both parties, albeit with reservations... the work must be considered worthwhile.

map. Given the fact of the quality of the background material and that the exercise was not a full survey for the purpose of establishing an international border it was never likely that both sides would be completely satisfied. Both sides finally accepted the line drawn, with reservations.

Can you explain the process of confirming Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon and the method the UN Cartographic Section followed to mark the Line of Withdrawal?

In the matter of the confirmation of the Israeli withdrawal an undue emphasis is I feel placed on the difficulties experienced

in regard to the Line of Withdrawal. There were three principal aspects to the confirmation of the withdrawal: withdrawal of all Israeli military and civilian forces from all Lebanese territory; dismantlement of the SLA including its command structure and logistic train and the return to the legitimate Lebanese authorities of prisoners being held at El Khiam.

Our focus was firstly on ensuring that the Israeli forces were out of the outposts and compounds they held and this took strong armoured patrols supported by Engineer teams to deal with the mine threat. Many local civilians who did not take this threat on board paid a heavy price. We also had to follow up on what was happening to the SLA heavy weaponry, this we did in conjunction with Lebanese authorities. While UNIFIL had no active role in the release of the prisoners from Khiam we did monitor developments there and satisfied ourselves as to the outcome.

If the Israeli forces were not effectively out of Lebanon it would not have been possible to commence work on the line of withdrawal as hostilities without doubt would have continued. Delineation of a line of withdrawal was necessary to advance the process and to confirm Israeli forces were out of all of Lebanon but we should not lose sight of the earlier verification work. The method employed by the Cartographic Team was to place markers along the line on the ground and to establish coordinates for these markers.

What are some of the challenges that UNIFIL faced during this process?

It is one thing to establish a line on a map but quite another to identify it on

the ground, more so if the terrain is as inhospitable as much of the border area is with steep escarpments, badly marked minefields and the constant threat from booby traps and war debris. The line of withdrawal was never intended to be an international boundary and was being interpreted by operational soldiers using hand held GPS devices giving a level of accuracy of plus to minus eight degrees.

It was possible to examine an area in the minutest detail and to declare it free from any Israeli presence only to find an hour later that an Israeli vehicle was driving along a track maybe 10 meters on the wrong side. One could consider this an inadvertent temporary violation but what if the incursion was a two-man observation position with no fixed infrastructure. There were indeed many challenges requiring infinite patience and a good sense of humour.

Looking back at the operation of demarcating the Blue Line conducted eight years ago, how do you evaluate the process and the results obtained?

When you complete an exercise with two parties and you end up with both feeling dissatisfied you may consider you were even handed but you cannot be overjoyed at the result. Nevertheless when you get the agreement of both parties, albeit with reservations, and secure the deployment of UNIFIL right up to the frontier and facilitate the deployment of the Lebanese Security and Armed Forces the work must be considered worthwhile. The bottom line is that until 2006 the people of South Lebanon and Northern Israel experienced peace and tranquillity unlike the previous twenty two years.

Holding out for the sake of peace



Brig-Gen Jai Prakash Nehra

Having taken over as the Deputy Head of an ostensibly stable Mission in February 2006, the humdrum of ‘routine peacekeeping’ he first encountered, was rudely shaken by the sudden outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah during July-August 2006. UNIFIL, despite being severely constrained in its own movements, security and vital resources, provided whatever assistance it could to the civilian population in the area. Importantly, through the tumultuous 34 days of war, UNIFIL managed to ‘keep a leg on the ground’ thus paving the way for the speedy restoration of a new security environment in south Lebanon following the cessation of hostilities agreement that led to the withdrawal of the IDF and the deployment of the LAF, supported by a much enhanced UN peacekeeping force.

UNIFIL’s Deputy Force Commander **Brigadier-General Jai Prakash Nehra** was right in the middle of the upheaval that led to the transformation of UNIFIL in strategic partnership with LAF. Just after relinquishing office on 19 March 2008, on his way to the Beirut International Airport, Brigadier-General Nehra gave a first hand account of his eventful tenure to *Al Janoub’s Neeraj Singh*. Excerpts:

SINGH: How were things when you first arrived in February 2006?

NEHRA: I found a small Mission, with set procedures and a predictable pattern of activities. There were some violations on the Blue Line, occasional clashes, but by and large it was peaceful. People were very warm and appreciative of UNIFIL. We had only two battalions in the field: Indian in the East and Ghanaian in the West, with other contingents providing force protection, aviation support and logistics. In all there were seven national contingents with 2,000 military personnel and a small complement of civilian staff.

