

# THE JOURNAL

OF THE  
SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES  
ASSOCIATION





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OF THE SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES ASSOCIATION



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# ASSOCIATION NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

## PRIVACY NOTICE RELATING TO THE GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATIONS

As you may be aware, on the 25 May 2018 new data protection laws come into force which will include the General Data Protection Regulations (EU2016/679) and the UK Data Protection Act, 2018, as well as other supporting legislation.

Under the terms of the new legislation, the SAF Association is a data controller as it holds personal data on those who have joined the Association as a member. The Association does not hold special category data on members. The personal data held consists of details of their service in Oman, ranks held, decorations awarded; appointments undertaken; as well as their contact details. The Association needs to maintain and process personal data obtained legitimately from the members and held in order to communicate with them on developments within the Association; to advise them of annual events and the relevant arrangements; to publish an annual Journal; to promote historical understanding; and to provide news of members and former colleagues. These purposes are legitimate interests for the Association under the terms of the new legislation.

All personal data held by the Association will be maintained under secure conditions and will only be used for legitimate purposes which meet the objectives of the SAF Association and the members. Personal data will never be shared with third party organisations or individuals. Members have an entitlement to expect that the Association will only maintain data which is as correct and up-to-date as is possible and should notify the Membership Secretary of any significant changes. Members have a right to request that any personal data held that is incorrect is erased and corrected and, if there is a need to make such a request, should contact the Membership Secretary.

If a member believes that the Association has not complied fully with the relevant legislation, they have a right to refer the matter to the Information Commissioner. However, the Information Commissioner would expect a member to have made a reasonable attempt to resolve the matter with the Association before doing so.

The Association has recently sent to all members a proforma which provides for fresh consent to be given to maintain and process personal data, as a matter of legitimate interest to the Association and to the members. If you have not completed and returned this proforma, either by email or in the form of hard copy, could you please do so to help us to continue to operate in the interest of members.

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Visit the SAF Association website and see 'The Journal of the Sultan's Armed Forces Association' online using the latest page turning technology. Pass the link to this year's issue on to colleagues and friends.

[www.oman.org.uk](http://www.oman.org.uk)

## FOR YOUR DIARY

SUNDAY 19 MAY • SCOTTISH DINNER

FRIDAY 15 JUNE • CURRY LUNCH

SUNDAY 17 JUNE • SON/RNO LUNCH

SUNDAY 29 JULY • WESSEX LUNCH

FRIDAY 7 SEPTEMBER  
SALALAH/LADIES DINNER NIGHT

FRIDAY 23 NOVEMBER • SAF DINNER

## PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

Front Cover: *Shabab Oman II arriving in Malta*

Chairman's Preface	6
Chairman's Dinner Speech	8
Return to Dhofar 2015	9
Shabab Oman II in Malta	12
47th National Day	14
Armed Forces Day	16
Royal Office	17
The National Defence College	19
Technical Military College	20
Ministry of Defence	21
Office of Secretary General at MOD	24
Office of COSSAF	25
Royal Guard	26
Military Sports Teams	27
Royal Army of Oman	29
Royal Air Force of Oman	31
Royal Navy of Oman	33
Memories of SAF 1966-1968	35
Arrival	48
Operation Storm	53
The Artillery Troop First Deployed to Dhofar	58
Gunners in Oman	60
Sultan's Armed Forces Engineers (SAFE)	61
The Sarfait Tripod	63
Reunion Lunches and Dinners	65
News About People	69
Remembering...	71

**2018 SAF ASSOCIATION DINNER**

will take place in the

ARMY AND NAVY CLUB, PALL MALL, LONDON

**FRIDAY 23 NOVEMBER 2018**

PLEASE APPLY BY 16 NOVEMBER 2018 AT THE LATEST

To: Neil Fawcett

Two Oaks, Mayfield Fold, Burnley BB11 2RN.

**2018 SAF ASSOCIATION CURRY LUNCH**

will take place in the

ARMY AND NAVY CLUB, PALL MALL, LONDON

**FRIDAY 15 JUNE 2018**

PLEASE APPLY BY 8 JUNE 2018 AT THE LATEST

To: Neil Fawcett

Two Oaks, Mayfield Fold, Burnley BB11 2RN.

**ASSOCIATION TIES**

Green Ties and a few Red ones are currently available from the Membership Secretary, address on page 3. Cost is £25. Cheques should be made payable to the SAF Association or by BACS transfer to SAF Association. Sort Code 40-15-17. Account No: 72019116.

**SALALAH/DHOFAR LADIES DINNER NIGHT****FRIDAY 7 SEPTEMBER, 2018**

The next Salalah/Dhofar Reunion Dinner will be held at the Army & Navy Club, 36 Pall Mall, London. on Friday 7 September 2018.

If you wish to attend and are not on George Correa's database, please contact him on: [georgecorrea@btinternet.com](mailto:georgecorrea@btinternet.com) or 01722 742835.

*Salaams and shukran*  
**George**

**SON/RNO CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF THE SAF ASSOCIATION**

will take place in the

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE ROYAL NAVY  
PRINCESS ROYAL GALLERY, PORTSMOUTH**SUNDAY 17 JUNE 2018 • 1200 onwards**

Drinks followed by 3 course lunch (further wine available at cost price).

INVITATION: Includes entry into the museum and guests will also receive access to 3 sets of galleries, which are all in the same building as the Princess Royal Gallery and are open from 0900-1700.

Please be aware that this does not include access to any other locations on site such as HMS Victory or Mary Rose.

GUESTS: Wives/partners most welcome • RIG: Jackets and ties

COST: Still to be confirmed but approx. £50 per head

CAR PARKING: Available outside Unicorn Gate at a reasonable price

Contact: Robin Gainsford • [robingainsford@hotmail.com](mailto:robingainsford@hotmail.com)**THE 33RD ANNUAL SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES (SAF) ASSOCIATION SCOTTISH DINNER**

will take place at

DOUNESIDE HOUSE, THE MACROBERT TRUST  
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[www.dounesidehouse.co.uk](http://www.dounesidehouse.co.uk) • [manager@dounesidehouse.co.uk](mailto:manager@dounesidehouse.co.uk)*You are warmly invited to attend on***SATURDAY 19 MAY 2018***Pre-dinner drinks and canapés from 7:30pm. Dinner 8:15pm.***THE 33rd SCOTTISH SAF ASSOCIATION DINNER WILL TAKE PLACE ON SATURDAY 19 MAY 2018 AT DOUNESIDE HOUSE.**

If you wish to reserve accommodation, please contact the Manager at Douneside House and indicate that you will be attending the SAF Dinner on Saturday 19 May. Most of those attending spend at least two nights, including Friday, and those having Dinner on that evening usually sit together as a group. Alternatively, please contact the Manager to reserve the Dinner only. [manager@dounesidehouse.co.uk](mailto:manager@dounesidehouse.co.uk) Please copy [jonathan\\_forbes@hotmail.com](mailto:jonathan_forbes@hotmail.com) into your communications with Douneside House.

Information concerning booking procedure for this 33rd Annual Scottish Dinner, accommodation and other dinner related detail is available from: **Jonathan Forbes:** [jonathan\\_forbes@hotmail.com](mailto:jonathan_forbes@hotmail.com) or 01975 562509

**THE DINNER IS OPEN TO ALL SAF MEMBERS, NOT ONLY THOSE IN SCOTLAND. NE SCOTLAND IN MAY IS A GOOD TIME FOR HOLIDAYS.**

**2018 WESSEX LUNCH**

The Wessex Lunch will once again take the form of a curry lunch at the **Sherborne Golf Club, Higher Clatford, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 4RN. [www.sherbornegolfclub.co.uk](http://www.sherbornegolfclub.co.uk) at 1200 hours, Sunday 29 July 2018.** The price remains at £25 per head, which will include curry, choice of four, the usual accompaniments, choice of desserts, coffee, wines, beers and soft drinks. Other drinks may be purchased from the bar for cash. Booking requests should be made to **John Kirkham, The Old Rectory, Oake, Taunton, Somerset TA4 1AR,** together with a cheque made payable to 'Wessex Lunch'. Please indicate if you have any special dietary requirements or need a table with easy access for those with physical disabilities. If a receipt or acknowledgement is required please provide an e-mail address or SAE. Early booking is advised as places are limited.

**COST OF OVERSEAS POSTAGE FOR THE JOURNAL**

As you will be well aware the cost of posting the Journal overseas is expensive. There are a number of overseas members and it has now been agreed that overseas members read the online version which is on the SAF website. A hard copy would be posted to those who requested it. To help planning, would any overseas members who are not content with decision, please let the Hon Sec know at [neil.fawcett@btinternet.com](mailto:neil.fawcett@btinternet.com)

**THIS WILL APPLY FROM THIS ISSUE.**

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# CHAIRMAN'S PREFACE

*by Mike Lobb*



they are predominately along the south coast from Cornwall to Kent. The only two regular regional social events have been the Wessex Luncheon, ably managed by **Johnnie Kirkham** and **Nick Holbrook** and the Scottish Dinner. These have proved immensely popular over the years. We will be looking to increase the number of regional events in the near future so if you would like one in your area and can assist, please contact me or **Kieron Shaw**. We also support other unit events as they occur but the Association's flagship events remain the Annual Dinner in November and a summer Curry Lunch in June, which this year will both feature the '50th'.

As with all Associations the Committee is only as good as the support we receive from our membership. We are committed to maintaining the spirit of mutual friendship and to meet that aim we organise and help with events. Thereafter it is over to you, in the company of your colleagues! The Committee does not have a monopoly on good ideas so if you have something which may interest other members or enhance the Association please share the information with us.

The Association e-mails have been running for over a year and have proved highly successful in

I took over from **Nigel** as Chairman in June 2017. I am sure that, like me, members of the Association will be delighted to have heard the news recently that HM has awarded Nigel the Order of Oman for his many and varied services to Oman over the past 50 years. My first task, on taking over, was to ask **Gordon Allen** to conduct a review of the Association, quantify our assets, count our members and listen to them to see what we could achieve with the resources at our disposal.

I am pleased to report that as the Association approaches its 50th Anniversary in 2018, it is in good shape. There are just under a thousand members (985 to date) of whom 130 are Omani. Most of the membership lives in the UK with about a 100 scattered around the globe from Australia to Zimbabwe. Moving into the 21st century, **Neil** had the membership's details on a database and has now put it on a Geographical Information System (GIS) to plot where in the UK most of the membership is located. Interestingly,

communicating with members on topics which cannot wait for the next issue of the Journal – unfortunately, these are usually deaths and details of funeral arrangements. However, it has also proved useful in locating members and putting them together when asked to do so. **Keith Ryde** joined the Committee in October 2017 and took over responsibility for both the Association's e-mails and restructuring the website. So please keep visiting to see the changes as we progress.

I visited Oman for a week in mid-November 2017 to meet with COSSAF and the Heads of Service. I was encouraged with their positive support for the Association to continue so that the experience from current members is passed to the next generation now serving in Oman.

I wish you all a happy and healthy 2018 and look forward to meeting you at one (or more) of the events in the coming year. ■



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# CHAIRMAN'S DINNER SPEECH

24 NOVEMBER 2017

Your Excellency, My Lord, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Ahlan Wa Sahlan Kulkum, Marahaba, and Welcome particularly to **His Excellency Abdulaziz Al Hinai**, His Majesty The Sultan's Ambassador to the United Kingdom, who has always been a staunch supporter of The Association.

Unfortunately, Our President, Fareeq Ahmed Harith, who had planned to be here is unable to be with us as a result of six weeks' absence from his office due to a hip replacement. We wish him a speedy recovery. I saw him last Sunday and he sends his greetings and hopes we have a good evening.

Welcome to **Commodore Said Al Maqbali**, the Military Attaché and his assistant attachés, **Group Captain Ali Al Habsi** – our congratulations to you on your promotion and **Major Badr Yousef Khalfan Albusaidi** – many of you may have served with his father as I did. What you probably won't know is that he has a brother, **Khalid**, who is in the Army Headquarters and whom I met last week. Welcome as well to **Group Captain Zahran Al Busaidi** who is here in the UK on the Rcds Course.

A welcome too, to the next generation of the Frontier Force who seem to be regenerating themselves, **James** and **Charles Isaacs** and **James** and **Eddie Ward**. I am particularly pleased that you are here this evening because it will enable me to report in The Journal that under my chairmanship, the average age of attendees at the dinner has dropped by ten years!

Having said that I was in Oman last week, I was invited to The National Day Parade which was held in Al Khoud Police Special Task Force Centre. His Majesty took the salute and he looked well. I also met **Al Muttasim** (if you don't know him, he commanded me amongst other things). He is looking well. He is a member of The Association and wished to be remembered to all those who served with him and wanted us to enjoy ourselves this evening.

It is customary on these occasions to report on the state of The Association and I am pleased to inform you that we are in good shape. Our current strength is 985 of which 60 per cent are Army, 20 per cent Air Force, 10 per cent Navy and 10 per cent other units.



There are currently 88 loan service personnel, male and female in Oman and I was given the opportunity to speak with them about the benefits of The Association. I have high hopes of lowering the average age still further to ensure that The Association continues which, I might add, is the express wish of His Majesty and COSSAF.

Taking over the chairmanship in June this year seemed an appropriate juncture to conduct a review of The Association. **Gordon Allen**, to whom I am extremely grateful, has been the driving force behind this. **Keith Ryde** has taken over emails and the website. They have been responsible along with **Neil Fawcett**, for the questionnaire and increased communications with members. It has identified a preference for more regional events but because one solution does not suit everyone, whether that is lunch or dinner will be decided by the region. If anyone is keen to manage any of these events please contact **Kieron Shaw**.

I have two requests to ask of you. The first is from **Liwaa Abdullah Khamis**, CRNO. He would like any old photographs of the Navy from members. The details of his email will be put on our website and also sent by email to you. Incidentally RNO has produced a splendid coffee table book of *Shabab Oman I*, the sail training ship and he is sending 100 copies to the Embassy for those who served in the Navy. The second is from **Aqeed Hassan Al Mujaini** (soon to be Amed). He is The Association link with COSSAF in Oman. He is asking for articles for their Journal on your reminiscences of your service, preferably not about the war. About four pages, illustrated and... he knows you too well... he will pay! Again, details on the website shortly and circulated by email.

Ladies and gentlemen, by being here you are supporting The Association and I thank you. However, it is those members who are not here that we need to support us. So, if you know of anyone who is wavering, try to bring them with you in the future, particularly the Ladies. Without support we will dwindle. ■



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# RETURN TO DHOFAR 2015

*by Peter Sichel*

In early February 2015, I took my son and his wife to Dhofar to show them where Operation Storm had taken place. We flew out by Oman Air to Muscat, where my old friend **Salim Hassan al Shanfari** facilitated our progress through immigration and security with a glance and a flick of his fingers to the officials waiting to process us. On down to Salalah, where we picked up a pre-booked Mitsubishi Pajero 3.8 and then to the Crowne Plaza Hotel where we were to spend the next nine nights.

We were on the road by 0730 each day, and our tour was in an anti-clockwise direction, taking in Taqa, Sumhuran, Mirbat, Tawi Atair, Wadi Darbat, White City, Midway Road, the Dianas and the Western Area, and all stops in between.

The first impression of Dhofar is of the vast amount of development which has taken place; most of Salalah Plain has been built on; tower blocks and luxurious houses galore. There are now tarmac roads everywhere, with none of the old "beehive" type houses on the jebel remaining. Driving was a bit like dodgems, and took some getting used to, but the Omanis are unfailingly polite, and there were no signs of the road rage we have become accustomed to in the UK. Taqa is a mile bigger in radius than it was in 1971, and I was interested to note an ATM on the petrol station forecourt north of the old fort! Petrol is incredibly cheap, and all the petrol stations have petrol pump attendants.



The Wali's fort has been refurbished and is now a well laid-out museum. The BATT house is no more, but the bullet pockmarked house next door is still there. The fort on the hill is well maintained, but not open to the public. There are now several houses surrounding the airstrip where we sat in the sun awaiting resupply by Skyvan, and I managed to identify the sangar where the mine incident took place in 1971 and from which Flicker McLaughlin and I recovered the bodies.

The Queen of Sheba's old town of Sumhuran has been extensively and carefully excavated, and is well-worth a visit.



The old sangars are still in place on Jebel Ali, where the twelve man piquet was taken out on the 18 July 1972 prior to the attack on Mirbat. The Wali's fort in Mirbat is well maintained as a tourist attraction, but "our" fort is in a state of disrepair, with the outside walls heavily graffitied. It is on prime building land, so it may not be around much longer. The BATT house is falling down, and the front door which was there in 2012 has been replaced by a less ornate version, and padlocked.

Wherever we went I made a point of going into the nearest Firqa location for a chat. These are walled compounds with a mini tower in each corner and painted green. There are many of them. In every case, after the initial greetings, they would ask me what I was doing there. I answered, "I have come to stand on the same ground I stood on in 1971 (or whatever year I was there)". They were



always intrigued and welcoming. They were fascinated by the old photographs I had in a folder, and several of them gave me their email addresses (!) so that I could send them copies. 'Kartooob' (**Ahmed Mohammed Salem al Umri**) is a magic word, as he is remembered as a hero, and the fact that I could tell them stories about him went down well. What didn't go down so well was when I dared to suggest that Frank Lampard's days as a first class footballer are over! They follow English football closely on the flat screen TVs in each location, have their favourite teams and can talk knowledgeably about them.

At one of the locations we met three former *adoo*. They were a jolly lot, and fun to be with. One was a former 3"



mortar man who had spent three years in Aden bombing British troops there, before coming up to Dhofar for a repeat performance. Another was the brother of one of the trio who shot down the AB206 over the Aqabat Qismeem on the 9 March 1975 killing the pilot and two SAF officers. Two had taken part in the battle of Mirbat. They were highly critical of the *adoo* tactic of bombarding the town first; they said that they could have just walked in and taken it before anybody realised what was happening. When I asked why they hadn't disagreed at the time, they replied that they were young men then and their leaders out-ranked them. They also insisted that the *adoo* bombardment had caused many of their own casualties.



The Commando Carrier stolen from Arzat Camp by a Bait Jaabub tribesman in the Dhofar Gendarmerie and dumped near the Wadi Arzat, and the other Commando Carrier knocked out in the mouth of the Wadi Jaadum on 13



July 1971, have both been removed by an Indian scrap-metal merchant. The Wadi Darbat is now accessible by saloon car, and it is now possible to hire a boat on the upper lake!

The road to the Western Area is dramatic, but it is interesting that after Mughsayl there is a military checkpoint. The troops there were seriously on-the-ball. Alert, and GPMGs loaded, they questioned our intentions and took our passport details and noted the car hire documents. There is another one closer to Sarfait, but we didn't go anywhere near it because I knew that a military pass is required for access. We visited Defa, Zakhir Tree and Stonehenge and the Shershitti caves. A couple of jebalis we met acted as guides, and warned us not to enter as they are still mined. Inside the entrance to one of them lay a pile of live DShK 12.7 link ammunition by a porcupine quill.

We found the location of Tiger Wright's last contact, and it appeared as if nobody has been there since the battle finished on 6 February 1973. There were clearly two 81" mortar positions, and from the empty mortar bomb containers over three hundred rounds were fired. Three of the sangars had piles of GPMG links,

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and several had the remains of hexamine cookers in them. There were many 82" mortar tail fins scattered around, together with several 81" mortar tail fins (after the withdrawal did the *adoo* overrun the position and were subsequently fired on?). At all other SAF locations, everything useable left behind had been rendered useless. At this location no such attempt had been made, suggesting that SAF had withdrawn in a hurry.

In the nine days that we were there we covered 1,450 kilometres and we were all tired at the end. However, it was a reward-

ing trip, not only on the basis of the knowledge gained, but also the comfort of the hotel and the pleasure of dining each night in the restaurant on the beach. As always, the Omanis were unfailingly polite and generous, and without local assistance we would not have found as much as we did. Many of the Omanis we met are very concerned about the current situation in South Yemen and stated that what happens there impacts upon Dhofar. They also said that if we hadn't appeared on the scene in the '70s Dhofar would be like South Yemen. Well worth it! ■

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# SHABAB OMAN II IN MALTA

by Roger Baldacchino



*Shabab Oman II* arrived in Maltese waters on Friday 22 September 2017 at around 0800 and was filmed with open sails as she cruised by Gozo and through the Comino channel. She majestically passed the breakwater at 1015 and approached her berth through the grand harbour fortifications. Crowds, mostly tourists and some Omani university students gathered on the Upper Barrakka and remarked on *Shabab Oman II*'s beautiful lines and smart crew members on board.

She was greeted with seven gunfire salutes, as she slowly went past the Saluting Battery. Being a bright sunny morning with a slight breeze and with St Angelo Fort in the background heightened her arrival. She was photographed from all angles and a drone was seen hovering above her tall masts. She was berthed port side to the cruise liner quay, where she could be sighted by all, both from the main road and the bastions.

*Shabab Oman II* was met by **Raaid Roger Baldacchino**, who served in the Royal Navy of Oman for twelve years, and his family. Yachting Malta officials who organised the visit were also present.



Roger's presence on the quay with an Omani National flag in hand was well received by the crew who seemed astonished to see the Omani Flag on shore. Roger and family were quickly ushered on board by one of the young officers to meet **Muqaddam Ali** whom they had met when he served as XO of *Shabab Oman II* on her maiden/fuelling visit to Malta on her way to Oman.



On Saturday 23 the vessel was open to the general public. A press conference was held in the morning on the quayside, during which the Maltese Minister of Finance, **Professor Edward Scicluna**, together with Yachting Malta and Malta Tourism Authority officials, attended. The minister was given a full guided tour of the vessel. Just before the conference started around thirty Omanis dressed in uniform and dishdasha gathered on the quayside and accompanied by bagpipes and drums entertained the public by walking through the main streets in Valletta with a short stop in front of Auberge de Castille (the Prime Minister's Office).



Omanis dressed in uniform and dishdasha gathered on the quayside and accompanied by bagpipes and drums entertained the public in front of Auberge de Castille (the Prime Minister's Office).

The evening saw a number of dignitaries attend a dinner party on board. **Commodore Salim al Qaasmi**, Defence Attaché in Paris was in attendance. Around fifty guests attended the dinner including the Maltese Finance Minister who exchanged token gifts with the Captain of *Shabab Oman II*. Omani food was offered for the dinner which was enjoyed by all the guests.

On Sunday 24 the ship was open to visitors and, despite heavy rain, the vessel witnessed a large number of visitors and a considerable number visited in the afternoon when the skies cleared and the sun shone through the tall masts of the ship. The vessel was also visited by Omani University Students some of whom have been in Malta for about five years.

Roger took the Captain and the Commodore for a short tour of Mdina (the old Capital of Malta), Busketto Gardens and Dingli Cliffs and then hosted them to lunch. Monday 25 saw the quiet departure of *Shabab Oman II* at 0800. ■

## SHABAB OMAN II

On 23 October *Shabab Oman II* concluded its third international journey (Sail of Friendship and Peace) and returned home where it was received in a ceremony under the auspices of **HE Sayyid Bader bin Saud bin Harib Al Busaidi**, Minister Responsible for Defence Affairs.



