

AUSSIE CITED FOR BRAVERY

The editor of platypus gratefully acknowledges permission to reprint the following article in full from a recent edition of THE CYPRUS WEEKLY.

'Seeing the mines all around me made me even more nervous. Believe me I was shaking... my knees felt like jelly.'

These are the words of a brave man, Chief Inspector Jack Thurgar, 30, the Australian police officer who risked his life earlier this month by walking into a minefield to rescue a seriously wounded Greek Cypriot farmer who had just been blown up.

Thurgar, a soft-spoken six-footer, is being cited for bravery. 'We have recommended him very highly for gallantry', the Acting Australian High Commissioner in Cyprus, Miss Erika Grimwade, told the Cyprus Weekly.

It took a lot of persuading before Thurgar, of Scone, New South Wales agreed to talk to the Cyprus Weekly about the rescue, described by a National Guard officer as 'a very brave act indeed'.

'I remember it was my wife's birthday that day, and I had to tell her when I got home. She's used to the things I get up to, but then I never tell her anything until it's all over', he said.

On 9 October, he added, he was in the Omorphita suburb of Nicosia, supervising some farming work going on in the buffer zone between the National Guard and Turkish occupation forces.

His main concern, as well as that of the National Guard was to prevent any-

one straying into a large minefield. And that is precisely what happened.

'I saw an unauthorised farmer — that is a farmer who had not obtained clearance — go charging past the National Guard post driving his tractor straight into the minefield. The guardsmen yelled at him, obviously telling him to get out but he just went on', Thurgar said.

Cut in half

'He had harrowed about 100 yards and tried to turn round for another run when his left rear tyre struck a land mine. It cut the tractor in half.'

'The back part of the tractor and the driver were thrown some 30 ft up — it looked like a rocket, with lots of dust, and his tyres went shooting up.'

The driver, Chrysostomos Seas, of Athienou, had hit the mine within two minutes of entering the minefield.

'I could see the farmer was still alive. His left arm was lacerated and he managed to get on to his elbow. He was trying to wave at us. I could see he was covered in oil and he was blackened all over from the oil and the blast.'

'His shirt was completely blown away from his body and the front of his shirt was absolutely peppered with small holes. The way he looked, I thought "Jesus. He's had it".'

Help

'He could not move his left arm or his feet. All he could do at this stage was put his right hand out in a gesture of help.'

Nine years ago Chief Inspector Thurgar was blown up by mines in Vietnam and badly wounded but he does not like talking about it now. 'I've

had experience with mines in Vietnam', he says simply.

Winch up

Getting a helicopter to the trapped tractor driver would take too long, he thought, and in the serious condition that the man was, time was vital.

'I could see how serious it was from the man's pleading motion, so I decided to go into the minefield myself. I told my sergeant not to allow anyone else in.'

'I could see old tractor tyre tracks and I thought if someone else could do it so could I. But I did not go as far as the tractor.'

Thurgar had gone some 50 yards into the minefield when he heard someone from the National Guard post shout: 'Go back, go back. There are more mines near the tractor'.

Like Jelly

But he was already half way to the badly injured man. 'I could not leave him there. I can tell you I was very, very, nervous. My knees felt like jelly.'

'I walked another ten yards or so, looking for prongs. Usually when anti-tank mines are laid it is normal practice to put anti-personnel mines around them. As I was going along I could see the big anti-tank mines. The rain had washed some of the earth away.'

'Seeing the mines all around made me physically even more nervous. Believe me I was shaking.'

'At this point I asked myself the question — is it worth it? But then I was no more than 30 yards from the man. His left leg from the heel to the knee was just

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one great lump of raw meat hanging out. I could see other large gashes over his legs and his trousers were blown away.

'The man was still conscious. Perhaps he could not hear due to the blast of the mine, but I'm sure he could see me.

'He tried to crawl across to me, holding his hand out, saying something incoherent. But I could see his eyes. They could tell a story. I'd never my whole life seen anything like it.