All of a sudden on 28 May 2006, Hezbollah fired at the IDF in the morning and IDF retaliated with massive aerial bombardments through the day.

The Force Commander was constantly in touch with both parties and we were able to broker the cessation of hostilities by the evening. Thereafter, things seemed to slip back to the normal routine.

Did you have any battle indications before the massive flare up in July?

There was no indication whatsoever of a conflict of this magnitude. The general expectation was that after the massive exchange of 28 May they would keep quiet for some time.

On 10 July, I had a meeting with Gen. Daoud, Commander Joint Force [the Joint Force composed of 500 Internal Security Forces (ISF) and 500 Army personnel were the only Lebanese security force deployed in the south], who told me that

It was like a ‘white line’ [of UNIFIL vehicles] parallel to the Litany, moving gradually south towards the Blue Line.

they did not expect any hostilities at least during the tourist season. He informed me of a plan he had received from the Prime Minister’s office to enhance the Joint Force deployment to 3,000 personnel. We took it as a positive sign that the government was moving forward to establish its authority in the south. Less than 48 hours later we had the war.

Even when the conflict started, we first thought it would last only a couple of days since in the beginning the pattern was like the 28 May exchange of fire. Only days later when we saw the first ground actions of IDF, we realised this was going to continue longer.

As the violence picked up, how did UNIFIL address the repercussions on the ground?

There was massive destruction. More than 80% of the population in the south left northwards. UNIFIL, in coordination with the Government of Lebanon, helped in escorting them and also in moving those who remained in the south to safer areas. Sometimes it took time because we had to coordinate with IDF to secure safe corridors. Generally, UNIFIL units were 'confined to posts' for security

UNIFIL over this, but soon the people realised our constraints.

Was supplies for UNIFIL troops a major concern?

We had 28-30 days supplies in the posts. Food was not as much of a problem as was water and, even more so, fuel. For safety reasons we used APCs to resupply our positions and due to their limited capacity they required more number of trips. We also used local resources, such as wherever there was a local water source available. For fresh supplies like vegetables, meat products and fruits we allowed the commanders to make local purchases.

The most critical was fuel. Our fuel supplies had been cut off and local gas stations were destroyed. In the first two weeks

when the OGL Patrol Base in Kham was destroyed by an aerial bomb and one of our international staff members and his wife died in a residential building bombed in Tyre. Several UNIFIL peacekeepers were injured and in some cases we were just plain lucky to escape major casualties.

The UN Secretary-General had authorised the Force Commander to evacuate the Mission if necessary, but we were determined to see it through. One of the reasons UNIFIL was able to expand so quickly after the war was that we already had a leg on the ground.

Were you able to pick up quickly from there in the immediate aftermath of the war?

Even during the war, we did our best to continue with our mandate to observe and report on a daily basis the best we could see. It was not 100% accurate because of the limitations of observation and judgement, but in retrospect it was a fairly accurate assessment.

Just four hours after the cessation of hostilities, through intensive liaison we were able to arrange a meeting with representatives of the Lebanese Army and IDF at Ras Naqoura. This was the first tripartite meeting chaired by UNIFIL.

The immediate issue we had to address was the withdrawal of the IDF and simultaneous LAF deployment.

What did this transition involve?

The challenge before us was to ensure that the IDF and LAF do not meet each other in order to avoid any potential clashes. So we negotiated detailed modalities with both parties and maintained a buffer line of UNIFIL between the two forces.

As IDF withdrew from a pocket, UNIFIL took over and 24 hours later LAF came in. We went by the roads that were available and so there was a string of 20 or more patrols from each of the two battalions round the clock. It was like a 'white line' [of UNIFIL vehicles] parallel to the Litany, moving gradually south towards the Blue Line. It took over a month and a half to complete this process.

Throughout this period the civilian population was returning in large numbers and if they saw an IDF detachment in the vicinity of their destroyed homes, obviously there were tensions. So emotions were running high and practically 70-80% of UNIFIL troops were out of their bases day and night for more than a month, mediating, negotiating, calming down the situation.



reasons, but we always responded to humanitarian calls to evacuate wounded civilians, provide medical aid, food, water and so on. Our freedom of movement was curtailed with roads and bridges destroyed.