*Shabab Oman II* crowned as winner of the 2017 International Friendship Cup for the Tall Ships in the Republic of Poland.



# 47TH NATIONAL DAY







*His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said,  
Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces,  
presided over the military Parade on the occasion  
of the 47th National Day on 18 November.*



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# ARMED FORCES DAY

*His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, hosted a dinner to his valiant forces on the occasion of Glorious Day of SAF on 11 December.*





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# ROYAL OFFICE



On 15 March, under the auspices of **HE Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani**, Minister of the Royal Office, The Sultan's Special Force (SSF) celebrated its Annual Day with a new batch of recruits and pinning the medals of Excellent Service and Royal Commendation.



On 2 March, **HE Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani**, Minister of Royal Office, received **General Sir Nicholas Patrick Carter**, Chief of General Staff of the British Army.

On 16 April, **HE Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani** received **Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach**, UK Chief of Defence Staff.







On 28 August, **HE Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani** received **The Rt Hon Sir Michael Fallon MP**, British Secretary of State for Defence.

On 10 October, **HE Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani** received **Lt Gen Thomas Anthony Beckett**, British Senior Defence Adviser to the Middle East.



On 5 November, **HE Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani** received **Lt Gen Sir John Gordon Lorimer**.

On 11 December, **HE Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani** received **Gen Sir Nicholas Patrick Carter**, Chief of the General Staff of the British Army.



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# NATIONAL DEFENCE COLLEGE

On 27 July, The National Defence College celebrated the graduation of the fourth intake under the auspices of **HE Sheikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah Al Khalili**, Minister of Justice.



On 18 October, **Air Vice-Marshal Chris Luck MBE MA RAF** – Commandant Joint Services Command and Staff College UK visited the National Defence College and the Command and Staff College.



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# SAF COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

On 1 August, SAF Command and Staff College celebrated the graduation of the thirtieth intake.



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# TECHNICAL MILITARY COLLEGE



On 12 December, The Technical Military College celebrated the graduation ceremony of the first intake of its students under the auspices of **HE Sayyid Bader bin Saud bin Harib Al Busaidi**, Minister Responsible for Defence Affairs.





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# MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

*In all notes of the meetings that **HE Sayyid Bader bin Saud bin Harib Al Busaidi** has held with visitors, to save repetition he is shown as MRDA.*



On 19 February, **MRDA** participated in the International Defence Exhibition and Conference (IDEX 2017).



On 15 May, **MRDA** attended the inauguration ceremony of the Typhoon aircraft and Hawk (MK166) in the UK for service in RAFO.



On 2 May, **MRDA** received **General Sir Nicholas Patrick Carter**, Chief of the General Staff of the British Army.



On 28 August, **MRDA** received the **Rt Hon Sir Michael Fallon**, British Secretary of State for Defence, both signed MoU regarding the usage of facilities in Duqm Special Economic Zone.

On 19 September, **MRDA** received **Mr Hamish Cowell**, the UK Ambassador to Oman.



On 5 November, **MRDA** received **Lt Gen Sir John Gordon Lorimer**, a British Senior Defence Adviser to the Middle East.

On 11 December, **MRDA** received **General Sir Nicholas Patrick Carter**, Chief of the General Staff of the British Army.







On 2 October, **His Majesty, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces**, authorised **MRDA** to present the second class Oman Military Order to **Major General Charles Fattorini**, Senior British Loan Officer, in recognition of his service and contribution to the strong friendly relationship between Oman and the UK.



On 26-27 December, **His Majesty, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces**, authorised **MRDA** to present a number of officers, non-staff officers and employees of the Ministry of Defence, SAF and RGO the Excellent Service and Royal Commendation Medals.



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# OFFICE OF SECRETARY GENERAL AT MOD



On 5 March, **HE Mohammed bin Nasser Al Rasibi**, Secretary General of the Ministry of Defence, received **Lt Gen Thomas Anthony Beckett**, British Senior Defence Adviser to the Middle East.

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On 9 May, **HE Mohammed bin Nasser Al Rasibi**, Secretary General of the Ministry of Defence, received **Rear Admiral Tony Radakin**, Commander of the British Navy.



On 12 May, **HE Mohammed bin Nasser Al Rasibi**, Secretary General of the Ministry of Defence, received **Gen Sir Nicholas Patrick Carter**, Chief of the General Staff of the British Army.

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On 3 July, **HE Mohammed bin Nasser Al Rasibi**, Secretary General of the Ministry of Defence, received **Lt Gen Thomas Anthony Beckett**, British Senior Defence Adviser to the Middle East.



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# OFFICE OF COSSAF

*In notes of the meetings that **Lt Gen Ahmed bin Harith Al Nabhani** has held with visiting dignitaries, to save repetition he is shown as COSSAF.*



On 6 March, **COSSAF** received **Lt Gen Thomas Anthony Beckett**, British Senior Adviser to the Middle East.



On 13 April, **COSSAF** received **Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach**, UK Chief of Defence Staff.



On 29 November, The French Government granted **COSSAF** Order National de la Légion d'Honneur.



On 3 July, **COSSAF** received **Lt Gen Thomas Anthony Beckett**, British Senior Adviser to the Middle East on another visit.





On 28 August, as part of the preparations for the joint exercises (*Al-Shumookh /2* and *Al-Saif Al Sarea/3*), which will be carried out by SAF, other military and security services and a number of civil government ministries and bodies with the armed forces of the friendly country of UK, **COSSAF** held a briefing at the Al Shafaq Officers Club attended by MRDA, the UK Secretary of Defence, COSSAF, Commanders of SAF Services, the UK Ambassador to Oman and the UK Defence Attaché.

Request from **Ameed Rukn Hassan bin Ali Al Mujaini**, Director of Morale Guidance and Public Relations in the Office of COSSAF

Please send any articles on members' reminiscences of their service in Oman, not necessarily wartime. They should be about four pages long and include illustrations and sent to: [haasoman@gmail.com](mailto:haasoman@gmail.com)



## ROYAL GUARD

*On 1 November, The Royal Guard of Oman celebrated its annual day and the graduation of a new intake of soldiers under the auspices of **HE Dr. Abdullah bin Mohammad Al Saidi**, Minister of Legal Affairs.*



# MILITARY SPORTS TEAMS



On 20 April, based on the directives of **His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said**, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, the SAF Football Team, winner of CISIM 2017 World Military Cup was honoured by **HE Nasr bin Hamoud Al Kindi**, Secretary General of Royal Court Affairs, along with the SAF Shooting Team and the National Shooting Team, which represented the Sultanate in a number of regional and international contests.



From 16-26 June, SAF Shooting Team participated in the International Shooting Championship, which took place at Bisley Camp National Shooting Centre, UK. The team won first place in the Army Rifle Association (ARA) and the British National Rifle Association (NRA) 2017 events.





## MILITARY SPORTS TEAMS



On 3 January, **His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said**, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, awarded grants to the SAF shooting team, the national shooting team and the military sports teams in a ceremony held by the office of COSSAF under the auspices of **HE Sayyed Bader bin Saud bin Harib Al Busaidi**, Minister Responsible for Defence Affairs.





# ROYAL ARMY OF OMAN

*On 20 December, RAO celebrated the graduation of the university officers and the cadet officers under the auspices of **HE Nasr bin Hamoud Al Kindi**, Secretary General of the Royal Court Affairs.*



The RAO carried out the demonstration of the 2017 Mountain Storm Exercise (*Asefat Aljabel*), represented by the Sultan of Oman Parachute Regiment and with the participation of some support units of the British forces, under the auspices of **Major General Mattar bin Salim Al Balushi**, CRAO.



On 12 May, **CRAO** received **Gen Sir Nicholas Patrick Carter**, Chief of the General Staff of the British Army.





On 3 July, **CRAO** received **Lt Gen Thomas Anthony Beckett**, British Senior Defence Adviser to the Middle East.



On 18 December, RAO celebrated the inauguration of the Borders Guard HQs at Hayma camp under the auspices of **HE Sayyed Bader bin Saud bin Harib Al Busaidi**, Minister Responsible for Defence Affairs.



On 12 December, RAO concluded the exercise The Mountain Tiger (Namer Al Jabal) with British infantry units under the auspices of **Major General Mattar bin Salim Al Balushi**, CRAO.



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# ROYAL AIR FORCE OF OMAN

*On 17 January, RAFO celebrated the graduation of its new officers under the auspices of **Lt Gen Munthir bin Majid al Said**, Head of Liaison and Coordination at the Royal Office.*



On 21 /6, the Royal Air Force of Oman celebrated the arrival of the first batch of Typhoon aircrafts under the auspices of **Air Vice-Marshal Matar bin Ali Al Obaidani**, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman, at Adam Air Base.





On 29 July, The Royal Air Force of Oman celebrated the arrival of the first batch of Hawk training aircraft under the auspices of **Air Vice-Marshal Matar bin Ali Al Obaidani**, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman.



*The National Survey Authority of the Ministry of Defence wins the Excellence Award for the World Geospatial Forum, 2016.*



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Ian Worby, CO SOAF Salah. 73-74 writes:

This is an excerpt from a Squadron magazine which I get about their detachment to Oman. Times have changed!

“For those of you who have experienced the joys of Thumrait (Midway in our day) you will be aware of the need to escape on a weekend so we arranged a top table at one of Salah’s many 5\* hotels.”

Must go there sometime. It must have changed a lot since there was nothing on the beach but lots of crabs!

(Brigadier Jack Fletcher, Commander Dhofar Bde, used to call Ian Worby War Commander Wingby!)



# ROYAL NAVY OF OMAN

*On 2 November, RNO celebrated its Annual Day under the auspices of **Lt Gen Hassan bin Mohsen Al Shariqi**, Inspector-General of Police and Customs.*



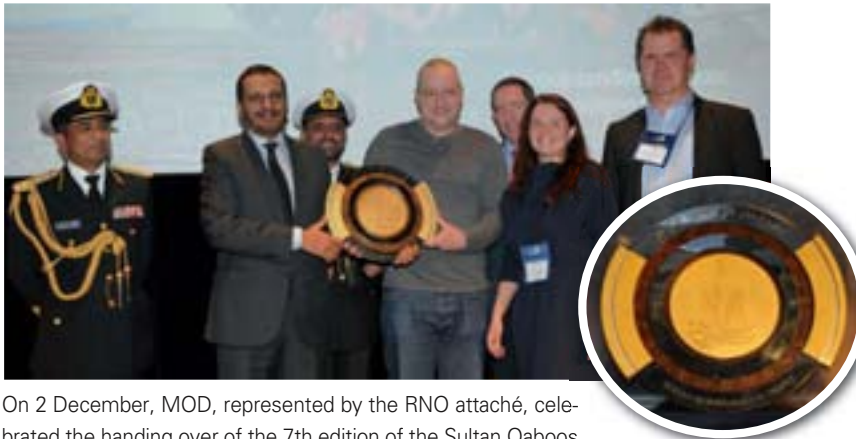
On 27 August, **Rear Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis Al Raisi, CRNO** received **Commodore Steve Denton**, Commander of the UK Maritime Component Command.

On 26 September, The Maritime Security Centre carried out Maritime Security Exercise/2 with the participation of a number of services of SAF and other security services. The exercise aimed to coordinate and unify the efforts of all parties to confront maritime piracy operations and ensure the safety of shipping corridors.





## ROYAL NAVY OF OMAN

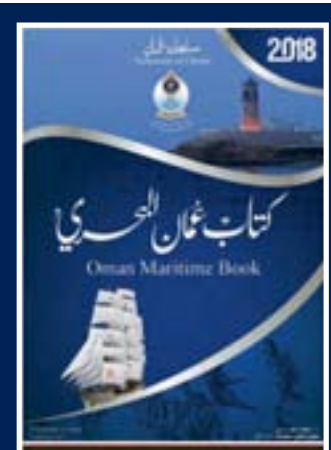


On 2 December, MOD, represented by the RNO attaché, celebrated the handing over of the 7th edition of the Sultan Qaboos Award for Sailing to the "Latvian Sail Training Association" in the City of Bordeaux, France.

Request from **Liwaah Rukn Bahri Abdullah bin Khamis Al Raisi**,  
Commander RNO

RNO are keen to develop their history. If you have any old photographs of SON/RNO please send them to:

haasoman@gmail.com and crno-office@mod.gov.om



*The Oman National Hydrographic Bureau of the Royal Navy of Oman issued the new edition of Oman Maritime Book 2018.*

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# MEMORIES OF SAF 1966-1968

by Ewen Southby-Tailyour [Written in 1992]

The name Oman conjures up a romantic image that few other countries can match. In legend the Queen of Sheba negotiated with King Solomon over the purchase of frankincense from the south coast; the biblical Ophir and Sephar are generally accepted as being Oman and, some say, it is the home of the unicorn. It remains the most mysterious and unknown corner of that land the Romans named *Felix Arabia*.

The country only entered the twentieth century in 1970 when it jumped two thousand years of development. It is still a country of tribesmen. Over two hundred and fifty separate tribes, with a significant number of them nomadic *bedu*, roam the edges of the Empty Quarter or *Rubha al Khali*, known by the *bedu* themselves as, simply, the Sands. This desert is the desert of imagination and fable – a million square miles of sand, gravel and scrub. It is a sea also of majestic dunes marching from the fertile *Jebel Akhdar*, or Green Mountain of the east coast, to the dry and barren hills of the Yemen in the south and west. The Oman is the crescent-shaped littoral mass that divides this vastness from the Indian Ocean. Since biblical years it has remained a comparatively small and simple country acting as a vital trading route between the orient and the west. More recently its geographical, political and strategic positions have given it further prominence.

No man can live among the nomadic tribes of the Oman and come away unmoved; no man can lead these fierce and independent men in a battle for their freedom and remain unconvinced of their cause and no man can endure this unforgiving and harsh land without falling under its spell. The need to return is compelling, for the call of the desert is as powerful as the call of the sea – and as romantic.

Lawrence of Arabia wrote in the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*: 'Beduin ways were hard, even for those brought up in them and for strangers terrible: a death in life'. Fifty years later a younger generation of Britains were to discover that nothing had changed since Lawrence mobilised General Allenby's desert flank in the approach to Damascus. This next generation were fight-

ing the Dhofar War, over the 'moon country' and jungle-filled wadis of southern Oman in a bitterly contested campaign of tribesman versus tribesman. The enemy, or *adoo*, eventually backed by Chinese communists, matched the drama of the climate with his own, equally cavalier, treatment of opponents. The Oman's government forces were led and supported by British, Baluchi, Iranian and Jordanian officers and men with these mercenary and regular troops fighting, at the beginning, with little more than their ingenuity and professionalism. Before the present ruler, Sultan Qaboos, came to power in 1970 there was little money to spend on essentials for the community, let alone the armed forces while it was suggested by some that the 'old' Sultan, Said bin Taimur, had been keen to keep the war in progress for strange reasons of status. Certainly the oil revenues, which became available in 1967, were



Empty Quarter.



not, initially, used for either the military or the civil sectors until the nearly bloodless coup changed the face of the country forever. The 'second half' of the war from 1970 onwards was most certainly difficult, and costly in casualties, but it was a more formal affair with the military commander able to call on many outside agencies for help as the seriousness of the situation became more clear to the western nations.

However, for all the 'old' Sultan's faults his small and backward country held sway in a political theatre renowned for turmoil, and, for ten years, his insular country stood against sophisticated infiltration from a revolutionary movement backed by a vast arsenal.

The turning point came on the 23rd July 1970 with the arrival of a man prepared to lead his country forward. It is still a remarkable achievement that for the five years before this event the Sultan's Armed Forces kept an increasing threat at bay with precious little equipment – and that vastly outdated by much of that used by the *adoo*. Those British officers who served after the coup often regard the earlier part of the war, in effect pre-Qaboos, as a minor affair but to those of us who had the privilege of serving under Sultan Said bin Taimur it was no ersatz campaign. We fought against the odds of poor arms, no medical support, no replaced uniforms or shoes and rudimentary intelligence, as well as an astute *adoo* whose territory it was.

For instance, although in the future, I was to buy a number of my company 'disruptive pattern trousers' out of my own pocket and had them flown out for my soldiers while it was quite usual for my men to patrol without boots or shoes. Many British officers bought their own rifles or, as I did, their own pistols. We were often outgunned by small arms and mortars and yet the morale of our men never wavered.

We must make no mistake; if the Oman had lost her lone struggle against communism, the entrance to the Gulf would have become dominated by those who do not hold the interests of the Western World closest to their hearts. If that had been the case, oil would not have flowed to where we would have preferred it to flow and a confrontation would have taken place dwarfing the present internecine feuding between Iraq and the rest. It is as simple as that and yet few know of the war that, with hindsight, was crucial to the west. It may take some more years yet for us to appreciate this.

To understand the 1965-

1975 Dhofar war it is useful to appreciate the political and social background of the country as a whole. British political relations with the Oman<sup>1</sup> date back to 1798 when Britain was at war with France which was expected to seize Muscat, the capital, in order to attack British and Indian shipping. It was even suggested at the time that France might have invaded India from this safe haven. A treaty of friendship was therefore concluded between Muscat and Oman and Britain that has existed ever since. This friendship manifested itself a number of times over the years with practical and political support. There was the Buraimi Oasis crisis involving Saudi Arabia between 1952 and 1955 and a revolt led by the religious ruler of the Interior in 1957.

In this later incident Saudi Arabia and Egypt lent arms while offering refuge and training facilities in their own countries. The aim was to re-establish an Imamate (religious ruler) of Oman which in fact would have been a Saudi puppet government. It was a long and rough struggle for the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) against well-motivated and trained fanatics which ended in the 'Jebel War' across the *Jebel Akhdar* high above the capital of Muscat. When the Omani forces, helped by the British, finally routed the Imam's

<sup>1</sup> Known as Muscat and Oman until 1970.



supporters a delicate peace reigned, broken by spasmodic mining and sniping. Rebels continued to be recruited and trained abroad although the training camps had moved from Saudi to Iraq.

Apart from the longstanding treaty of friendship there were underlying reasons why Britain was so keen to oppose the Saudi occupation of Buraimi and the Oman interior. An American company held the oil concessions in Saudi and believed that if the Oman could be deemed Saudi territory, through the Imam's presence and the claim to ownership of Buraimi by Saudi, it would ensure further riches. For the British and the Sultan of Oman it was vital to prove that, despite the Treaty of Sib, signed in 1913, the Sultan was seen to rule the interior, *de facto* as well as *de jure*, and not the Imam. Through this treaty the Sultan agreed not to interfere with the internal affairs of the Oman. Some argued that this meant, in practice, the establishment of two states with the Sultan only having jurisdiction over the coastal region. At that time the British agreed with the Imam in this respect and had it not been for oil, forty years on, this lack of concern by the British would probably have remained.

The Sultan granted oil rights to a British company and both the British and Omani governments determined that these should be exploited to their mutual benefit. The potential oil reserves were particularly exciting to the British as it had become well established that the Gulf oil fields were a mainstay of British post-war economy. The added attraction of the Omani oil was that it could be piped direct to an oil terminal on the Indian Ocean coast by-passing the strategic problems associated with a nearly landlocked gulf.

However, it is in the hitherto peaceful south that trouble, with the possibility of international consequences, actually began in 1964. For ease of description the Dhofar region of the Oman can be split into three geographical and tribal regions: the coastal plains and foothills inhabited, in the main, by the Kathir tribe; the Qara mountains to the north inhabited by the Qara tribe and the great gravel plains running north to the 'Empty Quarter' inhabited by the Rashid. There are numerous other tribes but it is these that were at the centre of the troubles.

The Kathir tribe had for centuries assumed control over the whole of Dhofar until relations with the Qara reached difficult proportions in the nineteenth century. Help from the Sultan in the north was sought and was given in the form of a Wali or local governor. This Wali arrived in 1880 as the Sultan's representative with orders to maintain peace throughout the area but this control from the distant capital was only a partial success.

Sultan Said bin Taimur had succeeded his father in 1932, married a Dhofari woman in 1939 and sired a son, Qaboos in 1941. Sultan Said was an articulate, educated man who viewed with distaste the effects of oil money on his neighbouring states.

Sultan Said believed that doctors, teachers and scientists were all subversive and should have no place among the traditions of his country. Even Qaboos, his son, on return from a conventional upper-class schooling and short period in the British army, was banished to the hills of Dhofar; presumably to prevent him from exercising western influence. While it was possible for those aspiring to higher education abroad to leave the Oman they could not obtain permits for return. Inevitably some did return, bringing with them glimpses of the outside world. Thus, especially in Dhofar, where another vast oilfield to match that in the north of the country was expected to be discovered, were the seeds for discontent sown.

Before the oil flowed to the newly built oil port outside Muscat in late 1967 the plea of poverty for the lack of government enterprise was almost understandable. Sultan Said wanted change but he wanted it to be natural and unhurried. There were many aspects of life under Said bin Taimur that were admirable, that must be seen in the context of an old and proud country and not judged against western standards. There was no crime of any significant nature and there was a real fear that the rural way of life, once gone, would never be replaced: the adherence to religion was absolute. For these aspects alone one must respect the old Sultan's stance.

The Dhofar Liberation Front was formed on 9th June 1965. Its aims were not, to begin with, the destruction of the Omani government but, in very simple terms, the achievement of some autonomy with recognition of Dhofar as a viable province. Of course, a slice of any oil revenue and the right to determine their own affairs formed a large part of these demands. The DLF had its first headquarters across the border from Salalah astride an important trade route at Hauf. Britain was due to leave Aden in November 1967 thus allowing the Peoples Democratic Republic of South Yemen to become established, but the birth of the new country was not a happy one with Britain being blamed for what was an inevitable disaster. As a diversion the PDRSY were therefore only too happy to give succour to the emerging 'liberation' movement beyond its eastern border. Here was ideal breeding ground for communism and PDRSY strategists quick to realise that, although the domination of the Oman with its oil revenues would be a difficult task, a third party involvement would make the whole project most attractive and possible. Allowing Eastern block countries an entrée was also expected to produce a further spin-off in technical and military aid in recognition of the part played in helping to secure communist control over the entrance to the Persian Gulf. Russia and China had long realised this. Opportunities were suddenly available for young Dhofaris to be taken away for training and indoctrination. Britain leaving Aden had paved the way for this closer attention and practical influence.

The revolution, for that is what it fast became, had all the hallmarks of the perfect communist-backed insurrection. A textbook example indeed, except, perhaps, for one vital aspect that the communists overlooked. The Omani is a deeply religious person and the replacing of his Islamic faith by a communist doctrine was doomed to failure. In the end this religious aspect coupled with careful manipulation of captured or surrendered *adool* by the British and Omani forces brought about the end of the war in Oman's favour. It was a classic example of the successful hearts-and-minds campaigns of Malaya and Borneo. This was helped by the 'new Sultan' insisting on a pragmatic approach to modernisation and the sensible use of oil revenues for the benefit of all.

