

# Canadian Soldiers In Desert Must Be Doctors And Diplomats

Canadian troops with the United Nations Emergency Force along the Egyptian-Israeli border must be diplomats and doctors as well as soldiers. This account of a typical desert patrol by a squadron commander was written by a Canadian Press reporter who travelled with him.

By DAVE McINTOSH  
FORT McAVITY, Sinai Desert (CP)—In the same parched desert where Moses received the Ten Commandments, Canadian soldiers are extending a helping hand to the nomadic Bedouin spiritual descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

The 120 members of the reconnaissance squadron of Lord Strathcona's Horse from Calgary are here in patrol 23 desolate, sandy miles of the Egyptian-Israeli border for the United Nations Emergency Force.

Between patrols, carried out by leaping jeep in windless heat or raging sandstorm, the Canadians truck water for the Bedouins, treat blubs (the children often stumble into campfires) or take the sick and derelict to the Norwegian hospital at Camp Rafah, the UN's Middle East base in the Sinai.

On a February day, Maj. Ron Stevenson, 36, of Calgary and Vancouver, squadron commander, made a 75-mile patrol to his two desert outposts, Fort Harvey and Fort McAvity. He took his interpreter, Al, with him in the jeep. The day was hot, the sky clear.

Stevenson drove down a sandy track along the ditch marking the armistice line with the Gaza Strip. The ditch fills in constantly with sand and has to be dug out. Soon he came to Fort Harvey, the northern end of the Canadian patrol area along the Israeli-Egyptian border.

**GIVE MEDICAL HELP**

Three Bedouins with horribly swollen limbs sat in the scrub outside the barbed wire while a woman tended their camels. Stevenson went out to look at them and made arrangements for them to be taken to hospital.

"We all have a go at diag-

nosis," said Lieut. Terry Meach of Vernon, B.C., in charge of the 20 men at the fort.

"Eight or 10 Bedouins come in off the desert every morning for sick parade and we take a typical desert patrol. A Bedouin doctor comes once a week, on Tuesday, and 40 or 50 show up."

There is a story that a corporal diagnosed a woman's ailment as acute appendicitis. She was taken to hospital at Camp Rafah. She had acute pyelitis.

Stevenson drove on, up dune and down dune. The hills of Hebron in Israel appeared on the left.

"We have to keep the Bedouins back 300 metres from the frontier," he said. "You can see where the scrub is grazed right up to the 500-metre mark. The Bedouins are selling their sheep and goats already and there is going to be starvation. We may have to relax the 500-metre rule if we can."

"But we have to keep them back from the border. If they go over, there may be a shooting incident and we might get involved."

"There's been only one incident in the last year or so, that was when an Israeli patrol came inside for three or four miles. Whenever we see an Israeli patrol we follow along parallel, on this side of the frontier."

**GRAVES AT HAND**

Stevenson's jeep caught up with two others on patrol.

"I wish we'd see some action," said Tpr. Rene Deschene of Charry, Que., driver of one of the jeeps.

Twenty Canadian soldiers have died serving with the UNEF. They are buried in a special section of Gaza military cemetery, Arab children bring flowers to Canadian visitors to the cemetery, calling "bakbeesh, bakbeesh, give me a tip."

Stevenson's jeep plunged down a steep slope and a few minutes later came to Wadi el Hareid, one of the main watering holes for the Israeli assault across the Sinai in 1966. The gravel landscape was pocked by old foxholes.

"The whole area is littered

with land mines," said Stevenson. "The Bedouins have picked everything else clean. We tried to put up signposts to mark the frontier. The Bedouins took them, split the post into four for table legs and used the sign for the toilet."

The frontier is marked by old oil drums filled with cement. The Canadians have named each barrel after a Canadian city or town so that, suddenly, New Moncton, Sherbrooke or Moose Jaw pops up out of the desert. The drums had to be filled with cement so that the Bedouins would make off with them as water containers.

**SAW FIRST TREE**

Stevenson climbed out of the broad trail and continued to follow the low sandy track, almost indiscernible at times because of sand drifts. A few yards away, there was a similar track on the Israeli side.

Stevenson stopped to pay a courtesy call at a Yugoslav outpost. The Yugoslav officer in charge had his right arm in a sling. He said he had broken it playing volleyball.

The track almost disappeared. Then there was a tree, the first Stevenson had seen since he had left Camp Rafah. One morning a Canadian patrol had found a Bedouin hanging—the "hung" has since been called the "hanging tree."

A few minutes later, Stevenson arrived at a 125-year-old well which the Canadians call Niagara Falls. A Bedouin was pulling up water. Three others, one wearing a Sam Browne belt over his white robe, were tending three camels, some goats and donkeys.

Stevenson exchanged greetings with the Bedouins in Arabic, then drove on. The jeep became stuck twice in deep sand on slope Stevenson backed up and made it on the second try, flying over the top of the dune like a surfboard.

He got Fort McAvity on his jeep radio to tell of his approach.

**SHORT OF WATER**

"We always keep in touch," he said. "We once had a patrol lost for six hours. You never know what might happen."

Stevenson reached one of his Bah for tea and cake. The local dignitary, called the Black Sheik because no Canadian has ever been able to pronounce his real name.

The sheik, who heads a tribe of some 3,000 Bedouins, greeted Stevenson warmly. His problem, of course, was water. His water barrels were leaking. A Canadian truck which carries water to the outposts fills barrels that the Bedouins leave by the track. This can save a Bedouin a two-day trip by camel to Bah where the Canadians have built a water tower for the desert men.

Stevenson promised to help repair the barrels.

Through the interpreter, the sheik said some of the members of his tribe are starving because of lack of rain. It had rained only four or five days in the last year.

The Canadians already had proof the sheik was speaking the truth. In a children's ward back at Bah where the Canadians treated with the matchstick legs, bloated stomachs and wide striae of malnourished children, a year-old baby, perhaps a year old, had the age of a person of 25.

**WOULD DIE IN DESERT**

Sometimes the Canadians cry when a Bedouin waves them to a stop in the desert wastes and hands them a pitifully small, dirty bundle of starvation.

Sometimes the parents don't want to take the children back because they know the same thing will happen all over again. A little girl with legs paralysed by polio plays in the children's ward. She can't be taken back to the desert because she would die.

"I guess she will be here as long as the UN is here," said the Norwegian doctor in charge of the hospital. "We can't pronounce her name. She has been here a year and we just call her, our little mascot, 'Daisy'."

The sheik asked Stevenson to tea.

Stevenson said he couldn't think of taking tea with the sheik during Ramadan because the sheik himself couldn't take any. He would have tea with the sheik on his first visit after Ramadan, the Muslim holy period of dawn-to-sunset fasting.

The sheik was obviously delighted and impressed with Stevenson's reply. The major had poked up such pointers from the previous commander, Maj. Spike Malone of Ottawa, who used to sit with the sheiks in their meeting huts and talk with them by the hour, sipping tea and eating goat's meat. The sheiks frequently drop in at the

days before and had already experienced a four-day sandstorm.

On their first night in the Sinai, Tpr. Ron Mulligan of Toronto and Tpr. Chuck Munn of Calgary had to go out into the desert to guard a broken down jeep for the night.

"That kind of thing shakes you up your first night here," Mulligan said.

**TESTED BY BEDOUINS**

Munn said the dewa patrol goes out at 5:15 a.m. A patrol has four men and two jeeps. The jeeps carry Bren guns.

Each man makes one or two patrols a day. Each lasts roughly two hours and follows the same track taken by Stevenson along the frontier except for side journeys to chase the

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