

to mutual destruction—had a duty to do what he could to make this aspiration into a reality....”

General Burns died in September 1985. J. King Gordon, in a recent conversation, contributed these recollections of a colleague and a friend:

“My first contact with him was very indirect. Shortly after the war I was invited to take part in a United Nations Association seminar in Manitoba. I discovered that, in his position as deputy minister of Veterans Affairs, he had got all the branches of the Canadian Legion committed to backing the United Nations Association; so the Brandon seminar of high school students was financed by the Canadian Legion—and, I think, still is.

“I didn’t meet him personally until 1956, when he flew into the bombed-out Cairo airport on November 8 on the first plane in after [the airport] had been bombed by the British. (I had been in Cairo during the attack, as head of the UN Information Centre.) His primary job that day was to speak to President Nasser and to establish a specific working agreement with the Egyptian Government which would, in a concrete way, implement the broad agreement to accept the UN peacekeeping force and enable it to carry out its task. Very soon the question of a Canadian contingent came up. The Queen’s Own Rifles of Calgary were on standby and designated for UNEF service. Nasser expressed serious concern that, with the name of the regiment and their uniform quite similar to the British, Canadian soldiers might not be safe from popular attack. Burns worked out a compromise that suited him. UNEF had plenty of rifle regiments. But what they needed was administrative staff to look after communications, transport, supply and air reconnaissance. It was perfectly acceptable to Nasser to have Canadians in these roles.

“This was significant about Burns: when he took over, he acted in terms of the immediate needs for peacekeeping. For example, the Danes and Norwegians arrived in Egypt on November 15 and the same week they were put into the middle of Port Said because he thought this was a difficult, tense situation. The British and French troops are there, they have done a lot of damage with considerable loss of life, and the presence of an international force there with their blue helmets will have a quietening influence.

“The British and French stayed there until December 22. After General Burns, on the advice of the Secretary-General, discussed with the commanders a timetable for withdrawal, it was agreed it would take about a month to get out all their equipment and staff. I don’t think there was any stalling. On the other hand, the Israelis certainly stalled over evacuating Gaza. Led by the Yugoslav contingent, UNEF had taken over El ‘Arish from the evacuating Israelis on January 14. The Indians were in the desert close by; the Indonesians were at El Kuntilla close to the Egyptian-Israeli frontier. The Israelis continued to occupy Rafah, at the southern-most point of the Gaza Strip. They claimed they were awaiting assurance that UNEF would administer Gaza when it moved in. General Burns came up several times from his headquarters on the Canal to discuss the arrangements for entry, without success. Even after the Israelis had agreed to withdraw under the terms of the General Assembly resolution, following pressure from the United Nations and the United