My part in all this was less-than-minimal but, to me, fascinating. In 1966 the Royal Marines were asked for the first time by the British Army to help supply officers for secondment on loan service with the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF).<sup>2</sup> By coincidence at that time I was a Lieutenant serving as a troop commander with 43 Commando, Royal Marines, in Plymouth, while my father was the Commandant General (then a four-star appointment) in London. This loan service tour presented me, if selected, with an ideal opportunity to leave the Corps for a short period in order to

<sup>2</sup> Although I was the first RM to be seconded, two retired Royal Marines had served on contract and both had very recently been killed in action: Captain Alan Woodman and Captain Hamish Emslie. Two more Royal Marines were to be killed before the war's end, both on secondment: Captain SJ Rae and Captain WN Marshall.



## MEMORIES OF SAF – 1966-1968

avoid embarrassment on either side of the family while at the same time experiencing some real soldiering. I had served twice before in the Middle East<sup>3</sup> and had a rudimentary knowledge of the Arabic language. With my commanding officer's ready agreement I applied to the Military Secretary for eighteen months loan service with SAF and was accepted with almost suspicious alacrity! Two courses were deemed necessary and after three months at the Royal Naval College Greenwich<sup>4</sup> and a further three at the Command Arabic Language School (CALs) in Aden I joined the Northern Frontier Regiment (NFR) stationed at Nizwa, the old capital of the Interior.

Aden was its well-remembered hot and smelly self. The British were leaving and the final 'troubles' had started some time before in an attempt to bring forward their departure.

For those of us attending the CALs life was fun. Not for us the daily toil of guard and piquet duties nor, in illegal practice, the restrictions of curfews. Instead we lived in comparatively palatial quarters in the Federal Regular Army's barracks at Seedaseer Lines. The mornings were spent in formal lessons while the afternoons were filled with homework which we learnt then tested each other while lying on the beach. We were fortunate as ours was the last course to be taught using Arabic script. Subsequent courses would be confined to transliteration and eventually moved to England anyway.

<sup>3</sup> With 45 Commando in Aden (and Dhala) and as the Officer Commanding Royal Marines in the LST HMS Anzio.

<sup>4</sup> Where I regret I did not distinguish myself except to have the following written on my end of course report: "This officer has a marked preference for fighting rather than writing and is not recommended for further training at this establishment." I thought that was rather nice, but not so my father!

I even managed an operational weekend in the Radfan flying in the left-hand seat of a Fleet Air Arm Wessex helicopter piloted by my father's ex ADC from Plymouth days and my future best man, Johnny Ackroyd Hunt.<sup>5</sup>

So much fun was it all that I ended up being 'interviewed' by a rather pompous RAF Deputy Provost Marshal Squadron Leader who took a grave and probably jealous dislike to my erratic driving within the confines of the Naval Base in a car I shared with a fellow Royal Marine, James Devereaux.<sup>6</sup> We had just passed our colloquial Arabic exams (in my case, rather surprisingly) and were between celebrations, driving in bathing trunks from the officers' Tarshine Club up the hill to the Royal Navy's Chief of Staff's house for a very late lunch. The car also contained the cream of the garrison's beauties: the daughters of the Admiral, his Chief of Staff, the army Chief of Staff and two army Lieutenant Colonels. As it was a diminutive Fiat 500 it was top heavy with most standing out of the rolled-back sun roof.

Regrettably the Squadron Leader, also in bathing trunks, ended off his bicycle in the monsoon ditch and I ended in uniform in front of his boss. No one was quite sure what jurisdiction the RAF had over me, indeed what my actual crime was, but a barrister friend in the Army Legal Service, also billeted in Seedaseer Lines, suggested that, from what he had heard on his 'net', the safest thing for me to do was to leave the colony.

The great secret in life is to have friends in low places and so with some help from a sympathetic movements clerk I was booked, under an assumed name, onto a flight the next day to

<sup>5</sup> Tragically killed in the early 1980s piloting a civilian helicopter at a county show.

<sup>6</sup> Destined for the Trucial Oman Scouts.



CALS Arabic course 1966. ES-T (RM and NFR) Nick Roberts (Royals and NFR) and Richard Murphy (Queens and MR).

Bahrain and spent that night as a moving target flitting from one farewell party to another just ahead of the RAF police. There was one further snag. My father was flying in on an official visit the day I was flying out and was due to stay with the Governor and Commander in Chief, Admiral Sir Michael Le Fanu. I was invited to the formal, welcoming dinner that night but a discreet word with the Flag Lieutenant sorted that out while ensuring that father did not know the reason for my absence. Ironically, though, my 'plane was on the taxi-way waiting for 'father's 'plane to land when ours – in naval parlance – 'threw a prop'. The propellor didn't actually come off but we had to return to the hanger for it to be replaced where I was forced to sweat out a few more hours as the net tightened. My loyal friends gave nothing away and eventually I left Aden for the last time – but again under a small cloud.

It was a relief to leave the heat, humidity and grenade attacks, some of which were particularly unpleasant, of the colony for the dry heat of Nizwa after passing through the SAF Headquarters at Bait al Falaj for joining procedures and the issue of my uniform. This last was a brief affair and consisted mostly of replacing my Royal Marine badges of rank with those of the NFR, learning how to wear the shamagh and stitching an embroidered cap badge into my green beret, replacing the Royal Marines' Globe and Laurel. The NFR wore commando green berets; the Muscat regiment a bright red scottish-style glengarry and the Desert regiment a sand coloured beret. Uniform was anything but! Most of us wore some variation of stone-coloured flannel shirt above lightweight, corduroy style, fawn trousers made by the numerous tailors in Aden or Bahrain. Footwear was the ubiquitous desert boot. Few wore socks. This was our dress whether on ceremonial parade – a rare occurrence – desert patrol or night ambush.

In the sixties there were three grades of British officer totalling about sixty in all. The bulk of these officers were on lengthy contracts having retired from the army, police or some other military organisation such as the Sudan Camel Corps or the Hadhramaut Bedouin Legion. These officers tended to be older than the others and were more usually employed in quarter-mastering duties, training and administration tasks.

The British army's seconded officers came from various regiments and arms depending on what skills at command level were needed at the time. The third type of officer (and the occasional Senior NCO) were known as 'junior leaders'. They were lent from British forces serving in the Middle East command for periods of two or three months, usually to help the contract officers with modern training skills and procedures. Unlike the others they did not leave their parent service as far as pay and conditions were concerned, retained their British uniforms, were not allowed into combat, or to receive Omani campaign medals.

The Sultan's Armed Forces consisted then of three infantry battalions, one Gendamerie regiment, a navy of two dhows (one operational and one for training), a number of De Havilland Beaver aircraft for communications, rudimentary air supply and a number of piston driven Proctor *Provosts* for fighter ground attack. The great advantage was that we all wore the same cap badge – just the hat itself changed with the organisation – and so petty rivalries and stupidities, as can be found in more sophisticated armed forces, did not exist. We had no artillery to speak of although there was always talk of some ancient, large calibre guns 'somewhere' in the south but I never saw them. We had no armour at all and no

special forces – which, at that stage, most of us considered a good thing! The infantry was equipped with Second World War .303 Lee Enfield rifles, 2" mortars with a choice of high explosive or smoke bombs and a few elderly, medium-calibre mortars. Machine gun support was supplied by the trusty Bren. Transport was either by donkey, Land Rover or Bedford three-tonner. Communications relied heavily on a variety of civilian sets and 'acquired' ex-RAF sea-air rescue hand held 'walky-talkies'.

On arrival at the battalion HQ of the NFR I was met by the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Hugh Saunders, and immediately appointed as animal transport officer and second-in-command of 'A' Company under Major Colin MacLean, late of some highland regiment which I regret I now forget. I was lucky enough to join just before the periodical change-round of locations and so enjoyed an interesting first few months at Battalion Headquarters before taking my 'new' company, A Company, to Ibbri under Major Charles Dudley – known throughout, rather unfortunately, as the Cream Puff. It had also been useful, as a new boy, to meet and work with the headquarters officers and particularly the Adjutant, Patrick Hibbert-Foy, a 16th/5th Lancers officer and the OC Recce Platoon, Paddy Bell, a Scots Guards officer. Both of them shared my love of shooting and whisky although we did not combine the two. Also at Nizwa was Richard Murphy of the Queen's Regiment with whom I had attended the language course and Sandy Dawson late of the Clackmackan police force – a wonderful, entertaining contract officer who had joined with no military experience at all and who was to end up holding a number of senior appointments throughout SAF.

We were a happy team kept in check, when necessary, by Patrick whose duties were not made easy by the commanding officer's predilection for sex and drink. The first was unobtainable; the second was available in large quantities. Nor was the CO helped by the irreverence of his junior officers for whom, quite wrongly, he was considered fair game. There is no doubt that in the south at Salalah, when an attempted coup had been staged, the CO had been superb. Interrupted during his post dinner drinks by the duty officer informing him that there was trouble, he instantly put down his glass and gave the clearest orders anyone in the battalion could recall. Once he was satisfied that all was understood the CO returned to his brandy and the embryo insurrection was quelled. In the more peaceful north, though, he was not the same and missed his wife with what might have been a touching form of homesickness if it had not manifested itself in such strange ways.

One night he turned out the whole camp convinced that music – from the musical *My Fair Lady* – was being played to annoy him through the air-conditioning unit of his mud hut. Rather more seriously, the officers were woken up during another night by the sound of pistol shots coming from the CO's *beyt*.<sup>7</sup> The Adjutant was the first to reach his door with the others cautiously looking over his shoulder. Lying naked on his bed was Hugh Saunders, a smoking 9mm Browning pistol in his hand. "Ah," he said. "I woke up to find I was being given oral sex by this girl and as I have forbidden sex in the camp I decided to shoot her." Of course, there was no one there and he had narrowly missed his toes.

He had been wounded in the hands during the Second World War and could only lift a glass to his lips by placing his straight

<sup>7</sup> Arabic for house or, in SAF, more usually one's room.



fingers vertically inside and gripping the glass between them and his thumb. Each time it was empty he would raise it to the sky and shout for 'Ghoul' the mess orderly. During particularly heavy sessions his gin and tonics would be filled not only with the standard ingredients but with a number of tiny fish that inhabited the *falaj* system of water ways, not dissimilar to the Dartmoor leats, that irrigate the villages fringing the *Empty Quarter*. The end came during a lunch with all the battalion officers present except the second in command, Major John Clark, who was standing in for C Company's OC, down from Saiq camp on the top of the *Jebel Akhdar*, and the quartermaster who was standing in for me at Ibri. Suddenly the CO, at the head of the table, put down his knife and fork, placed his thumbs to his temples with his fingers outstretched in the manner of some Martian antennae and announced that he was suddenly in contact with John – at Saiq – and instructing him not to waste a *Beaver* flight the next day but to come down on the weekly donkey patrol.

This 'conversation' continued at spasmodic intervals throughout the meal with the rest of us trying very hard to keep straight faces. Maybe we had overdone the *falaj* fish, maybe the CO was right and he really was speaking to John, but we never knew for the next week he was taken to Muscat and was not seen by the battalion again. A delightful man but one who could not come to terms with the loneliness of command and the absence of female company. Maybe, too, the officers were much to blame for failing to help but those were hard days of serious and difficult soldiering while there was, too, much heavy drinking when back in camp. Any stragglers, be they commanding officers or not, were left to their own devices.

I had, too, been party to a cruel joke on our CO. At Ibri a previous company commander had imported a life-size cardboard cut out of a slinky girl bearing a tray of drinks. Using a borrowed *Polaroid* camera the adjutant took a photograph of me with my arms around the girl's shoulders, framing the shot so that the tray did not feature, and then left it lying on a table in Nizwa's officers' mess so that the CO was bound to see it. Desperate that an officer of his was secretly (and illegally, although I never remember any actual 'rules') harbouring a girlfriend, the CO summoned a *Beaver* aircraft the next day and flew unannounced to introduce himself to the girl, and, for all we knew, confiscate her back to Nizwa. He was not amused but after the statutory lunchtime gin and tonics – without *falaj* fish – he returned in a good humour.

**Ewen Southby-Tailyour with 'girlfriend' at Ibri.**



Ibri. Now there was soldiering as one had dreamt it; thirteen thousand square miles of sand, gravel plains and foothills; one hundred and fifty Arab soldiers and for much of the time only one British officer, myself, a twenty-six year old Royal Marines lieutenant, acting captain.

**Edge of the sands.**



Each company had also a 'local' officer, usually a second lieutenant, which, in the case of A Coy NFR was Aziz Sullemein. Local officers lived in their own mess – Aziz's was a separate mud hut – to avoid them from the temptations of alcohol which was tolerated only in the British messes. Considerably more beer was drunk in Aziz's mess than in mine!

There were many incidents and minor skirmishes in this northern command, mostly related to gun running, gold smuggling and the flexing of the occasional muscle by the leftovers from the Imam's abortive attempt to impose his rule on the interior. However, it was the escalating war in the south that drew most of our attention. The ambition of every company commander was to lead his personally-trained men into battle against the rising threat of communism but until that moment came my life was spent patrolling the *Jebel Akhdar* foothills, the gravel plains and the edges of the *Empty Quarter*.

**2Lt Aziz Sullemein.**





The gravel plains around Ibri.

My Regiment was due to take over from the Desert Regiment (DR) in the spring of 1968, but in late 1967 it was decided that the western border needed strengthening by the building of a fort. As it was not possible to take any of the DR companies away from their already over-stretched operational duties for this task, 'A' Company NFR was ordered south. As a supernumerary Major John Edward-Collins was attached in overall command of this small task force. In practice the division of duties was muddled and as there were only two of us, he in effect took overall command which left me the practicalities. As John was approaching 40 and I was still only half-way through my twenties this suited us both fine. We got on very well indeed, sharing the same sense of humour, a love of shooting, soldiering and whisky.

On the 4th November 1967 we left our home base, the mud hutted camp on the outskirts of Ibri's date plantations, for the five hundred and fifty mile drive across some of the most barren country in that barren land. Although there were no tracks through the foothills and passing east of the *Umm as Samim*, that lies along the eastern edge of the Empty Quarter – and those that were made were soon obliterated by the wind – it had been traversed many times before, but that was no reason to take the journey lightly. We travelled in overloaded Bedford three-ton lorries and long wheel based Land Rovers. Without recovery vehicles, nor communications in case of difficulty, we took food and water for twice the journey's length – live goats, sacks of spices, dried fish, lentils, flour, salt and fire wood – and towed a number of one ton water-bowsers to refill the canvas *chuggles* slung on the dusty sides of the vehicles in an attempt to keep the water cool.

By the standards of those days, it was a reasonably trouble-free journey with only two night-stops in the desert: the first at the deserted oil rig of *Saih Rawl* and the second at the non-existent village of *Mugshin*. As with our desert patrols each day we started at 0300 in order to get the best 'trafficability' from dew on the sand which meant, also, that we could cover a good distance before the vehicles and their passengers had to rest from the heat. 140

degrees Fahrenheit were the highest daytime temperatures with 120 being about normal and with no vehicle canopies under which we could hide from the direct sun. In the cool of the evening when it dropped to a pleasant 90 degrees, we would put on woollen pull-overs and sit cross-legged in the sand to play *bedu* games as old as civilisation itself; most with dried donkey or camel droppings as 'counters' placed in scoops in the sand; the aim being, as so often, to capture as many of your opponent's pieces as possible.

It was a dry, dusty, bone-jarring ride and although we entered the 'war zone' at Midway we were glad of the mountain coolness after the burning heat of the desert and pitied any *adoo* that dared get between us and the cold showers and beer that waited to the south of the *jebel*. We were met at the deserted oil village and airstrip at Midway<sup>8</sup> by a Desert Regiment patrol led by Philip Carte<sup>9</sup> to escort us along the rough track, the Midway Road, that was then the only pass through the Qara Mountains. It was frequently ambushed throughout its fifty mile length and was to become a familiar journey for me. At that time almost all the resident company could do with its limited resources and firepower was to keep the road passable; it was never in a position to fight any encounter battle with an *adoo* who chose when and where to attack. Indeed to have done so would have played into the enemy's hands and left the road wide open to mining or further ambush.

After two glorious nights, including careful briefings and two wonderful evenings of duck flighting on the *khors* or inland lagoons behind the beaches, we re-mounted our long suffering Bedfords and Land Rovers for the difficult journey back to Midway and then west through the foothills before turning south along the border *wadi* that divided the Sultanate of Oman from the Hadramout, or Eastern Aden Protectorate. November was actually the month chosen by the British to complete the hand-over of the colony to the Peoples Democratic Republic of South Yemen and therefore

<sup>8</sup> Later reverted to its proper name of Thumrayt.

<sup>9</sup> Who was to die of a lung disease within two years. One of the bravest of the Sultan's officers who taught me a great deal about the *adoo* and his ways and means.



the deadline for the establishing of our border fort. Up to 1967 this physical marking of the border had not been necessary but with the impending departure of a friendly neighbour it was now an urgent requirement.

On the Hadramout side of the border was already a traditional white-painted 'Beau Geste' style fort on the edge of the low escarpment forming the wadi's edge. On the Oman side there was nothing with the unmarked frontier running down the centre of the dried water course. A Company's task was to guard civilian Arab workmen, mostly of the *khadim* or slave stock originally from Zanzibar, under the command of a British civil engineer, while they built a border fort of mud and stone that had to be just that little bit higher, wider, taller and whiter than the one opposite. Time was short as PDRSY troops in support of the terrorists were expected at any moment. Priorities were set. Wells were dug not only for drinking water but also for mixing the mud and locally produced cement; an airstrip on our side of the *wadi* centre was cleared and the whole area was staked out and picketed with all-round defensive positions. Although we were on the border all the fighting up to that time had taken place to our rear – in the east.

*Wadi Habrut* is a wide, gravel-floored, dried-up river bed that runs from the *Qara* hills in the south into the Empty Quarter. It was an ideal convoy route for arms and supplies to enter the Oman from the Yemen by way of the desert, for although there were no tracks the small stones and boulders on the wadi floor made it good going for camels and four-wheel-drive vehicles. Not only was it the legal border that needed marking and defending but it was also a main supply route that had to be blocked.

This was a fascinating period for a young officer in a sensitive and very lonely outpost. We came under fire regularly, patrolled out every day in an attempt to keep the *adoo* at arms length, lived under a palm tree for an officers' mess and ate locally shot sand grouse, duck and, inevitably, the standard, army-issue freshly-killed goat. The only surface-water for duck was on the *adoo* side of the wadi

but I'm glad to say this did not put either of us off from waiting for the evening flights! An example of the incongruity of it all was the method by which we ranged-in the 3" mortars. After dark our Arab mortar sergeant paced out the distance from the baseplates to the walls of the enemy's fort and returned to dial 440 yards on the sights. Life was as simple as that!

We cleared a football pitch area of stones on the wadi floor although accepting that the south-west corner was, legally, in *adoo* territory. Nevertheless we played each day more in an effort to impress those on the other side of the wadi that we were a friendly sort of people. Unfortunately, the Sultan himself decreed that no soldier was to enter that corner of the pitch which slightly curtailed the game and made refereeing rather awkward.

Those three months of total isolation were an amazing period of tension coupled with long lazy days spent ignoring the considerable threat to our small force by gazelle hunting, changing for dinner beneath the palm tree and even building a bath room, with bath, in the reeds by the wells. Food was mostly fresh game baked in an ammunition box over a smouldering fire in the sand, supplemented with tinned smoked oysters and whisky.

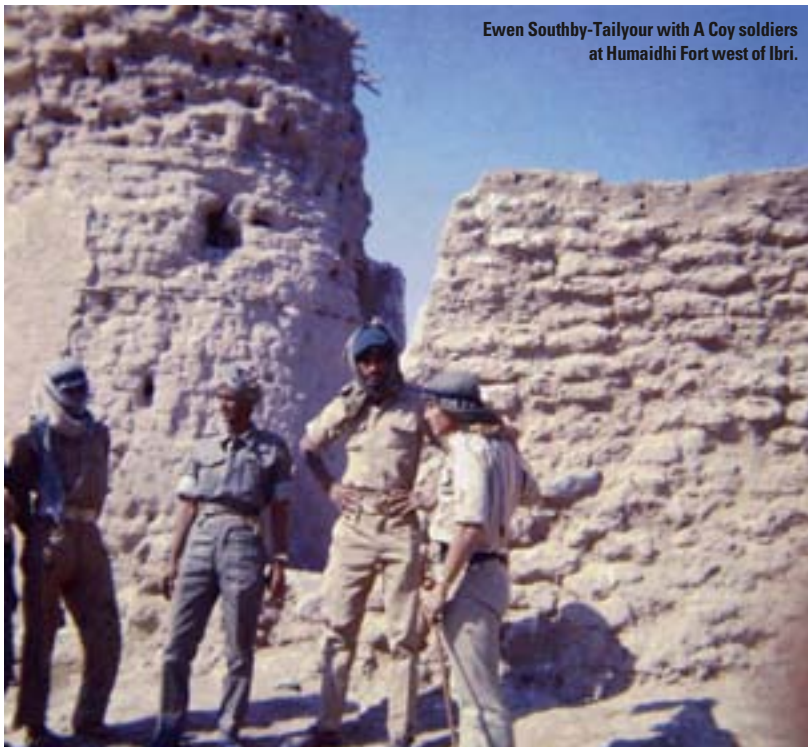
We left Habrut in January 1968 feeling that the fort, then occupied by a company of the Desert Regiment, was a fine testimony to our staunch defence of the project but, sadly, for it had become a very personal project, it was razed to the ground in a vicious and successful attack by the *adoo* a few months later.

Before my company was due back to Ibri at the end of our fort-building days at Habrut, orders were received for the move of the NFR to the Dhofar War. A Company would take over from 3 Company DR at the notorious Ambush Corner on the Midway Road. As an expedient and as I was already in the south, I asked to be lent for a fortnight to that company in order to get to know the tasks and country that lay ahead of us. To ensure that I could take my company to the war I had applied to the Royal Marines for a further nine months extension of my tour. This had been accepted

by the Corps and the Commander of the SAF. I was thrilled.

On the 3rd January 1968 I left Habrut in a small convoy of vehicles for 3 Company's position. I knew of the importance of this post for without it the road could not be kept open. Every week in the sitreps sent to the north from the resident battalion in Dhofar, Ambush Corner featured in some way. I felt honoured that my company was to be given the most difficult, and possibly the most dangerous position in the growing war. My men had earned this privilege through sheer hard work in training before acquitting themselves equally as well on the border.

I night-stopped with the convoy at Midway's deserted camp in the vastness of the gravel plain, spending a comparatively luxurious night in an abandoned caravan, but it was a strange place. Stores were still on the racks in the sheds; food, rotting away, was still in the kitchens while oil drums, drilling bits and pipes lay in neat lines ready for use. The only thing absent was any form of



Ewen Southby-Tailyour with A Coy soldiers at Humaidhi Fort west of Ibri.

transport for when the camp was closed, with little notice, the oil rig workers drove their wagons to the internationally-sized airstrip and left them facing into the desert with weights on the accelerators. For miles around the camp there were abandoned vehicles that had run out of fuel in their driverless journeys.

