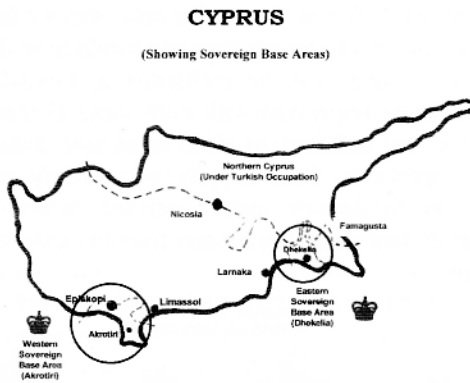


ONE OF OUR COLONIES IS MISSING

Simon Smith



A recent article referred fleetingly to the Royal Gibraltar Police as a “Colonial” force in the 21st Century. Of course, both Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands, like many other Colonies, are now dependent territories with local councils and lots of input and control including Senior Officers and responsible politicians.

The last British Colony is in Cyprus. Surely not? I hear you cry, Cyprus achieved independence in 1960. Well, yes and no, as the saying goes. 99 square miles was retained as British territory and is now referred to as the “SBA” or Sovereign Base Areas.

The history of the SBA Police is fairly straight forward. Originally, Cyprus was a Greek populated island in the Ottoman Empire. In 1878 at the time the Ottoman Empire was crumbling and the Suez Canal was opening, the British were put temporarily into possession as a “Tenant”, so to speak, of the Island.

From the beginning, an Army Provost Officer was assigned to command what became the Cyprus Military Police. Despite the name, the Commandant was the only Military Policeman in the force, which was the equivalent to what the Indian Raj called a “Levy”. This is where the precedent came from. For instance, the British Indian “Catcher Levy” of 1835, now, of course, the Assam Rifles and part of India’s Central Police Service. By such comparison, the administration and functions of the Cyprus Military Police can be understood.

In 1914, on the outbreak of war, Cyprus was formally annexed from Turkey for the sake of legal completeness, Turkey having joined the other side in the war. Although Cyprus became the base for major operations in the Military field and was important in the liberation of the Middle East. Ottoman rule, the Civil Administration and Police was not immediately affected.

By the 1930s however, British Police Officers were recruited to support the Military Officer commanding the Police and, subsequently, the force became Cyprus Police. There it remained until independence, when the

new Republic took over the policing function for the main areas of the Island. Many Cypriot Senior Police Officers were of course ex Cyprus Police themselves, though obviously retirement eventually replaced these with locally trained personnel. Although the Republic’s Police wear powder blue uniforms and the language is Greek, any UK Officer would, even today, have no difficulty understanding the procedure of their service, subject to translation.

For those areas that remained in the SBA, of course, no such changes were necessary. To this day the SBA is administered by the British Commander and British Administrator, a Governor in all but name, with a Chief Civilian Officer, two District Officers in the Western and Eastern areas respectively. There remains a British Resident Judge, British Laws and British Courts and, underpinning them, 260 members of the SBA Police. The Chief Constable, Deputy Chief, two Chief Superintendents (Western and Eastern Area), two Chief Inspectors (CID and Admin) and an Inspector (Marine) are directly recruited from London. Indeed, the Marine Inspector, when the Marine units were recently revamped following Cyprus’s accession to the EU and the consequent increase in smuggling and people trafficking, continued the tradition of recruiting Military Officers as his previous post had been as the Senior Naval Officer on the Island.

Actually, to illustrate the importance of the SBAP and its liaison with the Republic’s Police, the people trafficking problem could not highlight its relevance more. Traditionally, the SBA Administrator relied upon the UK troops and RAF for support. However, the bases, though vital as transport, staging and listening posts for US/UK interests, do not have large quantities of troops available. The SBAP is therefore more necessary than ever. The “local” other ranks consist of four Superintendents and Inspectors, Sergeants and PCs. To the UK observer, except for the name badges, Officers look just like their UK counterparts. Unlike the Republic’s powder blue vehicles, the SBAP’s white Range Rovers and Transits, with their familiar red streak and Crown and Brunswick Star badges make it all look positively like home.

Many personnel also come to the UK on courses, strengthening the connection. However, make no mistake, there are no local Councils, let alone Ministers for Law and Order, such as in Gibraltar. This is a Force that is accountable only to the Civil Servant who is the Chief Officer Administration appointed by the Secretary of State.

However, the Force is no worse for it, and many UK Forces would be happy with the crime figures and clear up rates of the SBAP.

All in all, if any readers get the chance to see this Force when holidaying in Cyprus, it is a worthwhile exercise. The Officers are universally friendly and it is fair to say very proud of their history and their job. Indeed, many are 2nd or 3rd generation British Police Officers.

The Security Force Police

Though descended from the pre 1960 Force, it must be mentioned that a pre 1960 Force also continues to function on the Island, guarding the British bases. This was formed in 1952 as the War Department Auxiliary Constabulary to guard Army Depots and was, then, made up of local veterans of the Cyprus Regiment who had served to defend Cyprus during World War Two. The Force was, subsequently, commanded by Officers of the UK's War Department Constabulary (now the Ministry of Defence Police) until local ranks took over command in the 1970s. The name has been changed, by then, to Army Depot Police, although they were, indeed remain, locally employed civilians. After taking over perimeter security at RAF bases, however, the term "Army" was

no longer accurate and they were renamed "Security Force Police". There are, also, now 3rd generation officers amongst their ranks and their loyal service over the last 53 years has been unsung but unstinting.

I hope this has filled in a gap by identification of our existing real Colonial Forces, the only ones we have left and, comparatively, nearer than one would have thought. However, rather than be embarrassed, I would urge readers to be impressed with both these Forces. Both effective and efficient in their respective duties, and more importantly, both happily able to rely on local personnel to deliver such a service, which shows eloquently that the locals remain friendly, Colony or no Colony!



THE GENTLEMEN RIDE BY

Roy Ingleton

*If you wake at midnight, and hear a horse's feet,
Don't go drawing back the blind, or looking in the street.
Them that asks no questions isn't told a lie,
Watch the wall, my darling, while the Gentlemen go by.
Five and twenty ponies, trotting through the dark,
Brandy for the parson, 'baccy for the clerk;
Laces for a lady, letters for a spy,
And watch the wall my darling, while the Gentlemen ride by!*

Rudyard Kipling: *A Smuggler's Song*



A view of the Kentish coastline as frequented by smugglers

An unwise traveller, walking or riding in the vicinity of Kingsgate on the Isle of Thanet in the early hours of a cold, foggy morning in March 1769 might, if he were

very unfortunate, have stumbled upon a band of men standing or crouching on the cliff top, looking out over the so-called Botany Bay. Unfortunate, because this was