

No Quarrel Worth the Price of Global Destruction

Although Lester B. Pearson was responsible for establishing Canada's reputation as an international peacekeeper in 1956, he received a strong assist from Lt.-Gen. E.L.M. Burns, a Canadian war veteran who had served as Chief of Staff to the Jerusalem-based United Nations Truce Supervision Organization since 1954. When the first United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF I) was formed, at then Secretary of State Pearson's initiative, Burns became its commander.

Burns, a native of Montreal who died in 1985, was first commissioned to the Royal Canadian Engineers in 1915 and commanded the 1st Canadian Corps in Italy

during the Second World War. His steady leadership, and his knowledge of the politics and logistics of Middle East peacekeeping, contributed heavily to the success of UNEF I.

In his memoirs, General Burns recalled that the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of the Second World War had persuaded him of the need for peace. "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," he wrote. "The ideal of the pre-

vention 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 had a duty to do what they could to make this a reality."

King Gordon, who worked with General Burns at UNEF I, recalled the commander as a calm, considerate, impeccably organized and highly respected leader.

"Burns was a highly professional military man and he carried enormous respect," Gordon said. "He . . . knew the situation inside out; he had great intelligence and also great curiosity, and he made a point of discovering the political situation behind

everything. He was not simply the military commander; he was also a political figure as representative of the UN Secretary-General."

Sir Brian Urquhart, retired UN Under-Secretary General for Special Political Affairs, recalls General Burns as "very low-key, a very skeptical guy, which is what you need to be in UN peacekeeping. He was a very good organizer, he had a very clear idea of the political situation, and of course he had a lot of experience in the truce supervision business." In a job that called for a lot of improvisation, he said General Burns "was pretty impressive and highly intelligent, and did an excellent job of running an experimental operation."



Photo: Canadian Forces, WO Vic Johnson

Canadian troops play a leading role in UN peacekeeping missions the world over.

- participation of 1 145 troops and observers in the second United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF II) sent to supervise the ceasefire between Egyptian and Israeli forces and later to supervise the redeployment of these forces in the buffer zones created in the Suez Canal sector and the Sinai peninsula;

- dispatching of 117 personnel to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) from April to September 1978.

Lt.-Col. Don Ethel is a veteran Canadian peacekeeper who served as senior Canadian military observer for the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) between 1984 and 1987 and as deputy chief of staff for the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) between Syria and Israel from 1984 to 1986.

He said the success of UN peacekeeping operations is based on three key elements — reliability, credibility, and confidence. "You must be totally impartial, you must be totally honest, and you must not attempt to do something which would favour one side or the other," he said.

A Recognized Authority

At the official level, Canada has been recognized as a leading expert in international peacekeeping. Continuing field experience has enabled Canadian specialists to identify the critical factors that determine the success of any peacekeeping initiative.

The peacekeeping mission either is the result of a political settlement between the parties to the conflict, or reflects their expressed interest in seeking such a settlement. The parties must agree to a ceasefire and must

accept the presence, composition and mandate of the peacekeeping force.

The peacekeeping force has a clear mandate, has sufficient freedom of movement to meet its responsibilities, and has appropriate authority to defend itself in case of attack. A political authority, preferably the UN, is responsible for supervising and supporting the mission, and for arranging a fair and equitable method of financing the operation.

Participation in the UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (the Committee of 33) has given Canada many opportunities to recommend improvements to the peacekeeping process. In recent years, these efforts have emphasized the need for adequate financial support for peacekeeping operations, advance preparation and wider participation by UN member states, and standardization of operating procedures and training.