I joined 3 Company and met the company commander, Jonathan Nason, a seconded officer from the Queen's Own Highlanders (QOH). We had much in common especially as I had one favourite uncle in the Seaforth Highlanders and another in the Cameron Highlanders before these two Scottish Regiments amalgamated into the QOH. However, there was not much time for reminiscing as my first night was spent creeping into a dawn cordon and search position around a village to the west, well into the mountains. We achieved our aim but found no known terrorists. That second night we moved into a position even further west and in the heartland of the *adoo*. The aim was to conduct a night approach through the wild country to a village on the edge of a steep valley which, in the space of a few vertical feet, changed from barren dusty moon-scape into lush, almost impassable jungle.

The *adoo* knew this country backwards and for the army to move undetected even in the dark was nigh impossible. The opposition moved in small groups, had the population in their grasp and could attack on ground and at times of their own choosing: we seldom, if ever, made contact unless it was on his terms. This was classical Mao Tse-tung teaching. There was, therefore, a great deal of 'coat trailing' by the SAF forces and our greatest training efforts in those days went into anti-ambush drills. It was dangerous stuff but the only way to force the *adoo* into a battle of our own choosing; it didn't always work to our advantage.

My duty for this patrol was to bring up the rear with one of the two *ex-adoo* we had taken with us as guides but before we had covered a mile it was clear that we had missed the next man ahead in the stealthy crocodile of soldiers. Maps were almost non-existent and those that did exist were very vague over topographical features. I had a rough idea of the contours that had been outlined on a blackboard during the briefing but it was clear that following the wrong spur would mean an error of some

magnitude by dawn with a deep, *adoo*-held valley bottom between us and the remainder of the company. It was not a happy prospect but I trusted in my navigation, a subject I had practised (admittedly at sea) since before I could hardly read or write and so I decided, much to the horror of my two companions, that we would continue with the aim of making the dawn rendezvous. The *ex-adoo* was, if anything, more apprehensive than I and the SAF soldier (a Baluchi).

At one stage in the night we came across a water hole and here I decided to set up an impromptu ambush more in self defence than with a sense of aggression for we would undoubtedly have been outgunned and out numbered. An *adoo* patrol did slide past us in the dark, no more than a few feet away, but wisely I decided to let them continue as I sat there with my pistol cocked, prepared if necessary to shoot the *ex-adoo* alongside me if he moved a finger. Dawn did not come as a relief as we were open to observation but it did make navigation easier. It was, therefore, with great satisfaction, and rather by luck than fortune, that we saw the rest of the company on the same spur a mile or two ahead. They too had seen us and took up fire positions believing us to be the enemy. At that precise moment a leopard appeared between us causing a brief

East map showing ambush positions





clash of priorities in my tired mind. “Do I shoot the leopard in self defence and risk missing, allowing the round to hit our patrol beyond thereby confirming their opinion that we are enemy or do I allow the leopard to do the damage instead?” I decided to shoot the leopard which our own men could not see from their distant positions, but luckily at the last moment he lolloped off into the undergrowth. The three of us breathed deeply and, risking the real enemy, stood in the open to identify ourselves to the distant company commander.

The search was a partial success. One man was identified as a rebel and the other, the one we actually wanted, escaped. We eventually returned to Ambush Corner without incident only to be told by our Desert Intelligence Officer that there had been considerable *adoo* interest in our patrol and that we had walked through two perfect ambush positions but they had chosen not to spring them. I believe that my unplanned diversion had confused them into thinking we had more men in the area than was so.

We were more successful a few days later on the 11th January when we were ambushed three times in one afternoon. 3 Company was ordered to patrol to the east of the Midway Road

and carry out a series of hasty cordon and searches in order to keep the *adoo* on the move or, with any luck, catch him at rest. It was to have been very much a coat-trailing operation on the return journey although the way out was conducted as covertly as possible.

The approach to the *Jebel Darbat* area was begun from Raven’s Roost, a position on the Midway Road alongside a rough airstrip cleared out of the scrub and bush. From this point eastwards there was no track but our convoy of three three-ton Bedfords and two Land Rovers made good going for about fifteen miles. Eventually we laagered up in a wadi bottom with good all round defence from pickets on the higher ground before moving off on foot and in tactical bounds for the first of the suspect villages.

The houses in these villages were low round dwellings made of mud and stone with, suspiciously, not one man present. That night we lay in ambush outside our second set of targets but detected no movement to or from them. It was clear that something was amiss and we prayed that it meant an encounter battle. On the morning of the 11th January our searching again produced no young men but did include a cup of thick, black, sour but welcome, coffee with the Sultan’s wife’s brother – ironically the only male we met.

**West map showing Raven’s Roost and Ambush Corner on the Midway Road**



As we had been foot-borne for twenty-four hours our supply of water was running low. Men can consume four gallons a day in the desert, and it was necessary to re-join the transport. For my part all I carried was three water bottles, two days worth of marmite sandwiches,<sup>10</sup> a Walther P38 and the issued No 5 .303 rifle as supplied to the British Army during World War Two. The No 5 rifle differed slightly from the more common No 4 rifle carried by the soldiers, being shorter-barrelled with a conical muzzle flash hider. For ‘shelter’ I carried in a thigh pocket a ‘space blanket’, silver on one side and bright red on the other; it occasionally doubled as air panel. Medical evacuation was usually on the back of a donkey with only a faint chance of survival. The company’s medical support was one Baluchi lance-corporal whose medical knowledge relied heavily on enthusiasm rather than a deep knowledge of *Grey’s Anatomy!*

<sup>10</sup> If six *japatties* – hubs – stuffed with ghee and marmite can be so described!

At 1630 a burst of machine gun fire halted the leading vehicle-borne troops who swiftly debussed into their anti-ambush positions. In accordance with normal procedures the heights had been picketed with a rolling system that allowed the main body to keep moving along the wadi bottom. As we passed a picketed height the men would descend as others in the front moved ahead to new positions. It was a well practised routine that allowed slow but steady progress for the main body: it also relied heavily on superb mountain fitness from the infantryman.

I was driving the rear vehicle, a Land Rover, and responsible for bringing in the pickets while ensuring that we left no one behind. The Company Sergeant Major was in the passenger seat and two soldiers were in the rear. All three jumped out and ran forwards to the crest two hundred yards to our right front while I threw the vehicle into a convenient acacia bush. This probably saved my life for a further burst of automatic fire swept the crest some seconds before I reached it; this burst came from our rear and seemed to precede me up the hill although a number of rounds hit the ground either side, uncomfortably close. I reached the CSM and knelt down beside him to his right, both of us behind a convenient rock. Then, just as he began his initial assessment, a single shot from behind removed the whole of the right side of his neck. As he sank to the ground it was clear he would not survive but I administered morphine: in truth, an overdose for he was beyond help and, tragic though it might sound, other priorities beckoned. While injecting a second ampoule – a third might have been involved but such details are hazy now – I shouted for reports from those troops further forward and sent hurried fire control orders to the 81mm mortar team, already prepared for action. The company commander was somewhere ahead, beyond the crest, preparing the counter attack against the *adoo*'s positions to the right unaware that we had been engaged from all quarters. By ambushing us in the position they did the *adoo* had divided the company into two separate killing zones: to communicate between ourselves I had to run a

gauntlet along the dividing crest. This could have been an advantage to us if the *adoo* had only opened fire from one flank or ahead or behind but by dominating both halves of the company and covering us with fire from 360 degrees, they showed a remarkable sophistication. Although this made us suspicious at the time little did we realise the full consequences of this forty-five minute battle. Jonathan and I believed at the time that it was about to change the Sultan's, and his army's, perception of the war forever.

It was immediately clear that this was a battle of a size then unknown to SAF and was being conducted in a manner with which we were not familiar. For instance, the *adoo* had prepared false sangers below the hill tops and then dug themselves into real fire positions. Our pickets had discovered the false fire trenches as they moved into position but as they were empty assumed that any *adoo* had left. The false positions drew our fire before we realised that we were wasting ammunition.

The Arab Sergeant Major died quickly. There was nothing any of us could have done except make his passing as painless, and as quick, as possible. Meanwhile, on the track ahead of the Land Rover, as it crested the rise dividing the company, a lone signaller had set up his HF set and was even then laying out a dipole antenna in full view of the *adoo* on all sides. By the time I reached him he was already establishing contact with Battalion Headquarters in Salalah. I wrote a 'Flash' signal asking for immediate air support and ran back to the Sergeant Major's position which by then was in the middle of the rear defensive position. The corporal in charge was directing covering fire for what he hoped was the leading platoon's attack and, on seeing me, shouted:

*"Left blanket or right blanket Sahib?"*

It took me some time to recognise that he was anxious to know whether it was to be a left flanking or right flanking attack that he was to support. One of his Bren gunners stood on the crest and he continued to fire his gun from the hip, again in full view of the *adoo*.



12th January 1968 – Ewen Southby-Tailyour talking to aircraft at Ambush Corner. Captain Paul Mangin (DR) running with spare wireless.



*“Top cover this is Sand Hat. I’m standing by a three tonner, waving a red handkerchief. Line of my arm. Two fifty yards. Enemy position. Rockets please. Beware of advancing own troops, over.”*



This attracted much return machine gun fire but the Baluchi soldier insisted on flicking his fingers for replacement magazines until he had to be stopped. Although it was probably demoralising for the *adoo* to be treated with such disdain it was actually a waste of precious ammunition. Another of the soldiers, a young man shortly out of training, lay beside his empty rifle with his forearm in the air. This was the signal on the training ranges that he had expended one magazine and was awaiting orders to “change magazines”. He received the order and continued to engage the *adoo*: such was the state-of-the-art of soldiering in the Oman during those early days of the war. An increasingly sophisticated opposition with Kalashnikovs, foreign training, 61mm mortars and on ground of

their own choosing was attacking an army that could boast of little except immense reserves of enthusiasm and courage.

Within eleven minutes a single piston-engined *Provost* aircraft appeared above demanding a target over the SARBE (Sea Air Rescue Beacon) set that we used for air to ground communications. Conversations were conducted through the emergency beacon’s bleeps! Time was short if we were to hit the *adoo*. I had received no orders from the company commander; indeed I had no idea where he was or what he was doing but assumed from the lie of the ground in front of me and a vague idea of some of the *adoo* positions that he would be attacking in a certain direction. Identifying myself by waving a red-spotted pocket handkerchief, the following conversation took place between me and the pilot above:

“Top cover this is Sand Hat. I’m standing by a three tonner, waving a red handkerchief. Line of my arm. Two fifty yards. Enemy position. Rockets please. Beware of advancing own troops, over.”

*“Top cover. Roger Out.”*

This method of Forward Air Controlling was conducted for ten minutes or so by which time the aircraft had almost expended its load of one 250 pound fragmentation bomb, rockets and machine gun ammunition. The last dive had to be aborted whilst the aircraft was in the final stage of a machine-gunning run for I had spotted the sand coloured ‘shamarghs’ of the Desert Regiment arriving on the *adoo* position. Luckily the pilot pulled up in time.

As the *adoo* were pushed back into the scrub, which fell away into the wadi bottoms of near jungle, the battle faded to a halt. For forty-five minutes there had been non-stop fire from all directions



12th January 1968 – Talking to an aircraft giving us top cover at Ambush Corner.

and varying ranges by both sides. I lit a cigarette (I didn't normally smoke then but there was no beer in my Land Rover!) and ordered the re-grouping. The company commander joined me from the right flank and sent orders for the sergeant major to deliver the 'ammunition and casualty' reports. I told him the sad news.

Ignoring the risk of further attacks on a lone vehicle, Jonathan decided to take the four wounded in one Land Rover ahead before dark to the rough airstrip at Raven's Roost. The *adoo* had never attacked twice in one day before and any delay might have been even more perilous for the casualties.

The company commander having left, ammunition was redistributed, new orders were issued, and after allowing the wounded to get well clear, we set off with the pickets re-briefed on the likelihood of future *adoo* positions while the refuelled and re-armed *Provost* flew top-cover outside small arms range. I was now travelling in the back of a three tonner with a section of soldiers until, after only two miles of rough track we again came under fierce fire from the right. The driver of the vehicle I was in was killed instantly and we debussed straight into an assaulting posture with bayonets fixed. The *adoo* ran off into the scrub being chased by the *Provost* dropping everything as he did so; this time without guidance from me and my red handkerchief!

Realising that this was the way to get to grips with the *adoo* we embussed and continued our journey, believing that they would probably not attack us if we were on foot. We kept a strong element of guides and patrols scouting out to the front and flanks. Sure enough at dusk and almost immediately after the aircraft had left us, having completed a total of twelve airstrikes, we were again attacked: this time from the left. The leading vehicle was hit several times but without casualties and I personally engaged the *adoo* instantly with 2" mortar high explosive bombs. We used this weapon as a superb anti-ambush reply, for what it lacked in accuracy, it made up with morale-sapping explosions in the general area seconds after the springing of any ambush.

As it was then dark we continued the rest of our journey on foot using prophylactic fire against any likely *adoo* position for we were anxious not to have to fight a full-scale battle again as ammunition was low. Suddenly in a long, low line of bushes ahead a white light blinked from the centre of the Bren gun's beaten zone. The Morse message was unmistakably English as were the company commander's distinctive demands to know what all the fuss was about. I went forward and told him of the two later ambushes. It was clear that he had been allowed to pass through the killing grounds by the wily *adoo* who was waiting for the bigger target. Eventually we reached Ambush Corner with one further shooting incident not worthy of the accolade 'ambush' after a tiring, trying, but professionally-satisfying, 24 mile journey.

We had suffered two dead and four wounded: remarkably light losses considering the weight of *adoo* fire and the reported fact that the *adoo* now had 120mm mortars. It spoke volumes for the field-craft and determination of the young Omani and Baluchi soldiers and we were immensely proud of them.

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The following morning I took the dead down to Salalah and debriefed the Desert Regiment's command team. Reports were already coming in confirming what we feared: the first ambush had been laid by between forty and sixty *adoo* and the second and third by fifteen to twenty each. This made a total of anything between seventy and one hundred *adoo* prepared to take on a company strength patrol operating in an 'advance to contact' role. This was unusual and disturbing enough but the last piece of news was astounding. The *adoo* had lost six dead and ten wounded with the expectation that this was only half the figure: among the dead were Chinese. We knew the war would never be the same again for something had taken place that was altogether different and more sinister.

From this day onward SAF faced a new threat which brought its internal battle into international eyes not only for the fact that foreign nationals were actively involved but that the communists were prepared openly to back a local revolution within this most crucial of Gulf nations.

I returned to Ibri with my company in order to prepare for our tour at Ambush Corner but my sojourn back in the north was short-lived as a diet of sand grouse, goat and wadi water followed by amoebic hepatitis had taken their toll as surely as any enemy action. I was destined to spend many of the next nine months in and out of hospital in Bahrain and London during which time, and in subsequent relapses over the next five years, my Royal Marines career also hung in the balance. For a brief period I had thought I was better and attempted to take over my command again, including a return to the jebel to accompany the DR CO, Brian Barnes, on a number of post-ambush, follow-up operations, and was even offered command of the Oman Navy (two dhows – one operational and one in reserve for training) but a dramatic deterioration during a lunch with the Senior Naval Officer, Persian Gulf, dramatically convinced me that the doctors were correct and I was evacuated to England the next day on a stretcher.

Very sadly, I have never returned. ■



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# ARRIVAL

## THURSDAY 13 OCTOBER 1966

*by Paul Davis*

"Where d'you say?" It was rather more an accusation than a question. "Muscat," I repeated. The harassed RAF Air Movements clerk looked at me belligerently.

"We don't go there." He turned away studying his clipboard as I stood there not knowing what to do next. This was the last thing I had expected. I knew that I was going to a fairly remote corner of the world, but no one had told me that I couldn't actually get there. I fished out my movement order.

"Would you take a look at this, please?" The clerk walked back to the counter and took the proffered paper. Eventually a smile of recognition crept across his face.

"Bait," he said, then "Bait" again.

"Bait?" I said uncomprehendingly. I watched him, silhouetted against a huge board listing flights, numbers and names, as he perused a bank of clipboards. I still didn't understand the significance of 'Bait', unless... I looked at my movement order – yes, of course, part of the address of my destination was Bait al Falaj. Question answered and relief that we were now on the same page. As I waited in the deserted Air Movements office I noticed, for the first time, the hum of the air conditioners. Then my eyes were drawn to the window through which I could see in the distance, stretched and shimmering in the heat, a long thin green line. It was hazy even though it was only 0830 in the morning but yes, palm trees, lots of them, lots and lots of palm trees. Wow...!!! My reverie at being in such an exotic place was interrupted,

"You're on the list for Thursday.

Take-off 0730, report here at 0630."

"Where do I go now?"

"Transit," he replied. "Follow the signs," as he pointed to the door.

The heat outside shocked me for a moment. The sweat began to run. I was in a suit and tie – well, it was 1966. I lugged my case along to the door marked 'Transit Office' and went in to another rush of cold air.

"I've just come off the UK flight and I'm going down to Muscat, sorry, Bait on Thursday." I showed the clerk my movement order, he looked at the ubiquitous clipboard, and my name was on it.

"You're in Transit Accommodation 'B'. Jump on the bus round the corner. You'll get bedding at the block." There were half a dozen blokes that I recognised from the plane waiting on the stifling bus. Spluttering into life it wended its way through the sprawling camp and then after a short while pulled up at the entrance to a long low building. The air conditioning must have been working overtime because it was very cold inside. Serried ranks of empty beds lined each wall. My companions piled down to one end, collected their bedding and immediately made themselves comfortable. I did the same and then after a tepid shower collapsed on to the bed. Lying on my back I noticed the ceiling fans. I studied them keenly – for here was another reminder that I was in another place – somewhere different, strange. Nevil Shute, TE Lawrence, Somerset Maugham; authors who had kindled my interest in the magical 'East'. All swam around in my mind emulating the ceiling fan which meant more to me than a mere cooling device. I was, at last in the 'East' well, the Middle East – the Far East would come later. 'The Middle East'; these words which had stoked my febrile imagination throughout my boyhood and became so strong that, I believed, a positive outcome was always on the cards. I had always



With Capt John Lewis Publicity Photo.

been an avid reader, head always buried in books (to the amusement of my parents) telling of far off exotic places. Fiction, non-fiction even travel guides – as long as they recounted, described ‘The East’ in whatever shape or form. You can keep the Americas, Europe: ‘The East’ was so different, attractive, compelling. I suppose that is why I joined the army. Having failed all my A Levels my susceptibility to the patter of an extremely good army recruiting sergeant persuaded me to sign on the dotted line. The fact that he was a Gunner obviously ensured that I would also be a Gunner. After all, in those days you could indeed join the army and see the world – not just on exercise but ‘proper’ postings. Two months later however, in Germany, in the middle of a bitter winter, I began to wonder!

On reflection, service in Germany wasn’t that bad. I was a clerk so I didn’t have to suffer the extremes of the German winter too much although there were the odd occasions when I had to play at being a soldier. No, the camp and company were very good and Paderborn, the nearest large town, reminded us of civilisation. But that was not where I wanted to be. I worked in the Regimental Office with five other lads and the Chief Clerk who was a regular shit. He was probably the driving force, and ultimately the catalyst, for my determination to remove myself as far away from him and Germany, as possible. There was a small library in his office of official publications, you know the sort of thing, Queen’s Regs, Manual of Military Law and a few back copies of Titbits. One slim volume, however, caught my attention and then my imagination. It was entitled ‘Manual of Secondment’ and it became for me essential reading. On long winter nights whilst on overnight duty in the office I would read and re-read the manual from cover to cover. During the day I would check the bookcase just to make sure it was still there. By reading this volume which resembled an army Lonely Planet guide, I discovered the world of secondment. British soldiers were loaned out to a myriad number of defence forces around the world from the Caribbean to Africa and from the South Pacific to the Americas. There was only one drawback – isn’t there always? Most of the available posts were for specialists and not for any old Tom, Dick or Gunner Clerk. I persevered, scanning the specifications for each post, willing there to be something until I found what I wanted. A Bombardier Clerk RA for the position of Confidential Records Clerk was a permanent fixture with the Sultan’s Armed Forces in the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman. Not any old clerk but a Clerk RA (I never found out why) and this had my name on it. I raced around the various offices looking for an atlas as I only had a vague idea where Oman was. Luckily, in the Colonel’s office, I found a small Collins Pocket Atlas – ‘The Sultanate of Muscat and Oman’ in bold, black lettering travelled in an arc across the south eastern corner of Arabia. The lettering left little room for anything else except for a few place names; Muscat, Matrah, Nizwa and Salalah and the land boundary with Saudi Arabia wasn’t even shown at all! But, with the Trucial States to the north and Aden to the south west I couldn’t keep my eyes off the map. Here was Arabia – a land I had read about for years and one corner of it was, possibly, accessible to me. It was a magical moment, the clear pure unadulterated excitement and anticipation made my heart leap and to celebrate I nicked a glass of the Colonel’s scotch! Once the reverie of finding somewhere to go had passed I now had to make a formal application for secondment and get it endorsed by the Chief Clerk. The office proforma cabinet had, mir-

acle of miracles, the secondment application form which I completed within a few days and gave it to the Chief Clerk.

“You’re only doing this to get away from me,” he said breathing alcohol fumes in my face.

“No sir. I’d like to try something different.” The Chief Clerk’s face broke into a lop sided grin, attractive on some but on him resembling a leer, as he said the magic words, “Leave it with me.”

“Hey mate.” I felt a hand on my foot. “Mate. “I saw a figure standing at the foot of my bed. “Mate. Tea’s up.” I mumbled thanks and rubbed the sleep from my eyes. The fans were still there. I hadn’t been dreaming. I was in Bahrain. Germany to Bahrain in the winking of an eye plus five hours in the cramped, full, BUA Britannia from Gatwick. On landing, all the passengers had been assembled in an open sided hanger and sorted into units, detachments etc., and marched away until eventually there was just me, on my own, standing there like a prune. A Warrant Officer took pity, asked me where I was going, which didn’t particularly enlighten him so in the absence of anything else sent me over to Air Movements. RAF Muhurraq was a huge sprawling camp and as I was on my own and only there for a couple of days I made limited forays to the cookhouse, NAAFI and swimming pool but no further. The heat was bad enough but it was the humidity that did me in. But, I was happy. I was in Bahrain, palm trees, hot blue skies, 20 years old with barely two years’ service, standing on the verge of a new adventure.

