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The following interview with Thomas Ferland of the Canadian contingent serving with the UN force in Cyprus took place September 4.

How did you come to be serving in Cyprus?

I was in the Armed Forces and they asked for a certain number of volunteers to come here as part of a Canadian contingent.

What is the difference between the regular Armed Forces and the peacekeeping force?

The peacekeeping force is installed in a country in order to keep the peace, act as a kind of police and try to keep both sides out of conflict. We wear the uniform of the Canadian Armed Forces, but with the blue beret of the UN.

Are the peacekeeping forces still supervising the cease-fire between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities?

Our position is between the two – right on the line. We act like a frontier between them.

Are any other countries represented in the UN force?

Several, but each of them is assigned a special area.

What is your impression of serving with the force?

It's an experience – a very good experience, to travel around the world and work abroad for six months in another country where the languages, the customs, the food and the climate are different. It's a lot different to Canada; we learn a lot.

Do you have much contact with the population?

Yes. We are living in a very populous area of the city (Nicosia) and we are in constant contact with the Greeks.

What is your observation of these people?

Different to us, different customs, but good individuals. The people are a bit Americanized.

Can you describe one of your typical days?

After waking, we do 12-hour shifts involving guard duty and observing...we take note of every movement on both sides, day and night, for 12 hours at a time. After a shift, another group comes along. It is like this all the time.

One section does guard duty at one observation post for one month. After that we change posts.

An average day is 12 hours and is spent mostly at one of these posts.

How long are you serving in Cyprus?

I have been here for six months, and have only five days to go before heading home!