

A Memorial to Recognise Australian Peacekeeping

Tim Ford

Sixty Years of Peacekeeping

On 14 September 2007, Australia will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the first deployment of four Australians as United Nations peacekeepers to Indonesia as part of the UN Good Offices Mission. Since then, Australia has contributed over 35,000 Australian military and police to more than fifty peace operations around the world¹.

A variety of events are being planned to mark this important anniversary. These include a conference titled “60 Years of Australian Peacekeeping” at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, and commemorative ceremonies in most Australian State capitals and a number of regional centres. In addition, a “60th Anniversary of Australian Peacekeeping” limited edition gold coin will be released by the Royal Australian Mint, which will be followed later by a range of other memorabilia including a joint stamp/coin issue.

It is fitting that at this time, the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial will move into an exciting stage. In conjunction with the anniversary, the National Capital Authority will release the Design Brief for an international competition which will be used to select the final design for the Memorial. This project, which has been some years in development, achieved its first major milestone in May of this year when the Prime Minister announced that the Canberra National Memorials Committee had allocated a site for this Memorial on Anzac Parade. Finally the significance of Australia’s Peacekeeping record is to be appropriately recognized.

For many years Australian veterans of peacekeeping missions have felt that such a Memorial should be built in Canberra to honor all those who have and will continue to serve on peacekeeping operations. This Memorial will represent all those from the Defence Force, the Federal, State and Territory Police Forces and Government Agencies who have served, and in some cases died, on peacekeeping operations commanded or authorized by the United Nations or sanctioned by the Government of Australia.

Peacekeeping Today

Today’s peacekeeping activity around the world is more significant than ever before. At the moment, there are some 18 United Nations “Blue Helmet” Peacekeeping Operations active, involving over 105,000 military, police and international civilians from 117 countries.

¹ For a full list of these peacekeeping operations, see the Department of Veterans Affairs web site at: <http://www.dva.gov.au/commem/commac/studies/anzacsk/res2.htm>

In addition to the UN commanded missions, there are a number of other peace operations being conducted internationally. These missions are being coordinated by various regional organizations, or by “ad hoc” coalitions of interested nations. Most have been authorized by a United Nations Security Council resolution.

The principal role of the military in these peace operations is to provide the basic security which encourages the peace process to strengthen. This allows all the other actors, who come from a wide range of UN agencies, international financial organizations and various other international and local aid and humanitarian organizations, to effectively coordinate their activities and to work with the local community to develop a stable environment leading to a sustainable peace.

While there is no specified enemy force operating against the military in such operations, the general situation is often very dangerous and volatile, and peacekeepers are often directly targeted by groups that do not support the peace process. Furthermore, the location of these missions is often remote, the local infrastructure and utilities are normally destroyed, the areas to be covered can be vast, and there can be scattered landmines and other hazards that need to be cleared. In many of these situations crime is rampant, there are serious ethnic tensions and large distressed populations are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance.

International police provide a critical contribution in today's peace operations. They assist in the establishment of the rule of law in conflict areas, and at times are given executive authority for community policing. They support the local police to regain a position of control and respect in the local community through improved training, structures and equipment. In some cases, international police provide formed police units that can assist a developing nation to counter internal disturbances and rioting.

Australian Peacekeeping

Australia contributes significantly to today's peace operations with military and police contingents and with civilian experts in a wide range of supporting roles such as governance, institution building, electoral reform, and border control. Australia is presently supporting UN missions in the Middle East, in the Sudan, Cyprus, and Timor Leste, and is a partner in coalition peace operations in the Sinai, in the Solomon Islands, in Afghanistan and in Iraq.

Peacekeeping has been a long standing commitment for the ADF with a variety of smaller contingents and individuals deployed across a wide range of missions over the years. This increased in the 1980s and 1990s with some significant unit sized contributions to peace operations in Africa and Asia, and this has been followed recently by our major contributions in the near region in Bougainville, Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands. Our record from these operations is very

sound and Australian military are well renowned as effective and flexible peacekeepers.

Australian police have an excellent and long term record in international peacekeeping, with contingents in Cyprus continually since 1964, but recently with much larger contingents deployed in the near region, including to Timor Leste, Bougainville and the Solomon Islands. To respond to this surge, the Australian Federal Police has now created an International Deployment Group, comprising police from federal, state and territory police forces, which are being specifically trained and prepared for offshore peacekeeping and stabilisation deployments. We have seen the benefit of this capability in their partnership with the ADF and other actors in the recent regional peace operations.

Construction of the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial

The proposed Australian Peacekeeping Memorial will be designed to commemorate the courage, sacrifice, service and valour of Australians, given in the same spirit of service on peacekeeping operations, as do the other cenotaphs and memorials across Australia and on ANZAC Parade in Canberra. It will celebrate Australia's long and distinguished contribution to international peacekeeping over the past 60 years.

The site allocated on Anzac Parade for the Memorial is the one nearest to Constitution Avenue on the Campbell side. The brief for the memorial design will describe the form of the Memorial and the two stage process that will be used to review submissions. This will involve a jury of peacekeepers, artists and architects who will initially select a short list for further consideration, and then in a second stage recommend a winner to the Canberra National Memorials Committee. Based on previous experience, the NCA is expecting over one hundred entries from around the world to be submitted for consideration.

Entries for the design of the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial will be requested to ensure that the proposed Memorial will portray appropriate messages about Australian peacekeeping. The Memorial should record with pride the achievement of our peacekeepers, it should recognise the difficult and often dangerous nature of peace operations, it should acknowledge the sacrifices those peacekeepers and their families have suffered and it should educate the community about the noble and positive impact of peace operations around the world.

You can find out much more about the plans for the Memorial by visiting the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial Project (APMP) web site at www.peacekeepingmemorial.org.au. Veterans of Australian peacekeeping are encouraged to join the APMP to provide support and offer their comments on the development of the Memorial.

It is estimated the Memorial will cost over three million dollars to construct. The Government has contributed an initial grant of \$200, 000 and hopefully will provide further financial support. Corporate Australia, particularly those with a close association with Australian military and police contributions overseas, has been approached to support the building fund. We would appreciate support from others in the Australian community². Peacekeeping veterans and their organisations are encouraged to consider contributing a donation to the construction on this important national memorial.

The opening of the Memorial is planned for September 2009. Activities recognising the sixty years that Australians have been contributing to international peacekeeping in September 2007 will be an appropriate forerunner to this significant event.

In Memory

Peacekeeping is a difficult and often dangerous assignment, Australian contingents led by young Australian military officers and NCOs and police, supported by civilian experts, have performed very well over many years in these difficult circumstances. Unfortunately; as in other dangerous overseas operations, Australian peacekeepers have also suffered casualties. Some have died or been injured, and many have been traumatized by peace operations. We should remember them.

Major General (Ret) Tim Ford is an international peace and security consultant. He retired from the ADF in 2003 following a 40 year career culminating in command of 1st Division, followed by UN command in the Middle East and an appointment as the Military Adviser to the Secretary General in UN Headquarters in New York. He remains active as a mentor and adviser on peace operations. He is also currently the Chairman of the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial Committee and the Representative Colonel Commandant of the RAA.

² All donations are tax free