I stood watching the overweight lady gamely ascending the perpendicular ladder which rose from the cavernous belly of the Beverley transport plane to the passenger deck above. The other passengers, all male, stood silently exchanging glances. The RAF ground crew weren’t as subtle, grinning and sniggering as they gathered around the foot of the ladder as if it was a daily ritual. Slowly and with great tenacity, the woman clawed her way up as a gust of wind swirled around the stacked cargo and lifted up her skirt revealing fat white thighs. The RAF boys laughed, some of the passengers smirked whilst others looked away in embarrassment. I caught the eye of an RAF Corporal, “You should see this ladder on a good day!” A victory cry pierced the heavy air. Startled, we all looked up; the fat lady had finally made it to the top and was giggling triumphantly. Now the log jam had been cleared the remaining passengers were able to use the ladder and as I began my ascent I looked around; the ground crew had disappeared, the morning show was over.

The passenger cabin was surprisingly roomy and comfortable. There were only a few passengers. The fat lady was safely sprawled over two seats smiling and sweating profusely in the hot humid atmosphere. I settled down and soon the engines fired, reached a crescendo, then subsided. The huge aeroplane lurched forward and on to the runway. The engines roared, brakes released and after a short while we climbed into the air over the blue waters of the Gulf. We were informed by the captain that the aircraft was destined for Khormaksar via Sharjah, Bait and Masirah – more names to conjure with. I looked out of the window; the shallow waters of the Gulf still lay below.

“Where are you going?” I looked towards the voice across the aisle. A round, tanned face smiled, “I’m going to Sharjah.”

“Muscat,” I replied.

“I’m in the TOS.” My brain struggled – I’d seen those initials somewhere. My blank face produced the answer “Trucial Oman



Scouts." I remembered – that Secondment Manual, again!

"I'm joining the Sultan's Armed Forces. You're seconded then?"

"Yes, I've just been on my mid-tour leave, another nine months to go."

"Do you like it?"

"Too right – better than Germany any day."

I grinned. "You bet. Have you ever been to Muscat?"

"No, it's difficult to get to. There's very little contact so far as I can make out. I've heard it's pretty primitive."

"Thanks," I replied. "Sounds great!" He looked at me and then laughed.

Below, the water had been replaced by a dull monotonous landscape; ochre, beige and the occasional green as we approached Sharjah where my new found TOS companion left the plane along with nearly everyone else. I got out to stretch my legs. The heat drove me under one of the huge wings and I looked up at the Beverley. It really did look like a box on wheels, with a snub nose and four oil streaked engines hanging from the wings. The metallic silver body was dulled by the constant battering of sand. This was my first encounter with the Bev – the workhorse of the Middle East. Able to carry huge loads accessed through large rear doors – a beautiful piece of machinery and supremely practical. Getting old now and often breaking down, they lumbered from one remote airfield to another providing a vital service with which newer aircraft couldn't cope.

"Beautiful old duck, eh?" An archetypal RAF Officer, neat uniform, trim moustache stood beside me.

"Yes, it's hard to believe it actually flies."

"According to some people it shouldn't. First trip?"

"Yes, I'm going to Bait."

"Oh, you'll enjoy landing there!" Before I could ask why, we were summoned aboard.

As we banked over Sharjah, I could see the receding airport, a narrow black strip against the featureless landscape. Roads ran as straight as arrows with neat roundabouts at intersections just like a draughtsman's diagram. Leaving the waters of the Gulf we turned inland and the landscape became browner, rockier and more forbidding. As we climbed, detail diminished into the haze. Mountains now appeared, jagged brown and flinty grey peaks that stretched as far as I could see. Eventually the plane made another turn and

lost height as we flew along a wide coastal plain streaked with green and bordered by a white necklace of foam where the land touched the deep blue of the Indian Ocean. The deep blue provided a welcome relief from the hazy brown earth although by now, there were some signs of habitation; villages, trees, fields, roads, even some water. My heart thumped. We had been in the air for nearly an hour and a half and I knew we must be getting close. I tried to see if there were any landmarks but nothing as we turned inland and back over the mountains. The landscape raced past my eyes unable to focus on anything for more than a few seconds; more villages, trees, roads even people. "Please fasten your seatbelts..." My heart was in my mouth. This was it. We turned again and again then descended through what seemed to be a valley. The mountains came ever closer; the flinty jagged rocks looked pretty close to my mind and on both sides of the plane for God's sake! We now seemed to be going faster and faster and the rocks were now a blur. A long drawn out, "Shit!" came from somewhere behind. I agreed and now understood that comment by the RAF Officer in Sharjah. The aircraft turned again and almost immediately thumped down on to the runway. The Bev groaned and the walls of rocks had been replaced by a broad valley. The Bev groaned again then shuddered as the engines were thrown into reverse thrust. Clouds of dust obscured the windows as the plane rapidly decelerated. Jerkily we braked then swung round and came to a halt. The dust settled and I could see two vehicles moving towards us and in the distance low white buildings set against the nearby mountains. It seemed ages before the rear doors were opened and we were able to climb down into the hold. I squinted out into the bright light. Standing against a battered olive green landrover was a tanned figure in uniform, a Corporal. I walked down the ramp into the sunlight. The uniform came towards me, "Barry?"

"Yes, you must be John," we shook hands.

"Welcome to Oman."

I, or rather the powers that be, had timed my arrival to perfection. It was October, the high heat of summer had passed and I had all winter to acclimatise. In addition, it was Thursday lunch time, the weekend had started and that evening there was to be a cocktail party in our Mess. "Good opportunity to meet some people," said John Eavis, the chap I was replacing. After meeting me at the

airfield, Bait could hardly be termed an airport with its gravel runway, John had driven us the short distance to the camp which housed the Headquarters of the Sultan's Armed Forces. It was a sprawling collection of one storied white buildings with dark verandas and dominated by an archetypal "Beau Geste" fort which housed all the Headquarters admin staff. The British NCOs' Mess was next to the Signal Centre and across the road, which bisected the camp, from the Officers' Mess. The Mess was small with an ante-room and bar, dining room and bedrooms. The building was distinctly shabby but exuded a lived-in sort of charm and whatever the building lacked in aesthetics, it was more than



British NCOs Mess.

made up for by the people who lived there. John showed me to my temporary room – I would inherit his when he left. My own room – another bonus! We then went into the bar where I met my future mess mates for a drink followed by lunch. The warmth and friendliness of the welcome overcame any apprehension on my part.

“Well, you’ve come at the right time of year.” I nodded agreement. “All the winter to get acclimatised before the heat really sets in.” I nodded again. “Of course, I arrived in June, flung in at the deep end, so to speak.” I sipped my drink having given up any attempt at conversation. “But, I’m used to heat. Spent most of my time in Palestine and Kenya. It’s a different sort of heat, of course.”

“Of course,” I murmured. My eyes flailed around desperately looking for a friendly face. I caught the eye of another stranger who wandered into our so-called conversation. He introduced himself then proceeded to talk estimates and budgets. I slid away to the nearest pillar that supported the veranda and looked back at my erstwhile companions. They looked remarkably alike, round ruddy faces, moustaches and glasses and apparently totally oblivious to everyone and barely sipping their drinks.

“They work in the Defence Department.” I turned and saw Geoff Begley, an Intelligence NCO, tall, bespectacled and soft spoken. His eyes glinted, “I don’t know why they come to these dos. They always end up talking to each other about work.” We moved across to a cable drum table, one of several on the veranda. The warm evening air was canopied by a night sky that shimmered with more stars than I had ever seen before. I felt very tired; the journey and drink were a potent mix and the adrenalin of arrival was beginning to wane. “Had enough?” Geoff inquired.

“Yes, it has been a roller coaster of a day.” I drank some of the cold beer. “How often do these shindigs happen?”

“A couple of times a year. We can’t do it more often because there are only eight of us.”

The British NCOs Mess at Bait al Falaj had the distinction of being the only Mess for seconded NCOs in Oman and was home

to eight NCOs both junior and senior. They were an eclectic bunch representing many different branches of the service as well as coming from a wide variety of backgrounds and experience. It was an invigorating mix which for this naive youth, proved to be an education in itself. The mess was small, intimate and actually just right for the number of people living there. It was run on the lines of a Sergeants’ Mess which is what it was in all but name and which it did become during my second tour. Junior NCOs were expected to fall in line and up their game which they did and good experience it was too. I soon discovered that because there were so few of us there was a camaraderie seldom experienced elsewhere.

“We’ll be going to the beach tomorrow after breakfast. Coming?” asked Geoff. The next day was Friday, Jumma, so I had a chance to lie in, otherwise it would have meant a 6.30am start. Geoff and now John Cartwright (Signals) and John had joined us and explained the Jumma routine. Breakfast at 9, then down to the beach with booze and lunch. Cinema in the evening, one of three shows a week in the open air cinema behind the Officers’ Mess.

“If you feel up to it, we’ll wander over to the fort tomorrow after the beach, and I’ll show you the office.”

“Can’t wait, eh John. Half hour handover and you’re off!” said John C as he dodged a swipe. “When are you leaving?”

“Next Thursday.” Well, that brought it home to me – a week to suss everything out. John obviously sensed my concerns. “It’s easy enough. We’ll have a good chat tomorrow – don’t worry.” The guests had drifted away, the Mess boys were clearing up and it was time for bed – it had been a long day but one that lived long in my memory.

We climbed a narrow stone staircase that ascended the side of the white painted fort on to a wide covered veranda. We had spent the day on the beach, Blackpool, where I revelled in the white sand and crystal clear warm water, and now after a shower John was starting to brief me on the mysteries of the job. From the veranda we surveyed the hotch potch of single storied buildings which



Barry, Stan and Bill at Blackpool.





Mess Gemini.

appeared to have, like Topsy, just 'grow'd'. Military order was imposed on perimeters and boundaries by being marked with the ubiquitous white washed stones so beloved of the army. John unlocked a plain wooden door that opened into a dark musty office with three desks. This was the AQ office home to the DAA&QMG, Staff Captain A and Staff Captain Mov. Diagonally opposite the entrance, heavy studded double wooden doors opened on to the inner veranda which overlooked the great well of the fort and was open to the sky. This corner of the fort was AQ Branch which housed the AQ clerks and the AQ Chief Clerk as well as the CR Clerk – a desk in the corner with two filing cabinets and a typewriter which would, in a few days, be my domain. Piles of files and paper covered all the desks along with table fans and the usual office detritus, all very Dickensian except it was much too bright for that metaphor. No one had air conditioning which meant, for nine months of the year, sweating buckets and there were no toilets!

"Keep Sgt Nazir on side," John remarked pointing to an empty desk, "he is a gem and knows everything that goes on around here."

After giving me a briefing on my forthcoming duties and showing me where everything was – none of which I remembered, he said, "Let's go down to the post room." We exited through another door set in the plywood wall and walked around the inner veranda. John pointed out the office of the GSO staff and the Commander and the Int office, then we went through a small door and down shiny steep steps to the ground floor which led to the fort's main entrance. Instead of exiting through the two huge studded doors we did a sharp right and, stooping through another door we entered a small dusty, windowless cubby hole lit by one naked bulb. This was the post room and officially, BFPO 63A, the other half of my duties. As well as the Confidential Records clerk I was also a postie, responsible for all official and personal mail that arrived on the twice weekly Bev and Gulf Aviation flights. Mail sacks were suspended from rough wooden racks labelled with strange sounding names of all the outposts of SAF. John, again, described the work which, to be honest, was pretty self explanatory. We left the fort through those huge doors past sleepy guards and returned to the Mess where we arrived just in time for drinks then dinner. That evening was my first visit to the open air cinema. It was a big draw both for the British Officers and NCOs as well as for the soldiers and all the assorted camp workers. Goodness knows what they thought of some of the films but they always seemed to enjoy them. The film we saw that night? I have no idea – so much for my memory.

Next day I was woken up at 6 by a mess boy with a cup of tea and into the office with John by 6.30. Introductions to the AQ officers and staff and the redoubtable Sgt Nazir followed by interviews with CSAF Col Tony Lewis, DCSAF Col Colin Maxwell and Major Richard 'The Drum' Anderson, the Garrison Commander. Then off to the tailors for my uniform which, if anything, confirmed to me that I had landed in a different world – things only get better and better. It was also the day I became, much to my chagrin a mere Corporal instead of Bombardier, oh the shame! The week passed in a haze of instructions and introductions, visits to Muscat and the Consulate, Muttrah and to and fro to the airfield and before I knew it John's farewell party had arrived. As with all handovers I had been cushioned by the knowledge that John was still around and even when I had been left alone to my own devices, I knew the work wasn't yet my baby. Watching your predecessor take their leave is always an occasion of mixed emotions – it always has been for me throughout my life. On the one hand you are champing at the bit to do the job and probably with the arrogance of youth, consider that it will be much better in your hands. Then there is envy at the friendly camaraderie of the farewell – will everyone be as effusive on my departure? Finally, panic, sheer bloody panic especially with this job where I wouldn't be part of a team – help... I am the bloody team.

*The finality of John's departure  
marked for me, an exotic new  
beginning which would, eventually  
lead to service in Hong Kong and  
a return to Oman.*

I stood watching the Bev lazily climb into the deep blue of the late afternoon sky taking John off to pastures new. I felt supremely happy and contented. I was in a place where I wanted to be and reasonably confident that I would cope with the work. The finality of John's departure marked for me an exotic new beginning which would, eventually, lead to service in Hong Kong and a return to Oman. But now, as I climbed into the land rover I suddenly thought of Germany, the approaching winter and the lads beavering away in the Regimental Office trying to avoid the gin soaked breath of the Chief Clerk. I smiled as I drove along the road to the camp, "Poor bastards." ■



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# OPERATION STORM

## A TROOPER'S TALE

*by Peter Sichel*

### **First trip**

Following the accession of Sultan Qaboos in July 1970, elements of 22 SAS appeared in Oman in a mainly training and support role. In early 1971, D Squadron prepared to go to Dhofar. As part of our briefing our squadron commander told us to have our heads shaved. When asked why, he said, "To make it easier for the surgeons when you get shot in the head." I was sent on the Short Arabic Course at Beaconsfield, and six weeks later flew out to Dhofar.

Stepping out of the gloom of the C130 into the blinding sunlight of RAF Salalah, and the stink of aviation gasoline, we collected our bergens and aviators' bags and loaded them onto a waiting three-tonner. I looked through the haze of burnt aviation fuel across the plain towards the jebel, and was reminded of Mordor. I wondered what it held for me. I was soon to find out. RAF Salalah at that time was a primitive airfield on the plain north of Salalah. It was ringed by five 'hedgehogs' for defence. These were small forts constructed of old 'burmails' (80 gallon oil cans) filled with sand, and manned by the RAF Regiment and various local units. Salalah was surrounded by a barbed wire fence on its landward side, and we were driven four kilometres east along the line of the fence to the camp at Umm al Ghawarif (UAG). The truck did not exactly follow the line of the dirt track, to avoid mines which were regularly laid. UAG was the HQ of the resident plains battalion, and consisted of a little white fort, surrounded by tents, the whole being surrounded by a barbed wire fence with two gate houses, one to the north, the other to the south, on the town side.

Because Harold Wilson had declared that no British forces were to be engaged in warlike operations East of Suez, we were not SAS – we were BATT (British Army Training Team). We didn't wear our berets or stable belts, or indeed have anything about us which could give away our true identity. The BATT enclave was within UAG, and consisted of one brick building, which held the squadron commander's office, radio room, and the stores and armoury. The rest was tented. Our immediate neighbours to the East were the Oman Artillery. They had two 5.5" field guns, which fired interdiction shots

at waterholes and track junctions on the jebel. They were only a few yards away from our cook tent. They fired without warning, a deafening crash, always, it seemed, at meal times, and covered us all in a fine, sand-coloured dust. We slept in 180 pounder tents, and we looked like Mother's Pride grain-graders every morning as the fine dust was caked by the sweat of the night to our faces.

While I was at UAG it was decided to send a convoy to Taqa, 27 kilometres east of UAG, on the coast. There was a Bedford truck full of supplies, with another full of infantry, three Commando Carriers. There were three of us in a Land Rover with the bodywork cut down. Wearing DMS (rubber-soled) boots, olive-green trousers and shirt, belt kit and bush hats, we were armed with semi-automatic rifles and a 7.62mm Light Machine Gun (Bren). We set off east through Salalah Plain, between the sea to the south, and the Jebel Qara to the north. We passed the Dhofar Gendarmerie camp at Arzat as the plain became increasingly constricted. When we reached Khawr Sawli we came under machine gun fire from the north. We stopped, deployed and took cover. The rounds crackled overhead, but we could not see where they were coming from. It wasn't really effective fire. The Commando Carriers fired into likely areas, and the convoy moved on without having been damaged. This sort of contact was fairly typical in its style. When on the offensive, the *adoo* were generally very hard to spot and their field-craft was of a very high order. They would often open fire at long range, whilst others carried out a flanking manoeuvre to close the range. They were lightly equipped and moved very fast. They were able to do this because they could break off a contact whenever they wanted and re-supply themselves from caches close at hand. When attacking at night some of them would lie in hollows flashing torch-lights in time with the machine guns to draw fire. They would place *shemaghs* under the machine guns to collect the empty cases so that finding where they had been firing from was difficult. In 1975, when I was an officer in Firqat Force of the Sultan's Army, I was briefing the officers of the Desert Regiment about a forthcoming operation. One of them asked, "How will we be able to tell



Taqa from the top fort showing wali's fort and BATT House, set back, opposite.



the difference between the *adoo* and the *firqat*." I said, "If you can see them, they are *firqat*. If you can't, they are *adoo*."

This last was a case in point; the local male dress was a *futah* (sarong), and a shirt with patch pockets, nothing on the feet. In winter the *futah* and shirt were often replaced by a *sbeaka*, which was a long, indigo-coloured shawl worn kilt-wise with the trailing end thrown over the shoulder, and secured by a belt, usually with a knife in it. Both the *firqs*, and the *adoo*, being local, wore the same garb. The *adoo* generally carried AK47 or SKS (Simonov) rifles, and the *firqs* carried FN rifles, and often the only way to tell them apart was if they were firing towards you or away from you. It sometimes happened that you would see some civilians in the distance, and observe them with binoculars. They would drop out of sight, and then suddenly you would be under intense fire. When fire was returned, suddenly the incoming fire would stop as quickly as it had started. The "civilians" had been a group of *adoo* who had collected concealed weapons, had a go, then legged it. Sometimes they would be dressed as women, and sometimes we would be attacked from inside a village, or close by, the *adoo* knowing that we could not return fire for risk of hitting genuine civilians. More often though, a contact would be against a permanent government position, or during an operation, and could last a few minutes, or go on for several hours, as they probed and redeployed.

Taqa had a population of about 2,000 people and consisted of two-storey mud brick buildings with a palm plantation between the town and the sea, a Foreign Legion style fort on a promontory to the north, the *Wali's* (mayor's) fort on the eastern side, and the whole lot surrounded by the ubiquitous barbed wire. 17 Troop were housed in the BATT house opposite the *Wali's* fort. This sort of war wasn't what they had expected. The operations were taxing, against an aggressive, persistent enemy, and to come back and be harassed by the locals for various forms of assistance was wearing in the extreme, especially as we suspected that some of the people we were assisting were of doubtful loyalty. But then, 'Hearts and Minds' played a large part in this operation. We returned to UAG without incident.

Close to Arzat camp was the old Sultan's summerhouse at Ma'murah. It was decided to raise the *Firqat Qaboos* there. This was to consist of Bait Jaaboob tribesmen, whose main tribal area was to the north on Jebel Nahiz. The track leading to Ma'murah was lined with dead date palms. They had died due to lack of water when the *adoo* destroyed the *falaj* which drew water from Ayn Arzat waterhole at the foot of the jebel. There were four of us altogether, and we equipped and trained some forty tribesmen. We tried to teach them infantry tactics. They humoured us as we taught them the principles of fire and movement, and the use of support weapons in the attack. As it turned out, they were absolute



Taqa fort showing repaired RCL damage.

naturals in their own terrain. They expertly used cover and peppercotted at speed. We should have realised – they had been fighting in this environment for hundreds of years – we had nothing to teach them, except net discipline with hand held radios. In a contact this went out of the window and they used them like telephones.

One night we received a message that one of the Dhofar Gendarmerie at Arzat had defected to the *adoo*, taking with him a Commando Carrier which he had driven out through the wire. We were told to engage it with the 84mm Carl Gustav anti-tank launcher which we had. As it turned out, although we heard the high-pitched whine of its engine in the distance, we never saw it, let alone got in range of it. It was found some years later, burned out in the bottom of the Wadi Arzat, with the radio and machine gun missing.

I was at Ma'murah for about a month before being moved to Sudh, a small town on the coast, about a hundred kilometres from Salalah. I went to Rayzut harbour, west of Salalah, which at that time just consisted of a small jetty, and boarded a Sultan of Oman Navy *boom*. It was about sixty feet long, and armed with two .50 calibre Browning machine guns, and a small field gun (RCL). Also on board was a platoon from the Dhofar Gendarmerie. We sailed in the evening and arrived at Sudh the following morning. Sudh was a mud brick village built along the sides of a wadi which opened into a natural harbour. The BATT house was about half way along it. Inside were elements of 17 Troop, who had just returned from the jebel after recapturing the town in an earlier operation. They were exhausted, and didn't recommend the place as a holiday destination.

There were nine of us living in the BATT house, and we also manned a picket above the village. The house was in a tumble-down state, and we rigged up a shower with a *burmail*. All the water had to be lifted from a well in the wadi bottom, the Jerry cans being filled by one of us and pulled up on a rope. It was then hand carried to the house. It was very brackish, and we used a local herb, recommended by the locals, to improve the taste. It didn't really improve it at all, and tea was ghastly. All the supplies had to be hand carried from the beach – about 400 yards of soft sand away. It was back breaking work, especially the 81 mm mortar ammunition. The local traders, who also used the same route, were so impressed with our work output that they offered to pay us to shift their stores.

Sudh was a hot, boring place to be in, with limited scope for patrolling. Some local light relief was provided by the Dhofar Gendarmerie, who mounted their 3" mortar on a neighbouring roof. We watched, fascinated as they practised their drills, awaiting the inevitable outcome. Although the roof was strongly made from palm tree trunks, it had never been intended to put up with this sort of abuse. It withstood the first few rounds, but when it gave up, the mortar suddenly disappeared into the room below.

One day about forty armed men suddenly appeared in the town. They were in the wadi directly in front of the BATT house. They weren't causing any trouble, but we didn't like the fact that they could do. Ossie (the troop commander) said, "You are the troop Arabist, Sibley. Go and disarm them." I said, "You must be joking." "No," he replied, "I will cover you with the Jimpie from up here." There was no way out. I went down and politely asked them for their weapons. They looked at me as if I was mad, which I probably was. When they didn't do as I had asked, Ossie fired a burst across the wadi. They complied. As it was, they were friendly, and later joined the *Firqat Gamal Abdul Nasser*. Being the troop Arabist did have its compensations, however. When an Arab came to talk to me the

troop would gather round asking what he was saying. I would make up something obscure and cryptic such as, "He said, before the sun is over Jebel Samhan the wadis will run with blood." Or "The ravens will not go hungry today." This got the barrage of abuse it deserved.