'I kept going and when I reached him he rolled from his side onto his back.

'I managed to get one arm under his

crutch and one under his head across the shoulders in a fireman's lift.

'He knew I had come for him but as it must have been very painful he was struggling.

'I got him over my shoulders and turning back trying to follow my footsteps, but even so, together we were almost 400 lb which would set off any mine if we were unlucky to step on one.

'The ground was hard and there were no tell-tale signs and I just had to take the chance. Also time was of such great importance that I had to take him out the short way — that is precisely the way you would expect the enemy to come in.'



When Thurgar got the wounded farmer to where he thought was safe, the U.N. economics officer, Captain Kevin Delaney of Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) applied shell dressings on the man's wounds.

Exactly 15 minutes from the moment the tractor hit the mine, a U.N. helicopter had landed on the scene and Captain Delaney and Warrant Officer Jim McGowan, also of Lord Strathcona's Horse put the wounded farmer carefully on a stretcher and then into the helicopter.

Thurgar flew in the same helicopter 'to keep the stretcher steady'. They landed at Wolseley Barracks and thence by truck to hospital. The entire operation, from the moment of the mine explosion to the time the man was accepted at the hospital, had taken half an hour.

'It was a U.N. team effort that got him out, a combination of everybody', Thurgar said.

'When I got back to the Mess I was filthy. My shirt was torn and although I've had it washed again and again, the stains of blood, oil and grit are still visible. I think I'll send it back to headquarters in Canberra to see if I can get a new one', he said.

Back at the Nicosia hospital, farmer Seas said: 'A shirt? You tell him I'll give him my own life if necessary. There's no way of repaying him for what he did'.

Miss Grimwade and Thurgar have been to see him in hospital and Seas said: 'They came to see me and brought flowers but I was so excited I can't remember which one of the two had brought the flowers or whether I thanked them'.

Thurgar is presently serving a second term of duty with the Australian Police detachment of the U.N. peacekeeping force in the island.

He was last in Cyprus in 1977 — Cyprus Weekly.

The Editor's **VIEWPOINT**

I mentioned in this column in the first edition of platypus that AFP offers many diverse and interesting career opportunities for members. In recent months a very important facet of the modern police role has been considerably broadened with the integration into AFP of the 'Narcs' — the members of the former Federal Bureau of Narcotics.

My personal view is that only good can come from this development; we as Members have gained new long-term career opportunities while, more importantly, the integration means that those former Narcotics agents now have a 'back-up' of an extra 2500 personnel to help them to combat the trafficking and distribution of illegal drugs.

The drugs problem is a frightening one. It is a problem that can only be solved by our entering a new era of police co-operation on State, national and international levels. I personally find it heartening that only a short time after the former Bureau was integrated into AFP, the Commissioners of all Australian police forces were meeting to plan concerted action against drugs and related crime.

I dare say there is a wide spectrum of views on specific

drug matters throughout the AFP. Some members may personally favour the so-called 'decriminalisation' of certain 'soft' drugs. My own view is that we take enough drugs as it is without legalising new ones. Why would it be desirable to further pollute our bodies with foreign substances? Do we not imperil our health to a great degree as it is by using (and abusing) the pleasures of nicotine and alcohol?

I do not wish to use the VIEWPOINT column as a pulpit, but my personal view is that apart from posing a general danger to our community, the drugs problem in Australia poses a specific threat to our young people and their chances for a happy, successful life. And it only follows that we must protect our children for are they not the leaders of tomorrow?

It is an unfortunate syndrome, but our children, often those in their teens, become victims of the drugs scene through 'peer group' pressures or, I suspect, often through the neglect, apathy or ignorance of parents. At the heart of the problem are the criminals who import and distribute drugs, motivated by the prospect of vast illicit profits.

As police, we have the unenviable task of enforcing the law against drugs. I believe that our chances of success in this area have been greatly enhanced in recent times. And we MUST succeed.