

---

## E.L.M. Burns Not So Far East of Suez

■ Lester Pearson gained worldwide fame and the Nobel Peace Prize for the negotiations that established the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) in November 1956, and that defused a crisis that could have exploded far beyond the Middle East. It is fair, though, to say that Pearson's success might easily have turned sour within weeks if there had not been a remarkable soldier on hand to create the United Nations Emergency Force and lead it through some very sensitive situations. Lt.-Gen. E.L.M. "Tommy" Burns was both available and experienced in the politics and the logistical problems of the region; he had been chief of staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), based in Jerusalem, since August 1954. J. King Gordon, who was seconded from his post as director of the UN Information Centre in Cairo to be public relations officer on the UNEF staff, says today: "Pearson's reputation for peacekeeping could not have been gained without this partnership."

General Burns wrote his own detailed account of the UNEF operation along the Suez Canal and into the Sinai in his very readable book, *Between Arab and Israeli*. In that book, he describes a little of his military career and the reasoning that led him into service with the United Nations. A Montrealer, he was commissioned in 1915 from the Royal Military College into the Royal Canadian Engineers, fought on the Western Front and, between the wars, was for five years in charge of Canadian military mapping. In the Second World War he commanded the 1st Canadian Corps in Italy, leading it to its successful assault on the Gothic Line. He retired as a major-general in 1946 to join the civil service and become deputy minister of Veterans Affairs. In the preface to his book he wrote:

"I was happy in the service, and felt I was pursuing an honourable profession, and was sustained by the philosophy that war, however regrettable many of its features, was inevitable in the then state of development of the human race; and that peoples who refused to contemplate the possibility of war, and indeed to prepare for it, would be likely to be pushed off the world's stage by those who still thought of war as a means of settling differences not otherwise reconcilable.

"The atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki changed all that thinking. I had seen the destruction of countless years of human effort which had been wreaked by the airmen in their blitzes—in London, in many of the smaller cities in Italy, and above all in the Ruhr. This desolation was spread by the 'conventional' high explosive bomb. It did not need pages of laboured scientific and humanitarian explanation to convince me that there could be no quarrel between the so-called civilized nations whose settlement would be worth paying the price of the destruction that would be caused by an atom war.

"So, war being something to be avoided at almost any cost, the alternative way to settle international differences had to be some supranational machinery for the purpose.... Whatever the imperfections of the United Nations Organization, the ideal of the prevention of a war which would destroy countless million man-years of thought and labour was there, in the United Nations Charter. Everyone who believed in that ideal—that common-sense alternative