We were relieved in May, and returned to Salalah by helicopter. At UAG we were briefed about what was to happen next. In spite of everything, I had enjoyed myself and so went to my OC and requested that I stay on with the relieving squadron. He concurred with disappointing alacrity and so it was that I went to Taqa with 13 members of A Squadron. We manned the BATT house and the fort on top of the hill. The BATT house was an old two-storey building constructed of local stone. We had access to one room downstairs which was used as a store. A flight of stairs led to the first floor which consisted of two sleeping rooms and a kitchen. There was a roofless room at the back which we converted into a lavatory/shower. The windows in the sleeping rooms were partially bricked up and glass-free and had wooden shutters over them. We always sat with our backs to the outside wall, away from the windows, for safety's sake. There was a ladder which gave access to the roof, which had a perimeter wall about 18 inches high. I chose to sleep up there when I wasn't living in the fort because it was cooler. One night I had gone to sleep when the *adoo* attacked. I lay down behind the wall as the AK rounds rattled by. Wally shouted at me to get off the roof. I grabbed my Armalite and belt-kit and ran to the ladder to scuttle down it navy-style ie. with my back to it. I didn't get very far; the upright of the ladder had gone up my *futah* (sarong) and I was swinging around with my legs in the air. I had to go back up into the hail of fire to get it out before I was able to gain the sanctuary of the house.

The fort was on a hill overlooking the town. It was a modern construction and looked more like something out of *Beau Geste*. It was about 35 yards wide by 20 yards deep. The outer wall was about 20 feet high and had two low towers set into the ends of the side facing the jebel. The keep was set into the rear wall and was about 30 feet high with a small tower in one corner. On this tower was a flag-pole on which flew the Sultanate flag. It was manned by a platoon of Dhofar Gendarmerie (DG) who occupied the eastern tower and the perimeter wall. We occupied the keep and the western tower and also manned the mortar pit which was on the western side of the fort.

At night the *adoo* would come in close, using AK 47s, Guryonovs, RPDs. The *firks* referred to these as 'Doktors', from the last part of the name, and 60mm mortars. To reply, we had two GPMGs, an 81mm mortar and our personal weapons. We were always short of mortar ammunition, because the Quarter Master for the Middle East, based in Cyprus said that we had used up our training allowance for the year! This meant that we had to severely ration ourselves in contacts, giving the *adoo* the advantage. It took months before he was put in the picture that we were actually at war. This was particularly irritating, because the RAF Regiment in Salalah, trialling a new Trilux night sight, had unlimited supplies, and we were between them and the *adoo*. We eventually got the new Trilux sight – a vast improvement on the old battery system.

When the *adoo* attacked at night it was generally before midnight for the simple reason that it took them that long to get from the jebel in the dark, have a go at us, and then get back before first light. In the evenings, therefore, we stood-to from just before last-light up until about 2230 and searched the surrounding area from the fort with an image-intensifier which was useless during the

monsoon because no star-light got through at all. Mick, a stocky fair-haired chap who later won an MC in the Falklands, was using it one night when he spotted a leopard approaching the fort. He alerted the mortar crew by radio. They were, of course, outside the fort, and the panic it caused them delighted us. Having mooched around it wandered off without incident, but we told the mortar crew afterwards that we could see their eyes bulging in the darkness.

During the day, the *adoo* would shell us from Jebel Aram, to the north, using a 75mm RCL. They would light a fire about a hundred yards from the RCL, and cover it with a cloth. Each time it fired they would lift the cloth allowing a billow of white smoke to rise thus confusing us as to its exact whereabouts. It was out of range of our 81mm mortar, so the crew, instead of using the normal maximum charge of three large augmenting cartridges and three small ones, would use six large ones and add a cup of petrol. This increased the range of the mortar. However it never actually achieved anything except to wear out the barrel, and make the mortar crew deaf. The *adoo* would only fire about ten rounds at a time before withdrawing, so they would be gone before we could arrange a jet strike. At that time, SOAF was equipped with Strikemasters. I always considered that their main advantage was in drawing enemy away from us when we were in a corner, thus allowing us to redeploy – there would be more kudos for the *adoo* in shooting down a Strikie. The skill of the *adoo* at concealment, and the nature of the terrain – hilly scrub, covered in soil with scattered rocks, deep wadis with cave systems – meant that in the vast majority of cases, a direct hit was required to get a kill. On one occasion I was walking from the clinic towards the BATT house when the RCL began firing. For some reason I chose to go right, instead of left around the house. Lucky I did, because the next salvo of high explosive and phosphorus landed in the alley I would have used.

Rats were a serious problem. They destroyed food, and stores. They would sharpen their teeth on water bottles and mugs, gnawing them until they were useless. They would run over us in the night, and their constant squeaking disturbed us no end. The *Jays* soldiers took their boots off at night. The rats would gnaw the calluses on their heels until they reached living flesh. At this point the soldier would wake up, but by this time the damage was done. Any weight on the foot would cause the wound to open. The only treatment was bed rest until the wound healed. We set traps for them at night, in the stores. These were squirrel traps which caught them alive. In the morning they would be so full of rats that it would have been impossible to squeeze another in. We took the cages down to the beach and drowned them. We never got on top of the problem.

During the day we provided civil assistance in the form of a clinic which was in a separate building. There were two locally hired nursing assistants, Al Hinti, who had TB, and Ethebet, who we nicknamed 'Deathbed'. They were widows of dead *adoo*, and served mainly as chaperones when we treated women. We had a wide range of drugs, and could treat most things. Anything which puzzled us we could get advice about from our doctor over the radio. Serious cases could be medivac'd by helicopter. Our doctor paid us a visit every month or so to see how we were getting on, and assist us when necessary.

We even became vets in a limited sense when we were sent chemicals to spray the camels which were infested with irritating black-flies. We waited for them by the town gates as they came in carrying fire-wood, or stones from the quarry, and wouldn't let them



## OPERATION STORM

in until they had been sprayed. This also gave us the opportunity to search them. It was while I was on this duty that I made an interesting discovery. All the camel herders were men, except for one. There was a woman who didn't wear the normal local female dress of black gown and brightly coloured head shawl; instead she wore what looked like a long sand-coloured t-shirt down to the knees, secured at the waist with a leather thong in which was a knife. She wore nothing on her head, and the men treated her with caution.

We had the only vehicle in the town, which was a battered old Land Rover. We used it to ferry plastic jerry-cans of water to the *firqat* families when we had time. This was always a bone of contention, because of the enormous demand. If we had given in to them, we would have done nothing else except deliver water.

In between helping the civilian population, every couple of days we would go out in daylight, hoping to catch the *adoo* on the hop, searching villages under the jebel, or just sitting there, knowing that they would come and have a go at us. This wasn't very nice, because they had the benefit of the high ground, and used to produce a Shpagin 12.7mm heavy machine gun. We would bring the mortar out and set it up in dead ground to try and catch it but we never did. Having been pestered we would then retire to Taqa.

At night we mounted ambushes. They were never successful, because the town's people knew when we went out, and flashed torches towards the jebel. However, we tried. We would take Claymore mines and a GPMG and lie out for hours on the rocky ground. I generally used to carry the Jimpie and 400 rounds of mixed link ammunition, extra ammunition being carried by the rest of the patrol.

We were re-supplied either by convoy along the coast road, which was expensive in terms of forces required, by beach run, or by air. The beach runs were carried out at night by Land Rover or 4 ton Bedford truck. About four of us would go, and having negotiated the sand dunes, driving as fast as possible along the beach, on the hard sand temporarily left behind as each wave receded. It was a bit dodgy, because apart from the risk of being bumped by the *adoo*, if you got bogged down you were really stuck; the tide would come in and swamp the vehicle. This happened a couple of times, but fortunately I was not involved.

Air resupply was by Skyvan, and landed on a dirt airstrip three kilometres to the east of Taqa. It was opposite Sumhuram on the Khawr Rawri. We would be told by radio to expect a Skyvan, but never the time. We would go out with elements of the resident *Jaysh* platoon, check the airstrip for mines, and then settle down in the sun to wait. There were old *sangars* (small defences made by stacking rocks) dotted around the edge which we never used, because of the mine risk. From time to time we came under fire, but it was usually long range, and not effective.

On one occasion we noticed a group of *Bedu* camped on the plain between Taqa and the airstrip. They were a wedding party from the jebel, come down to register the marriage with the *Wali* of Taqa. We were expecting a re-supply the following day, and we informed the *Jaysh* accordingly. The following morning the *Jaysh* platoon arrived outside the BATT house to go with us to the airstrip. At this moment a signal started coming in, so we told the *Jaysh* to go on ahead, and we would catch up with them when we had decoded the signal. The signal announced that the re-supply had been postponed until the following day. We had no direct communications with the *Jaysh* because of a shortage of radios, so Flicker and I got into the Land Rover and drove to the airstrip to

inform them. As we approached the airstrip there was a loud explosion from the *sangar* which I usually lay near. Two *jundies* had gone into the *sangar* and lifted a rock which was in the middle of it. Under it had been a mine with an anti-lift device. We drove over and reversed up to it. There was a strong smell of cordite and the fine dust was settling over the bodies as the blood soaked through. One was dead, and the other severely injured. Hoping that the *adoo* would not have laid two mines in the same *sangar*, we gingerly dismounted and put the two of them in the back of the Land Rover, told the platoon commander that we would cancel the Skyvan (no point in telling him that it had been cancelled anyway), and returned to Taqa. We told the locals that there had been a vehicle accident (they didn't believe us, of course) and arranged a Casevac (helicopter casualty evacuation).



We then returned to the scene of the mine incident to search the area for pieces of the mine for identification purposes. We probed around and filled our pockets with little bits of green plastic, springs, anything we could find. When we returned to the BATT house, we emptied our pockets out onto the table to examine our finds. Whispering Wally, picked up what looked like a piece of wire. "Electrically detonated," he announced. We looked hard at it. "Wally, that's a human tendon." He dropped it in disgust.

The following day we drove out without the *Jaysh* to receive the Skyvan. On the way we noticed that the *Bedu* wedding party had gone. I went to my usual place near the *sangar* where the mine had been. We came under small arms and heavy machine gun fire from the other side of the *khawr*. They were out of range of the 81mm mortar in Taqa, and we replied ineffectively with the Jimpies. Wally decided to bring the mortar out and set it up near the air strip. The target was quickly adjusted, and the *adoo* driven off. About fifteen minutes later I saw a group of people about two kilometres away, running towards the jebel. The *firks* confirmed that they were *adoo* so I directed the mortar onto them. After the first couple of rounds of HE (High Explosive) I was on target, and ordered "Five rounds mixed fruit pudding". This was a sequence of HE, Smoke (White Phosphorous), HE, Smoke, HE. We had found this combination to be highly effective in rocky terrain. The group scattered, and ran even faster towards the jebel. I realised that they would shortly disappear out of sight behind a low ridge, so I ordered a large left switch, to land in front of them and drive them back into the open, where I could continue to stonk them. At this point the *firks* began to express concern. When the *firks* became agitated I stopped the shoot. At that point a civilian ran into our location from the east. He said, "We are the wedding party. Stop shooting." We waited until they brought the wounded in, treated their injuries, and arranged a casevac. When I discussed this incident with the *firks*, they said that the mine layers had used them

for cover, and that it was Allah's judgement. I didn't think they would have been so philosophical had they been of the same tribe.

Early one morning there was a banging on the BATT house door. One of the team opened the window shutter and saw a *firk* standing there. "Go away. We don't open until nine o'clock," and shut the shutter. At 0900 the man returned. He was an *adoo* trying to surrender! He told us that he had been sent from the *jebel* as protection for a minelayer. What the *adoo* had not known was that the minelayer had killed a member of his family. As soon as they were off the *jebel* he had killed him, hidden their weapons, and come into Taqa. He went out to bring the weapons in, and was sent to Salalah for debriefing. We were to discover that if a member of an *adoo* group was considered unreliable, he was not shot within the group. This would have upset his friends. Instead he would be told to take a message to the leader of a neighbouring group. The message would say "This man is unreliable. Kill him". This worked well, provided the messenger was illiterate. There were several cases when the messenger could read; as soon as he was out of sight of his group he would read the message, realise that he had overstayed his welcome and defect to the Government forces. This is how we found out about it.

The monsoon favoured the *adoo*, and in that three month period we recorded over 70 contacts. These ranged from artillery bombardments, to stand-off attacks with heavy machine guns and concerted assaults up to the town wire. It is now thought that these attacks were rehearsals for the attack on Mirbat which took place in July of the following year. They never got in. Because of the need to be alert at all times we wore our boots day and night, so most of us had foot rot. We never took our belt kit off, and our weapons were permanently at hand. At night I kept my webbing braces on and used my belt kit as a pillow – when I stood up it dropped onto my waist and I only had to fasten it. We were in a permanent state of heightened awareness, to the extent that it was dangerous to wake a colleague up by touching them – they would come out fighting. The accepted way was to whisper their name, at the same time tweaking their toe through the sleeping bag, and then jump back.

During the day, several of us took to wearing a *futah*, but instead of wearing it full length, folded it in two, so that it looked like a miniskirt. Boots, miniskirt, belt kit, OG shirt and Armalite – unfortunately I never took a photograph of this rig.

One night I had gone to bed in the yard at the foot of the keep of the fort, dressed in shorts, boots and OG shirt, belt kit as pillow with a waterproof bag of spare clothes to soften it. I slept in a sleeping bag made of parachute nylon with my Armalite inside pointing towards my feet. This was so that no one could take it, and if I was disturbed during the night I could fire it through the bottom of my sleeping bag. I heard a single crack of a round passing overhead. I leaped out of my sleeping bag and ran up-stairs to the parapet. I had paused to draw breath and suss out the situation, when I heard the boom of the RCL. The next thing I knew was that I was on my back, and there was the pungent stink of cordite. I couldn't move my legs because they were covered in masonry, there was a large hole in the wall where I had been leaning, and there was a hail of machine gun fire and green tracer coming through it. I pushed the masonry off my legs and found that I couldn't use my left arm. I was also stinging down my left side. I ran downstairs to the room below where the rest of the BATT were gathered, doing a head count. It turned out that the *adoo* had brought their RCL down from the *jebel* and had set it up a thousand

yards away. They just couldn't miss the fort at that range. They scored four more direct hits before we fought them off. The following day I was casevaced to the FST at RAF Salalah, where they found a minor fracture in my left elbow, and flash burns down my exposed left side. I returned to Taqa the same day on light duties – we were too short of arabists for me to lurk in UAG. My sleeping bag at the foot of the keep was riddled with shrapnel, as was the waterproof bag I had been using as a pillow.

Following this incident we were sent an old French 90mm anti-tank gun. We set it up by the fort at the eastern end, and taught ourselves how to use it. It had a range of two thousand yards, and two types of ammunition – High Explosive Anti-Tank – not very useful against personnel, and Practice Rounds. These last gave off a hideous howling noise when they ricocheted, and we decided it would be useful to terrify the *adoo*, who would think we had banshees. It was fired by a long lanyard of mine tape from the top of the fort at the nearest position the *adoo* were likely to use at the start of any contact. We never bothered to reload it until the contact was over. When the Dhofar Gendarmerie took over from us, their OC was familiarising himself with it, and made the mistake of standing directly behind it when he fired it. The recoil buffer mechanism failed, and the barrel and breech block assembly came back and killed him.

To discourage the *adoo* we started to make our own mines out of whatever was available; tins, nuts and bolts, and improvised pressure switches out of sheet tin and lavatory paper. We laid them in suspected *adoo* fire positions at last light, and lifted them the following morning so as not to cause civilian casualties. When Wally asked me to go out and lay the mines I took a section of Dhofar Gendarmerie with me as local protection. We moved out at last light, heading towards the *jebel*. When we were about fifteen hundred yards out I chose my site, and told the section to go into all-round defence. I was engrossed with laying the mines, and had just completed the ring-main which would cause them all to detonate if one was disturbed, when I looked up. Instead of being in all-round defence, the section were all looking inwards to see what I was doing. Hopeless! I berated them, finished what I was doing and then scuttled back to Taqa, thankful that the *adoo* weren't playing that night.

At the end of the tour we had piously hoped to be airlifted out. Instead we were told that the G Squadron team would arrive by land convoy, and we would go out on the return journey. We didn't mind, it was the end of it all and we had survived. We weren't at all happy to receive a signal on the morning of our departure that intelligence had indicated that the Salalah to Taqa road had been mined. We were to leave our bergens and heavy equipment in Taqa, and go out and clear the road. We went out, looking for signs of disturbed soil, prodding the ground with spikes. We didn't find anything, and were relieved to get onto the three-tonner when it arrived. We celebrated our survival in the NAAFI at RAF Salalah that night, and returned to the UK on the 19th August 1971 by C130.

Because we were on active service we were entitled to a daily tot of G10 rum. However, because we were "dry" we didn't get it. To make up, at the end of each trip each soldier was given two bottles of Hudsons Bay Rum from the NAAFI, no G10 rum being available.

We had two weeks leave, some further training, and I returned to Dhofar on the 15th November with my own squadron. ■

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*To be followed up in the next edition.*

*Adapted from "A Monk in the SAS" third edition by Paul Sibley.*



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# THE ARTILLERY TROOP FIRST DEPLOYED TO DHOFAR

## FEBRUARY 1967

*John Lewis – Artillery Troop Commander 1966/1968*



25pdr firing from Salalah Plain in support of jebel operations – 1968.

I was ordered by CSAF to take the Artillery Troop to Dhofar in early 1967 in support of the Muscat Regiment. The Troop consisted of three 25pdrs, two 75mm pack hows and, later by sea transport, one 5.5inch gun.

The overland route from Muscat to Salalah took four days of hard driving from dawn to dusk across endless gravel plains and sand dunes on the edge of the Wahiba desert. The troop knew the route well since we had helped the Force Transport Company mark the route with sand filled oil drums during 1966. As each escarpment was crossed so another oil drum would come into sight on the horizon. Arrival at the oil company camp at Midway allowed us time to rest, repair vehicles, unload the guns from the back of our three ton trucks and line up as a gun group ready for action. The reconnaissance platoon of the Muscat Regiment escorted the Troop to a company position of the Muscat Regiment on the jebel, alongside the Midway Road at Raven's Roost – so named after the company commander **Peter Raven**.



From Muscat to Midway – February 1968.

Within an hour of arriving at Raven's Roost a picquet position came under attack and called for reinforcements. The 'standby' platoon of the company immediately set off down the Midway Road accompanied by our two 75mm guns. The guns were brought into action and fired in the direct fire role on the enemy positions. For the *adoo* it was their first experience of artillery fire and they quickly broke off the engagement. It was heartening when a cheer went up from the picquet position and we felt we were now fully integrated with our infantry colleagues.

After the action we discovered that the guns had fired with shredded tyres that had burst on the rough and stony ground. The tyres had been held together by tyre paint to look smart on the gun park at Bait al Falaj. Worrying thoughts of having to source new tyres for an out of service gun were quickly dispelled when my resourceful driver **Khalfan** measured up the spare Landrover tyres and found they fitted the guns so the problem was solved!

Thus, the first artillery rounds of the Dhofar War had been fired with good effect and within a few hours of deploying onto the jebel. Except during the monsoon period from July to September, the guns were permanently deployed on the jebel.

The airstrip at Raven's Roost was the first to be built on the jebel and was constructed by soldiers of the Muscat Regiment and the Gunners. This allowed the SOAF Beavers to land on the rough strip bringing in supplies and evacuating casualties. The seconded RAF pilots never hesitated to resupply the position and the same pilots also flew the piston engine Provosts for ground attack in support of ground operations. I accompanied the infantry as their OP officer on operations either side of the Midway Road in order to keep the road open. Contact with the *adoo* was often made in the deep and

## THE ARTILLERY TROOP FIRST DEPLOYED TO DHOFAR



heavily wooded wadis. When casualties were taken it was necessary to break off contact in order to evacuate casualties to Raven's Roost. In the open country above the wadis it was easier to dominate the ground but long range sniping by the *adoo* slowed our movement. Artillery fire often dispersed the snipers and discouraged them from assembling for an attack.

My most worrying moments in Dhofar were while waiting for the opening ranging round. Was my map reading accurate? Would the ranging round explode out of view in the depths of a wadi? By using base ejection smoke for the first round I could see the smoke trail in the sky and then smoke rising from the point of impact. Panic over. I was then in a good position to make an adjustment towards the target. These were very anxious moments and on some occasions (very few) the fall of shot was too close to our troops by Larkhill standards. However, when this happened at least I could see the point of impact and was able to confidently order an accurate correction towards the *adoo* position. My stomach churning concern (adrenaline rush) was often alleviated when the cry went up from the infantry of 'sharbash' – well done in Urdu.

During the monsoon months of July to September, the gunners and infantry moved off the jebel to the army camp outside Salalah. The monsoon brought low cloud, mist and rain making movement difficult and the soldiers did not have the right clothing and footwear to operate on the jebel in these conditions. SAF just did not have the logistics to sustain units on the jebel. Under cover of the monsoon the *adoo* could move down to the foothills of the jebel and threaten Salalah, the RAF airfield and the coastal towns. During these months the priority of the Muscat Regiment was therefore to defend Salalah and vigorously patrol the coastal plain. The Sultan had extensive gardens at Mamurah, ten miles east of Salalah, and irrigated from a large watercourse and waterfalls running from the foothills. Frequent patrolling in this area was supported by the Troop and our artillery fire often disrupted ambushes by the *adoo*.

On one operation a patrol returning from Mirbat was ambushed from overlooking hillocks all of which could not be picquetted. **Sergeant Charshambe** brought his 25pdr gun into action in the direct fire role. Enemy bullets were hitting the gun

shield but still his gun detachment calmly carried on with their kneeling gun drill with Sergeant Charshambe directing the fire of his gun on the enemy positions and their escape routes as they quickly broke off their engagement. For this action, Sergeant Charshambe was the first gunner to be decorated in the Dhofar war.

The 5.5inch gun with its long range and easy manoeuvrability along the flat coastal plain was used to support operations and to fire harassing fire by night on the tracks in the jebel.

The Sultan sent a message that he liked to hear the guns firing at night and listened to the gunfire from his open window in the palace. He was again to show interest in the gunners when he made one of his rare appearances outside his palace to attend an artillery demonstration. With no blank rounds available to fire a salute, we used live rounds fired onto the jebel. He seemed well pleased and the gunners were delighted and excited to see their Sultan for the first time.

By April 1968 the Northern Frontier Regiment (NFR) took over from the Desert Regiment and the pattern of operations continued to be much the same. To secure the Midway Road continued to be a priority as supplies to maintain the regiment in Dhofar had to be transported overland from Northern Oman. Thus operations were frequently mounted to keep the *adoo* out of the wadis on either side of the road from which they could mount attacks on SAF positions and lay ambushes. The gunners continued to support these operations from gun positions along the Midway Road. The DR could only mount one company size operation at a time so when a major operation was planned on the Dhofar Plain the Troop moved off the jebel to provide artillery support to the 'Plains' company.