In some villages, such as in Hule, we were able to negotiate with IDF certain safe areas such as a football ground, or municipal hall or hospital. We put our APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers] with UN flags and got the civilian population to concentrate there to protect them from the fighting.

There were instances when civilians gathered in front of our bases for shelter. But we had very limited bomb shelters only sufficient for troops and not enough food and water. So we escorted them to the Tyre barracks where the LAF took over. Initially there was some resentment against

we were able to run two logistics convoys from Beirut. But then that stopped. By the end of the 34-day war we had practically exhausted our fuel stock.

How about the security of UNIFIL personnel?

Statistically speaking, out of the 45 bases UNIFIL had, 36 received explosive hits, either direct or dangerously close. 16 of these had rockets falling inside. It was mostly collateral damage and it was coming mostly from the IDF, but also from Hizbullah. On one occasion, there were as many as 32 direct mortar hits on the Headquarters of the Ghanaian battalion in a single night. We had sound force protection measures, good discipline and excellent command at all levels.

Four UN military observers were killed

An enduring oasis of hope

Mohammed Fawaz is a school teacher who has dedicated most of his life to orphans in the south of Lebanon during the country's most turbulent times. In his efforts to keep the orphanage open, Mohammed has faced many challenges and has gone through a great deal of pain, hardship and financial difficulties. But he also found lasting friendships that have endured the tests of distance and time.



It all started in 1978, just after the establishment of UNIFIL in the south of Lebanon. With the help of a generous donation from the Dutch battalion, Mohammad opened the orphanage in Tibnin, giving refuge to more than 100 children. Unfortunately the dramatic escalation of the conflict in 1979 forced him to close and evacuate the orphans to different locations around Lebanon. During the war the orphanage was occupied and looted - nothing was left inside, even the doors and windows were removed and the building was severely damaged.

"When I tried to re-open the orphanage in 1991, I did not know where to start from, where could I find help and financial assistance?"

The response of the Irish and Norwegian peacekeepers, based in Tibnin at Camp Sharmock, was immediate. They helped in the reconstruction of the centre, including structural and engineering work, the donation of a generator and medical assistance. Very soon, UNIFIL became an integral part of the orphanage, the Irish providing food and the Norwegians paying most of the school fees.

"From that time on they have always been with us, providing reassurance with their presence and so much beyond their military duties. The help we have received from the Irish can't be measured in material terms. During the hardest moment they never left us alone. They were a reassuring and enjoyable presence for the children, playing music for them, showing cartoons, bringing toys, talking and laughing with them. They were part of their family; they were our family."

The corridors of the orphanage are covered with photos portraying its history. Most of the pictures show UNIFIL peacekeepers involved in different activities: taking the children around Lebanon by bus, organizing Christmas parties, playing music and sharing meals.

"The departure of some of the contingents did not put a halt to their support. The former peacekeepers continued to provide the orphanage with donations, gifts, clothes, school fees, etc." Mohammed pointed out that it was not solely the Irish or Norwegians that donated, other UNIFIL contingents also helped.

Unfortunately peace was still a distant

"Also during the last conflict the Irish, the Dutch and the Norwegians were constantly in touch with us, to check how we were doing. They have left Lebanon, but they will be always part of us."

dream and during two major conflicts between 1993 and 1996 Tibnin frequently came under heavy fire. The Irish did whatever they could to keep the centre safe and to reassure the children, staying with them while Israeli jets were shelling the area.

"They also raised a UN flag on top of the building to mark it as a 'UNIFIL position' and continued to provide us with food and fuel supplies," said Mohammed with tears in his eyes. "They stayed with us for the 16 days of bombardment sleeping on the floor. To reassure the children they played music while the conflict was ongoing. How can I forget the Irish peacekeeper who risked his life driving a truck full of fuel for the orphanage while the Israelis were shelling the area?"

"Also during the last conflict the Irish, the Dutch and the Norwegians were constantly in touch with us, to check how we were doing. They have left Lebanon, but they will be always part of us."

Mohammed now has serious concerns about the future of the orphanage: "We have never been affiliated with any particular political party or faction, so we were reliant on funding and help from UN battalions, international organizations, embassies or charities."

"Now the Italians are providing us with doctors, the Polish with water, the Belgians with food and the Qataris gave us a generator and food supplies."

But Mohammed is still worried about how to protect the orphanage if there is another war.

Andrea Tenenti



UNIFIL Photo

Girls at the Orphanage in Tibnin



UNIFIL peacekeeper watching the Blue Line