It was while preparing for such an operation (Op GARUMA) that at the beginning of June 1968 my replacement **Captain Nicol Cameron** arrived in Dhofar to take over the Artillery Troop. Like me he had jumped at the chance of a secondment to SAF to seek excitement and adventure. This he would get in great measure and I knew that my cheerful and loyal SAF gunners would not let him down. I was given a superb send off by the Troop organised by my trusted friend **Lieutenant Mohd Ashraf**. During my time in Oman, my SAF gunners and I had shared happy months of peacetime soldiering in Northern Oman and also shared much toil and hardship at war in the jebel region of Dhofar. ■





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# GUNNERS IN OMAN

We held our annual lunch on 5 September 2017 in the Medal Room at the HAC with the reception in the Court Room. There was a large attendance including **David McFadden** who had come from Vienna and **Rod Baker** joining us from Spain. It was good to have all the eleven seconded RA officers who were in Oman at the formation of 1st Regiment Oman Artillery in March 1972. Unfortunately, **Nigel Knocker** was unable to attend and sadly **Bugs Hughes** was not well. **Hugh Colley** welcomed everyone to our 18th lunch and emphasised that it was a special occasion for us as **Mike Lobb** had been appointed as Chairman of the SAF Association replacing Nigel Knocker. The handover to Mike took place at the SAF Association Curry Lunch on 8 June 2017. Hugh reported that he presented a framed photograph to Nigel on behalf of the Gunners in Oman thanking him for his comradeship, support and friendship reaching back to when he commanded the Desert Regiment in 1972 with **Douglas Maclaine's** B Troop under command and reinforced by David McFadden's Light Section for *Op Simba*. The gunner relationship was further strengthened by **Tom Bremridge** and **Alec Lamond** who were seconded to the Desert Regiment.

Mike Lobb was commissioned into the RA and subsequently selected for SAS. He is a founder member of our Group and we congratulated him on his key role in the SAF Association, wished him the very best and assured him of our full support. Mike responded and described his ideas and plans for the future of the Association. He was planning to visit Oman before the end of the year.

Hugh thanked **Mike Hardy** for all the effort and work he puts into setting up such a successful and enjoyable event every year. Also he thanked **Johnnie Kirkham** for the quality photographs he efficiently circulates after our events. We are all most grateful.

*Attendance:* **Rod Baker**, Tom Bremridge, Hugh Colley, **Will Cook**, **John Dean**, **Mike Goodfellow**, **Nick Holbrook**, Johnnie Kirkham, **John Lewis**, Mike Lobb, **Chris Long-Price**, Douglas Maclaine, David McFadden, **Miles Thomson**, **Graham Smith**, **Ian Ventham** and Mike Hardy.

*Apologies and Good Wishes:* **Jimmy Garnier**, **Gordon Allen**, **George Correa**, **Tony Smith**, **Ken Brown**, **Jerry Yeoman** and **Patrick Dunn**. ■

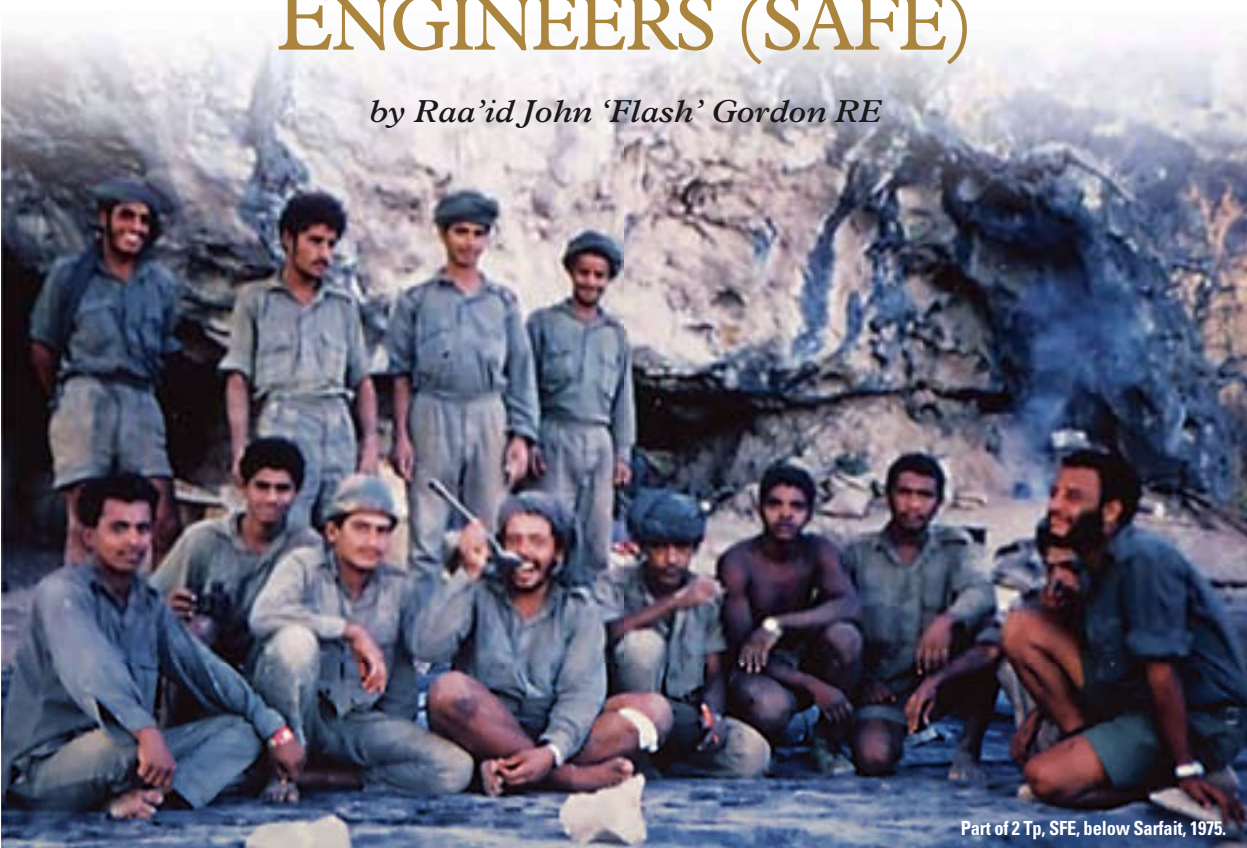


Left to right: Ian Ventham, Will Cook, Johnnie Kirkham, Douglas Mclaine, Patrick Dunn, Miles Thomson, Jerry Yeoman, David McFadden, Tom Bremridge, Julian Paxton, Hugh Colley, Mike Goodfellow, John Lewis, Mike Lobb, Mike Hardy and Nick Holbrook.

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# SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES ENGINEERS (SAFE)

by *Raa'id John 'Flash' Gordon RE*



Part of 2 Tp, SFE, below Sarfait, 1975.

Prior to the Dhofar War all combat engineering tasks were carried out by the Assault Pioneer Platoons of the Infantry Battalions. In late 1973 it was decided that SAF needed its own integral engineers. Thus in early 1974 **Raa'id Alec Tomlin** and a small training team of British SNCO instructors established itself in Bait Al Falaj and started training the first Combat Engineers, of what was titled the Sultan's Forces Engineers (SFE).

They trained the first field troop of approximately 40 all ranks, which was deployed to Dhofar on 4 November 1974 under the operational command of OC 60 Field Squadron RE. Under the command of **Raa'id Robert 'Knobby' Reid**, it took a further 18 months for SFE to become a fully fledged squadron of around 150 or so equipped with the all the requisite tools and heavy earthmoving plant machinery. A second troop was trained up to replace the first troop in Dhofar in mid-1975 and was involved in obstacle construction around Salalah and intensive mine clearance training.

By that stage, those in SFE had developed significant experience from the numerous operations towards the end of the campaign. SFE were involved in the diversionary operation from Sarfait in October 1975, when they successfully cleared routes down from Sarfait on the position below, known as Capstan, allowing C Company MR to secure the objective; a pivotal point in the final phase of the war. Operations continued and SFE, assisted by Assault Pioneer Platoons from two infantry battalions, laid 4.5kms of fencing, thus effectively cutting off the *Adoo* access routes. At the

same time the other operational SFE Troop was helping to clear routes into the Shirishitti Caves Complex so that FF could capture it. SFE as a fledgling sub unit, often worked hand in glove with the Royal Engineers whilst they developed their experience but were solely responsible for supporting offensive operations in 1975 (FF and MR in particular).

By the end of 1975, SFE had proven itself in the field and comprised an HQ, three Field Troops, one Support Troop and a HQ Troop.

The post Dhofar War period saw SFE move its base in to the new MAM Camp and continue training both its own recruits and Assault Pioneers, as well as participating in numerous civil aid and



Constructing gun positions at Sarfait, late 1970s.



## SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES ENGINEERS (SAFE)



development projects. Some troops still remained in the south conducting mine clearance and civil construction tasks. In late 1977 the unit title was re-designated as the Sultan's Armed Forces Engineers (SAFE).



By the end of 1981 it had become evident that SAFE was too small to provide the required support and in 1982 they expanded to a single Regiment under an Omani Commander. The new structure included a Regimental HQ, two Field Squadrons and an Engineer Training School. Each Field Squadron comprised of three Field Troops and a Support Troop, a third Field Squadron being added in 1986. The HQ and two Field Squadrons were based in MAM and one in Salalah, primarily focused on mine and UXO clearance.

During the early 1990s an HQ Squadron was created and the support troops were withdrawn from the Field Squadrons to create a single Support Squadron. In 1995 the embryo of a future Armoured Engineer Squadron was created with the arrival of the first

Piranha and Panhard Armoured vehicles. M728 Engineer Tanks were acquired from the USA in the late 1990s and used for the first time on Exercise Saif Sareea 2.

SAFE continued to expand to include niche capabilities such as NBC/CBRN and in 2008 split into two Regiments, 1st Regiment based in MAM and 2nd Regiment in RAFO Salalah. In 2010 1st and 2nd Regiments defined their role as Combat Engineer Regiments



supporting 23 and 11 Brigade respectively, whilst a third newly formed Regiment (also based in MAM) subsumed many of the support and niche capabilities and became a General Support Regiment. 2nd Regiment remains the 'Operational' regiment and recent operations for SAFE have included disaster relief and support to public order. Expansion for SAFE does not end there as there are now rumours that a 4th Regiment will be formed in the next year specialising in road construction.

Today SAFE, under the Command of Aqeed (Hameed Des) Mohammed Al Juma is working at a high tempo as it focuses on delivering a wide range of support to RAO and has its eyes set on the large scale exercises of Ex Shumook and Saif Sareea 3 with the UK in late 2018. Despite this, they are still finding time to develop expertise in NBC, amphibious, search and the more traditional combat engineering.

In sum, it is clear that the requirement for what SAFE can offer has grown exponentially over the past 43 years and it continues to act as the backbone to much of what RAO does – long may it continue. ■



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# THE SARFAIT TRIPOD

*Tim Jones, Grey39 1972-74*

Jebel Regiment returned to Dhofar in January 1973 relieving Muscat Regiment in the Western Area. Two companies deployed to Op Simba at Sarfait augmented by elements of Oman Artillery, Frontier Force, Spike Powell's Zulu Company and Dhofar Gendarmerie. This released one JR Company for offensive operations out of Manston.

By now, the Dhofar war was gaining considerable international attention. The battle of Mirbat had featured in Western Newspapers and ITV *News at Ten* visited Op Simba in January. Although plans to exploit below the Scarp to Capstan and beyond had long since been shelved – no water and too dangerous for heli-resupply – Simba had become strategically significant. It made an important political statement for the Sultanate – notably attracting support for its struggle from Jordan and Iran. It also absorbed a lot of ordnance that might otherwise have hit more vulnerable targets further east; and it was a provocative thorn in the side of the enemy denying complete freedom of movement right at the border.

However, the isolated Simba 'garrison' (known as SIMFOR) lived a strange existence. Supported entirely by air, the management of resupply and turnover of reserve stocks was a daily task but ears were constantly cocked to pick up the distant bang, boom or pop of an incomer being fired. After each stand-off attack, unexploded incomers (blinds) had to be blown-up for safety. Sangars were constantly being rebuilt and strengthened by day, and listening posts and patrols were mounted by night.

The tempo of stand-off attacks on Simba increased throughout February. Over 1500 'incomers' hit the various positions during the month as they were attacked from all sides most days with mortars, RCLs, RPGs, machine guns and snipers. Sometimes individual positions were targeted; sometimes several positions were hit at once; sometimes nothing. There was no obvious pattern but Red, the platoon position closest to the Yemen border on the west end of the dominating northern ridge (Yardarm), took hits most days. So, too, did Blue 2 (some 4000m to the east at the other end of Yardarm).

*The reaction to any stand-off attack was standard. Whoever heard the bang, pop or boom of a weapon firing yelled 'incomer' on his National radio, took a quick bearing on the sound and then it was 'take cover'.*

The reaction to any stand-off attack was standard. Whoever heard the bang, pop or boom of a weapon firing yelled 'incomer' on his National radio, took a quick bearing on the sound and then it was 'take cover'. Time of flight depended on weapon type and could be just 17 seconds or so (for a low trajectory RCL) or about 28 seconds for a 82mm/81mm/3inch mortar. Shorter range, shoulder launched RPG7s obviously arrived sooner and left a smoke trail. They were sometimes directly aimed at sangars but more often fired in the indirect /self destruct mode to explode overhead. There

was no way of knowing in advance what sort of 'incomer' it was going to be although we became quite good at prediction. Sometimes we were caught out when a mixture of weapons was employed!! Stand-off attacks were usually answered by counter bombardment from the Simba mortars/ artillery and SOAF jets, but targets were often hard to identify.

By contrast, the enemy knew exactly where we were! The RCL and mortar fire was extremely accurate; most rounds fell within the perimeter wire of the target position and many sangars took direct hits. On 22nd February, Red took over 50 mortar incomers and one sangar received three consecutive hits in as many minutes! But, remarkably, we suffered few casualties.

A serious loss, however, was the fixed wing, Caribou, resupply aircraft which brought in most of the water and ammunition. This was destroyed by a 75mm RCL whilst unloading on Mainbrace. We reduced to half water rations immediately and even had to plan complete withdrawal.

*The pressure was mounting on Simba. Despite forward listening posts and patrols, both Red and Blue 2 were probed by determined close range night attacks during February.*

The pressure was mounting on Simba. Despite forward listening posts and patrols, both Red and Blue 2 were probed by determined close range night attacks during February. It was clear that we needed more effective defences and especially mutual machine gun support between positions but the ranges were extreme – too great for light role GPMGs and well beyond burn-out range of tracer. We had no tripods or Sustained Fire role kits for GPMGs and there were no .5 Brownings immediately available, so improvisation was needed!

We were fairly sure that the 7.62 round would still be very damaging at 2000 metres so CO JR (**Col Roger Jones**) worked with **Len Mallet** and Brigade workshops to design and produce a GPMG tripod made from angle iron pickets. To this, they fixed a screw-adjusted elevation plate which was fitted with a proper GPMG mount 'acquired' from friendly sources. There were no buffer plates so the wooden stock remained in place. There was no dial sight or aiming posts. We got hold of some spare barrels but it was essentially a light role weapon on a (hopefully) steady improvised platform – the Sarfait Tripod – to deliver accuracy at extreme range by day or night. But would it work for real?

There was no time for tests and trials. The first kits were rushed to Simba wrapped in sandbags and were set up on Green 1 and White 1 to fire in support of Blue 2 and Red respectively, which were some 2000 metres away across deep wadis. In the absence of pamphlets, range tables and accurate adjustments, it was all very ad hoc! The School of Infantry and Small Arms Corps instructors would have been horrified as trial bursts were fired by day and night and tripods adjusted until rounds were just striking the out-



## THE SARFAIT TRIPOD

side wall of the most forward sangars regularly (to much cheering from the soldiers inside!). There was some scatter in the fall of shot as the tripod was not really rigid but we felt that was an advantage against enemy troops in the open giving us an area weapon much like the WW1 Vickers Machine gun! It also seemed to have a fairly long beaten zone, or cone of effective fire, which could be 'interlocked' with that from another weapon firing at 90 degrees from another distant position to 'seal' the two most exposed sides of the position. So, two tripod weapons could be sited on Yellow (one to support Red and the other Blue 2), harmonised and adjusted with those on White and Green to provide interlock. That was the theory anyway! Settings were marked with white paint and the procedure was carefully explained to the platoon commanders. The guns would be laid on and locked on their Final Protective Fire (FPF) task at last light just like mortars and artillery guns. They would report ready and only then be fired on the order from Red and Blue 2.

With artillery and the platoon defences tightened up (including new and improvised claymore mines) we felt we now had a workable, albeit ad hoc, solution to the growing threat of night infiltration attacks.

*Morning patrols picked up blood trails and Blue 2 was never attacked from close range again, nor was Red – we felt that the Sarfait tripod had proved its worth.*

Whilst similar, mutually supporting, tripod mounted machine guns were being installed at other Simba positions, Blue 2 was again attacked by night at close range but this time it was a different story. Blue 2 called for the White1 GPMG FPF and a series of long bursts was fired into the night sky towards the unseen target. The tracer burned out after 1100 metres somewhere near the top of the arc and fingers were crossed. Mortars also fired in support but the engagement soon ended. Blue 2 called end of mission and reported that the GPMG rounds fell on target. The attack had then stopped almost at once.

Morning patrols picked up blood trails and Blue 2 was never attacked from close range again, nor was Red – we felt that the Sarfait tripod had proved its worth. ■

### SON/RNO CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF THE SAF ASSOCIATION

will take place in the

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE ROYAL NAVY  
PRINCESS ROYAL GALLERY, PORTSMOUTH

**SUNDAY 17 JUNE 2018 • 1200 onwards**

Drinks followed by 3 course lunch (further wine available at cost price).

INVITATION: Includes entry into the museum and guests will also receive access to 3 sets of galleries, which are all in the same building as the Princess Royal Gallery and are open from 0900-1700.

Please be aware that this does not include access to any other locations on site such as HMS Victory or Mary Rose.

GUESTS: Wives/partners most welcome • RIG: Jackets and ties

COST: Still to be confirmed but approx. £50 per head

CAR PARKING: Available outside Unicorn Gate at a reasonable price

Contact: Robin Gainsford • robingainsford@hotmail.com

## DEATHS

The following deaths have also been recorded:

- 14 Aug 16 **Richard Bowyer RAFO**  
Nov 16 **Paul Braithwaite SOAF/RAFO** (see obit)  
1 Apr 17 **Bernard Richard Bowen RAO '68-70**  
22 Apr 17 **Richard Wood DR '70-71**  
24 Apr 17 **Roddy Jones ORYX Project, ORD Musandam**  
May 17 **Peter Buchanan First Force Signals Officer Sep 61-Apr 64**  
9 Jul 17 **Sean Brogan MC. 22 SAS, SSF, Oman Ministry of Health.** Obit in the Daily Telegraph dated 6 Oct 2017  
18 Jul 17 **Alec Tarwid MBE. Aged 95. Polish Officer commanded Wessex Detachment RAF in Dhofar. Flew Spitfires in WW2**  
28 Jul 17 **Mike Roythorne. Aged 86. Previous Major RA and RAF Flt Lt. FOS early '80s**  
8 Aug 17 **Brian Essex MBE AFC. SOAF/RAFO late '70s/early '80s. Loan Service as Strikeys instructor Masirah. Contract as CO 5 Sqn Skyvans Salalah '85-92**  
8 Sept 17 **Eric Le Quesne QM WFR and SO2 Log '85-89. Died whilst on a cruise in the Norwegian Fjords**  
8 Sept 17 **Martin Johnson WKhM (G) SOAF/RAFO, '82-99. Known as "blind Pugh". Described as a remarkable man**  
9 Oct 17 **Jaspar Browell MBE**  
30 Oct 17 **Peter Day R Sigs. Advice and Support for RAO Signals. '96-98 approx.**  
30 Nov 17 **John Darbyshire. OC B Coy MR '61-64**  
8 Dec 17 **Anne Perkins. Widow of Ken Perkins CSAF '75-77**  
11 Dec 17 **Bruce Moore. Senior Personnel Officer HQ SOAF '76-82**  
12 Dec 17 **Roger Bayldon MBE, TD, WKhM DQ HQ Dhofar Bde '75-77** (see obit)  
30 Dec 17 **John Booth. RM, DR and later RAMC**  
31 Dec 17 **Charles Ramsay WB CBE DSO. NFR '73-75**  
11 Jan 18 **Bugs Hughes. WkhM OBE SOA '75-76**  
18 Jan 18 **Chris Bentley. WFR. '79-81**  
23 Jan 18 **Harry Dalzell-Payne. CBE. NFR late '60s**  
2 Feb 18 **Vivyan Robinson. MC WB WKhM. Baluch Gd. Renamed FF. '71-73**

### 2018 SAF ASSOCIATION DINNER

will take place in the

ARMY AND NAVY CLUB, PALL MALL, LONDON

**FRIDAY 23 NOVEMBER 2018**

PLEASE APPLY BY 16 NOVEMBER 2018 AT THE LATEST

To: Neil Fawcett

Two Oaks, Mayfield Fold, Burnley BB11 2RN.

### 2018 SAF ASSOCIATION CURRY LUNCH

will take place in the

ARMY AND NAVY CLUB, PALL MALL, LONDON

**FRIDAY 15 JUNE 2018**

PLEASE APPLY BY 8 JUNE 2018 AT THE LATEST

To: Neil Fawcett

Two Oaks, Mayfield Fold, Burnley BB11 2RN.

# WESSEX LUNCH 2017

Once again the annual Wessex Lunch was held at the Sherborne Golf Club on 30th July 2017 organised by **Nick Holbrook** and **Johnnie Kirkham**. Seventy-three members and guests attended and enjoyed an excellent meal of curries and puds, and of course drinks. Judging by the noise level everybody had a thoroughly enjoyable time. ■



Presentation to Angela Knocker.



Tony and Nell Nicholson



Hugh Colley



Nellie and Julian Paxton



## WESSEX LUNCH 2018

The Wessex Lunch will once again take the form of a curry lunch at the **Sherborne Golf Club, Higher Clatford, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 4RN**. [www.sherbornegolfclub.co.uk](http://www.sherbornegolfclub.co.uk) at **1200 hours, Sunday 29 July 2018**. The price remains at **£25** per head, which will include curry, choice of four, the usual accompaniments, choice of desserts, coffee, wines, beers and soft drinks. Other drinks may be purchased from the bar for cash. Booking requests should be made to **John Kirkham, The Old Rectory, Oake, Taunton, Somerset TA4 1AR**, together with a cheque made payable to **'Wessex Lunch'**. Please indicate if you have any special dietary requirements or need a table with easy access for those with physical disabilities. If a receipt or acknowledgement is required please provide an e-mail address or SAE. Early booking is advised as places are limited.



# SCOTTISH DINNER 2017

The 32nd Scottish Annual Dinner took place at Douneside House, Tarland, Aberdeenshire on Saturday 13th May. Association members, friends and guests who attended were:

**Sandy & Diana Blackett**  
**Neil & Marjorie Fawcett**  
**Ian & Helen Gordon**  
**Neil & Margaret Lamb**  
**Alan & Christine Palmer**  
**David & Sarah Sayers**  
**Margaret Spencer**  
**Fiona Warton**

**Sandy & Lesley Dawson**  
**Jonathan & Nicky Forbes**  
**Robin & Seonaid Hastie Smith**  
**Valerie Robinson**  
**David Sandifer & Olive Forrest**  
**Euan & Mollie Scroggie**  
**Andrew & Juliet Vivers**

Regrettably, illness and injury forced both **Nicol & Vi Cameron** as well as **Peter & Felicity Leicester** to call off attending the Dinner. We trust both Nicol and Felicity will be fully recovered for next year!

Douneside House gave us the freedom and privacy of their conservatory room, with its splendid view over Royal Deeside, for our Dinner. Once again, the Douneside staff were most attentive throughout the evening, with the standard of cuisine being of the usual high quality.

Many attendees enjoyed the facilities of Douneside over the weekend. It was excellent to see several new faces besides being able to enjoy the company of those who continue to make the effort to travel from south of the border, and all corners of Scotland, for the Scottish Dinner. ■



L to R: David Sayers, Seonaid Hastie Smith, Neil Fawcett, Fiona Warton, Sandy Blackett and Margaret Lamb.



L to R: Margaret Spencer, Andrew Vivers, Olive Forrest, Ian Gordon, Lesley Dawson, Christine Palmer and Neil Lamb.



L to R: Neil Lamb, Sandy Blackett, Ian Gordon, Jonathan Forbes and Robin Hastie Smith.

# The MacRobert Story

There are few in the military or amongst those who remember the Second World War who don't know the story of the MacRobert family.

Lady Rachel Workman MacRobert (1884-1954) and Sir Alexander MacRobert (1854-1922) established their family at Douneside in the early 20th century, and further developed the house and estate.

They had three sons, Alasdair, Roderic and Iain. The eldest, Alasdair, who inherited the baronial title on his father's death, was killed in a civil flying accident in 1938, aged just twenty-six. On his death, the baronetcy passed to his brother, Roderic, a pilot in the Royal Air Force.

Roderic was lost in action just three years later on May 22nd 1941, also at the age of twenty-six, while leading a flight of Hurricanes in a strafing attack on a German-held airfield in Iraq. The baronetcy now passed to the youngest son, Iain, who was by then a pilot officer in the RAF having joined straight from Cambridge University.

Less than six weeks after the death of his brother, Iain was reported missing when his Blenheim aircraft failed to return from a search and rescue mission which set out from Sullom Voe airfield in the Shetlands. His body was never found. He was twenty-four years old.

One can only imagine how Lady MacRobert must have felt on hearing of the loss of her sons but her immediate response gives a flavour of her character. She made a donation of £25,000 to purchase a bomber for the RAF and asked that it be named "MacRobert's Reply".

The chosen bomber was a Stirling of XV Squadron, which was handed over in October 1941 to its first captain, Flying Officer PJS Boggis, who captained it on twelve operational missions.

This was the start of a tradition that the RAF has kept alive. A succession of RAF aircraft has since carried the name.

In 1942, Lady MacRobert donated a further £20,000 to purchase four Hurricane fighters, which were sent to RAF operations in the Middle East. Three were named after her sons and the fourth after her.

These acts of fortitude and determination cemented a charitable legacy that originated with her husband's benevolence in India and still resonates today.

Between 1943 and 1950, Lady MacRobert established what is

now The MacRobert Trust to reflect the interests of her late husband, who through hard work and study rose from humble origins to make his fortune in India, and of her American parents who were famous mountaineers, explorers and authors.

In particular, Lady MacRobert wanted to provide the means to foster in young people the best traditional ideals and spirit, which she believed had prompted so many young people, including her own sons, to fight in the Second World War.

Today, the MacRobert Trust continues to own and maintain Douneside House in memory of The MacRobert family. Douneside House has recently been named as the AA's Hotel of the Year (Scotland) and has been awarded 3AA Rosettes for its restaurant. Serving or retired members of the armed forces receive a substantial discount on holiday stays at Douneside.

For more information, visit [www.dounesidehouse.co.uk](http://www.dounesidehouse.co.uk) or email [manager@dounesidehouse.co.uk](mailto:manager@dounesidehouse.co.uk)



DOUNESIDE HOUSE  
ROYAL DEESIDE

*Treat yourself and your family to the perfect highland holiday. You've earned it.*

THE PERFECT HIGHLAND RETREAT IN THE HEART OF ROYAL DEESIDE



Fresh clean air, great hospitality, breathtaking views and so much to do. Treat yourself to the perfect highland holiday at Douneside House, a charming Scottish country house offering holidays subsidised by The MacRobert Trust for all serving and retired members of the armed services and the reserves.

Perfect for young families with excellent facilities including spa, pool, gym and indoor games area.

For reservations and details of our special offers available throughout the year, contact us on +44 (0)13398 81230 or email [manager@dounesidehouse.co.uk](mailto:manager@dounesidehouse.co.uk)  
See independent reviews on [tripadvisor.co.uk/douneside](http://tripadvisor.co.uk/douneside).



THE MACROBERT TRUST



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# SALALAH/DHOFAR REUNION DINNER

The following, in alphabetical order attended the 16th Salalah/Dhofar Ladies' Dinner Night held on Friday 8 September 2017 at the Army & Navy Club: **Paul and Tami Cadle, Neil Cave, Nick Cooper, George and Venice Correa, Janet Grieve, Staffan and Ewa Hellberg, Mike Lobb, Bob and Diana Loughlin, Mike Martin, David and Dotty Mawdsley, Richard McCrow, Richard and Edwina Moore, Dave and Judith Phillips, Heather Pratt, Marcia Vivian and John and Mavis Warner.**

The 17th Salalah/Dhofar Reunion Dinner will be held at the Army & Navy Club on Friday 7 September 2018.

Anyone not on **George Correa's** database who wishes to attend, should contact him on: [georgecorrea@btinternet.com](mailto:georgecorrea@btinternet.com) ■



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# NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE

by Mike Lobb



In April **Gareth Hardwick** (SAFE 1975-83) contacted me over the death of Roddy Jones. 'I first got to know Roddy when we both attended the six week equitation course in the early '70s at what was then the Army Remount Centre at Melton Mowbray. He was very good company and proved himself a very competent horseman. Later, of course, he looked after the Arabian oryx reserve. A man of many parts.'

Saturday 20 May saw the ordination at Worth Abbey of **Fr John MacWilliam** (NFR) of the Society of African Mission as Bishop of the Sahara, a diocese ten times the size of England. It was attended by a number of Association members including **Christopher Allanson** (NFR and SAFTR).

As I e-mail members on a regular basis I am reminded that many of our members are overseas so it was good to hear from **Johnathan Orr** (SFE/SAFE & Skydiving Team 1977-79; FMS Medical Student 1983). 'Just a wee note of thanks for your efforts in producing the SAF Journal. My copy arrived yesterday and I have already read it cover to cover. I cannot explain why it gives me such pleasure as I was only a small cog in SAF; I think it is something to do with the legacy of those who went before me, and to a lesser extent, those I helped and who came afterwards. Truly in those days I was on the shoulders of giants. I have just spent 51 days in hospital with two years of a grossly infected hip replacement, and was very nearly one of those Mike Lobb emails: 'Sadly I need to report...', mainly because I continued in the Australian National Skydiving Team and still rode as a WW1 Australian Lighthorseman at commemorative functions, up to six parades each ANZAC Day – hence the Orthopods kept telling me I was doing too much and no wonder there were pains; that was until the hip all-but fell off and I nearly chucked up over one of my skin-cancer patients. Life wasn't meant to be easy.

On 25 September 2107, *Shabab Oman II*, captained by **Muqaddam Rukn Bahry Ali bin Mohammed bin Salim Al Hosni** (RNO) over-nighted in the Grand Harbour, Valletta, Malta and hosted a number of Association members including **Tony** and **Nicky Quinlan** (Palace Office) and **John Titley** (NFR).



Also there to greet Oman's magnificent Sail Training Ship was **Roger Baldacchino** (RNO) and his grand-daughter, **Victoria England** aged six who was well looked after by the friendly crew.



Roger Baldacchino at the Trafalgar Night Dinner in Malta this year, organised by the local RNOA who held the dinner for one hundred members and guests. The guest speaker was The British High Commissioner. The RNOA has around 40 members and around 30 Associate members. Should any

SAF member wish to attend such a dinner they would be most welcome. The cost is about Euros 35. Maybe someone might decide to visit Malta, as the chosen capital of Europe, next year, and combine the visit with attending the dinner.





**John 'Flash' Gordon** joined SAFE in mid-October as part of the Loan Service Advisory Team and wanted to connect with his predecessors in the unit for background on mine clearance. There was an immediate response from **Jonathan Orr** (1977-79), now a doctor in Queensland, **Andrew Roseveare** (1971 and 1975-98) in Zimbabwe and still involved with mine clearance. **Gareth Hardwick** (1975-83) responded, as well as **Bill Gore** (1975-77) who sent the photograph.

**Suleman Al Balushi** whom I had known when he was the Ranges Officer at SAFTR in Ghallah when I was the Chief Instructor there from 1976 to 1982. Aziz (YSCO/70) joined SAF on 18 Feb 1952 and fought in both the Jebel Akhdar campaign and the Dhofar War where he was wounded in the leg. He was commissioned in 1963 and was the Security Officer in the Palace in Salalah in 1970. He subsequently moved to the SAF Training Centre, initially in Bait Al Falaj, and later to Ghallah where he managed the 14 ranges from



I visited Oman 12-19 November and called on the Senior British Loan Service Officer, **Major-General Richard Stanford** who had served in 23 Bde on Loan Service in 1996-97. As I was leaving the building his ADC **Mul/1 Mohammed Al Rahbi** said that there was a Wakeel who wished to have a word with me and introduced **Wkl/1 Waleed Al Balushi**. Waleed is the son of **Ra'ees Aziz**

recruit classification to firepower demonstrations. He retired on 1 January 1985 after completing almost 33 years' service. Unfortunately he was killed in a traffic accident just three months later on 23 April 1985, coincidentally after returning from a visit to SAFTR. Aziz was a quiet unassuming officer who worked tremendously hard and I consider it a privilege to have known him. ■



## JOINED IN 2017

<b>Chris Blakey</b>	SO2 Armour	2007-2010
<b>Charles Doyle</b>	SO2 HQ SOLF & HQ SSF	1985-91 1991-98
<b>Andrew Joscelyne</b>	DR	1970
<b>Mike Martin</b>	SO3 OPS Dhofar	1984-86
<b>Charles Fattorini</b>	SBLSO	1914-17
<b>Rich Emmerson</b>	MSO	Present
<b>Brian Park</b>	RNO	Present
<b>Peter Le Gassick</b>	RNO	Present
<b>Kenny Dalglish</b>	RNO	Present
<b>Eoin Carson</b>	11 INF BDE SALALAH	2009-10
<b>Kieron Riddy</b>	EME (WEAPONS)	2015-18
<b>Eddie Sims</b>	RNO	1985-2005
<b>Robert Soutar</b>	FOS	Present

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# REMEMBERING...

## **Brigadier JEM (Bugs) Hughes OBE WkHM**

**Bugs** was born on 11 December 1934 and commissioned into the Gunners in August 1954. He served in the Middle East including a spell in Aden with 3 RHA until volunteering for the Trucial Oman Scouts where he was from '61 to '62. In December 1962 he married **Janet** (in driving snow!) who from then on followed the drum keeping a watchful eye on Bugs' more unusual activities. As we will see, this was not the last time Bugs volunteered for something out of the ordinary – the TOS, not marriage! After some service in BAOR he was selected to attend the Pakistan Staff College at Quetta in 1965, but an outbreak of hostilities between Pakistan and India interrupted his studies and eventually he joined the last three months of the Camberley course. On graduation he was posted to HQ British Forces Persian Gulf in Bahrain where from 1966 to '67 he was DAA&QMG responsible for the A/Q aspects of the withdrawal from Aden and the rebuild of facilities in Sharjah. At the end of his tour he was awarded an MBE.



After being a Battery Commander in 17 Training Regiment RA, in 1968 he volunteered (that word again!) for 95 Commando Light Regiment serving as Second in Command in the Royal Citadel, Plymouth and Singapore until 1971. He attended the NDC then he went to be a DS at the Staff College. While at Camberley he was selected to command the First Regiment Oman Artillery.

Bugs served in Oman from December 1974 to March 1977. His Regiment, which had grown from a Troop in 1970 to a four battery Regiment in 1974 was spread throughout the operational area in Dhofar supporting virtually every operation, large and small, and in Northern Oman where training, leave for the soldiers and local security responsibilities left precious little time for navel gazing. In Dhofar in addition to commanding his Regiment he was the de jure Deputy Commander of Dhofar Brigade which he commanded in any absence of the Brigade Commander. He dealt with some flair with the two conflicting requirements of helping to win the war and at the same time Omanising his Regiment, and his selections for Omani advancement stood the test of time.

The stories of his time in Dhofar are manifold, but maybe one of the best is his flight in the lead Iranian Chinook flying the 5.5s into Sarfait where his steady hand was needed in order to stop the pilot jettisoning the gun due to worry about incomers.

In addition to the Dhofar War, Bugs had to keep his hand gently on the tiller in Northern Oman where his Regiment's northern base was moving from Rostaq to a new purpose built camp at Izki. There his enthusiasm for gardens was evident. In mid 1976, gardens also caused him some trouble in the South where a tipper load of manure, obtained by him from the Royal Stables and destined for the Officers Mess garden, spontaneously combusted in the aftermath of a Mess Guest Night. Only a privileged few witnessed him visiting the scene early the next morning when on kicking the smouldering remains in disgust, they burst into flames again.

At the end of his time in Oman he was advanced to OBE and additionally was awarded the Oman Distinguished Service Medal.

After Oman Bugs rejected advice to accept an MOD appointment "for the good of his career" and volunteered instead to join the BATT Sudan as a DS at the Sudanese Staff College where he remained until 1980 – his last year there was as an acting Col commanding the whole BATT. Living conditions in the Khartoum area were difficult, a fact not fully realised by the UK authorities. A good example of "the norm" is that during one of the frequent power cuts, Janet was visited by a local in an official looking vehicle who assured her that power would soon be restored and asked to "inspect" the fuse box. It was only when the lights came on around her did Janet realise that her visitor had stolen all the fuses!

From 1981 to 1983 Bugs was back in UK at the RMA Sandhurst as Commander of Victory College where a wide variety of professionally qualified officer cadets tended to question the teaching rather more than their younger colleagues. Bugs found this an interesting challenge and he had fun dealing with officer cadets who, if not openly rebellious, needed a slightly more flexible approach. At his first interview with the Commandant Bugs appearance clearly did not impress, for the next day an immaculate Lance Sgt from the Household Division called stating that he had come to sort out Colonel Hughes' turnout! Bugs, however, always said he felt less isolated after the **Queen Mother**, who had come to take a Sovereign's Parade, was spotted with distinct moth holes in the crown of her hat.

From Victory College Bugs was, in 1983, appointed Regimental Colonel RA, a post which involved him in Regimental affairs, recruiting and liaison with schools and universities, but in 1986 he again found himself drawn to jobs in strange lands when he became Chief of Personnel of the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai. Here his broad experience of dealing with individuals and organisations whose approach and operating techniques were surprising, to say the least, was at a premium.

Bugs' final appointment in the Army was for two years as a Brigadier commanding the Royal Artillery Ranges in the Hebrides where his work force included not only serving officers but MOD boffins and locally engaged staff.

Bugs retired in 1989 and characteristically threw himself into all his interests for which there had not been sufficient time earlier. He gardened, fished, and above all, sailed in addition to devoting time to the wellbeing of his big family. **Penny** had been born in



Germany in 1963, **Jonathan** in Quetta in 1965 and **Judy** in Woolwich in 1969 – they all married, and Bugs and Janet have grandchildren galore. He also maintained links with his military past especially the Gunner Commando Regiment, and the Sultan's Armed Forces, and here he was particularly active in encouraging the production of a book recording the actions of the Oman Artillery during the Dhofar War.

From 1990 to 1995 he was the Director of the Royal Yachting Association charity for the disabled, now known as RYA SAILABILITY; he developed blind sailing events and started Blind Sailing International with New Zealand.

All in all, Bugs was a professional Gunner who knew his trade and lead from the front. He could get things done and his judgement was such that if he needed to act as the court jester, he did it – and rather enjoyed it. If he felt that a harder approach was needed, it was readily available and his interviews without coffee were well known – even on the jebel. But underneath it all he was a compassionate person who was interested in people, be they young Omani soldiers who thought that the world was flat or senior individuals who came from countries where promotion appeared to be determined by weight.

Bugs endured his increasing ill health and frailty with good humoured stoicism, and wearily tolerated Janet's superhuman care. After a mercifully short stay in hospital he was able to return to Pippin Cottage just outside Lymington where he died peacefully early in the morning of 11 January 2018 enjoying his house, garden and family.

**Miles Thomson**

### **Paul Braithwaite 1945-2016**

**Paul Braithwaite** served in 3 Squadron SOAF from 1976-79. The Dhofar campaign had officially ended before Paul arrived, but SAF was still deployed throughout the Province in pursuit of the remaining *Adoo* and Paul was fully engaged flying helicopters in support of Geysh units when not partying in the North!

He died after a long illness in November 2016. Such was the esteem in which he was held by so many, that almost 300 people attended his candlelit funeral held in a tiny church near his home in Monflanquin, SW France.

One of six children of a well-known Guyanese teacher, author, diplomat and wartime RAF pilot, Paul was born in Chadwell Heath in 1945. He was brought up mainly by his mother in East London and joined the Royal Marines aged 18 straight from school. During his 13 years of service he served in Malta, Cyprus, Hong Kong and Singapore including a tour with the SBC (now SBS) and latterly as a helicopter pilot.

Paul's daughter, Vanessa, was born in Singapore during his first marriage and his son, Stefan, to his second wife Sally in Poole. Stefan has followed in his father's footsteps and is now a pilot for Etihad.

On leaving SOAF, Paul spent the remainder of his working life in aviation including flying helicopters for Schreiner KLM during the Revolution in Iran from '79 to '81, the Dubai Air Force from '81 to '88, in the North Sea oil industry based in Aberdeen and Great Yarmouth flying Super Pumas for Bond and then to Nigeria where he flew for Bristows for a year. Paul had married Sally, a BA stewardess in '84. They moved back to the Gulf in 1997 and Paul worked for Abu Dhabi Aviation until retiring to France in 2010.

During his service in Abu Dhabi, Paul established the UAE Search & Rescue organisation. Until he became too ill, Paul was a consultant to a Swiss Bank.

Half Guyanese and half British, in those far off non-PC times, his RM and SAF chums of whom there were many, labelled him, "Super Coon." He was never lost for a witty rejoinder to any jibe however lightheartedly it was made. But who knows how he really felt?

Paul was a gentleman in every sense of the word and was devoted to Sally and his children. I owe my life to Paul and fellow pilot Steve Watson for picking me up early one morning from a mined area in October 1976 and delivering me to the FST in Salalah.

In the words of his great friend **Graham Cotton**, "Throughout his life, Paul was a man of great courage, calm, integrity, considerable charm and undying friendship. If you were ever in need of help or support he would be the first at your door. Paul was the epitome of the perfect gentleman, totally considerate for others."

**Peter Isaacs**

### **The Reverend Roger Bayldon MBE TD WKHM**

**Roger Bayldon** sadly died on 12 December 2017 after a long illness bravely borne.

Roger was Rhodesian and was originally commissioned into the Rhodesian Army. He was unhappy with political developments in the country and transferred to the British Army. He had a varied and interesting life.

In SAF Roger was DAA and QMG at HQ Dhofar Brigade from 1975 to 1977 at a crucial time. He was responsible for the logistic planning for the final major operation in the west, Op Kahoof/Hadaf. The plan was changed at the last minute when MR managed to reach the sea from Sarfait which resulted in the end of the war. Roger managed to replan the resupply of all stores needed for this sudden change using the *SNV Sultana* as a platform at sea including ammunition, defence stores and also refuelling helicopters from the ship. This required considerable skill and imagination. And then, later, on a lighter note he organised a farewell lunch for **John** and **Shirley Akehurst** in a Skyvan including all the trimmings and silverware!

After leaving Oman Roger was the OC Mortar Division at the Support Weapons Wing, School of Infantry, Netheravon. Later he joined the TA and served (with **Gareth Hardwick**) in the All Arms Watch Keepers' Pool. He was deployed to Iraq during the first Gulf War which made a deep impression on him. On return he decided to take Holy Orders and was ordained as a priest in the Church of England.

In June 2014, with **Colin McLean**, he was involved with the dedication of the new replacement SAF Memorial at the National Arboretum. He also went to Oman on several occasions to officiate at the Armistice Day Service at the PDO Cemetery.

He enjoyed his soldiering and always had a twinkle in his eye even when under pressure.

We send our deepest sympathy to **Wendy** who looked after Roger so well during his final illness and his children **David**, **John** and **Isabella** and his sister **Sue**.

**Nigel Knocker**

*(Thanks to **Douglas McCully**, **David Houlton** and **Gareth Hardwick** all of whom have contributed to this obituary.)*

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**MEMBERS £40 – GUESTS £50** – Please mention any dietary requirements.

I enclose a cheque for £..... (payable to the SAF Association) for the Dinner on **Friday 23 November 2018**.

Or book by email and pay by BACs. SAF Account Sort Code 40-15-17. Account No. 72019116. Ref: SAF Dinner.

Note: We no longer send out tickets.

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# 50 YEARS AGO

by Ian Buttenshaw

## PHASE 1 – CONTAINMENT (1965-1967)

### Operation Rainbow



*The Donkey Truck - 1965*



*The No. 19 radio set mounted on a camel.*



*Air re-supply for patrols at Thint area*



*Animal Support-unloading camels*



#### **Formation of the Dhofar Liberation Front**

The rebels convened their first congress at Wadi Kabir in Central Dhofar on 1 June 1965. This effectively unified all the various groups into the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF). They elected an 18-man executive and issued a declaration, very Arab Nationalist in tone, condemning the Sultan's regime and calling on all Dhofaris for support. To cement the formation of the DLF, they made three quick strikes. Their first armed action was on 9 June when the driver of an oil company vehicle was murdered by machine gun fire; this was followed on the same day by an attack on the RAF rubbish truck and the Askar Camp at Raysut. The 9 June 1965 attacks marked the official beginning of the Dhofar War as far as DLF (and later PFLOAG) were concerned.

*Right and below: OC Recce Pl leads patrol of A Coy MR in Thint area*



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