

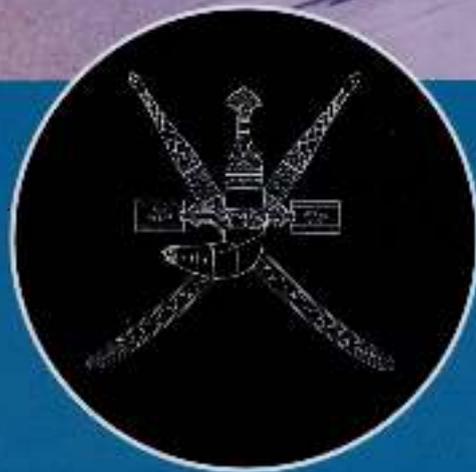
# THE JOURNAL

OF THE  
SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES  
ASSOCIATION



*Bid Bid 1969*

*Salalah 1968-1970*



# EDITORIAL CONTENT

We are very grateful for the wide range of contributions which we have received for this year's Journal. Of particular interest are the historical articles and present developments which so vividly illustrate the progress made within the Sultanate in many different ways.

The editors would like to place on record their appreciation of the excellent advice and help provided by BRUNTON PUBLICATIONS our publishers and printers, over a period of thirteen years. Without this the quality standard of the current Journal would not have been possible. A big thank you to the whole team.

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## ASSOCIATION NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Shabab Oman

Congratulations to the crew of SHABAB OMAN which had such an excellent cruise last summer. Details are fully covered in this issue.

### Cemetery Bay

Congratulations as well to the Loan Service team that cleaned up the Cemetery Bay graves. Details are also in this issue. It is always gratifying when the cemeteries are maintained in the state that we all wish them to be kept. Because of the climate and other factors the upkeep is an on-going challenge to all those who have an interest.

### Dinner and Cocktail Party 2009

There have been representations made that a Friday is not the most suitable day for the dinner and cocktail party. After consideration, and as an experiment, this year we are holding the cocktail party on a THURSDAY. If this proves popular we will consider also changing the dinner to a week day. No doubt you will let us have your views!

### Obituaries

We are very grateful for the time and trouble members have gone to in order to ensure that other members, and occasionally non-members with a close connection to SAF and to Oman are properly remembered in the Journal. As we all get older the number of obituaries inevitably increases and we welcome drafts, recognising that they will, more often than not and quite naturally, reflect both

personal memories and opinions, as well as giving consideration to the feelings of surviving family members. Sadly this sometimes leads to the obituary being overlong or out of balance with those of other people who do not have such eloquent eulogists or obituarists. While we do our best to accommodate as much as we can there will frequently be occasions when what may appear to be "heavy" editing has, or perhaps, should have taken place. Rest assured that such editing is solely in the interests of the Journal and its readers and has no PC influence! But please do keep us informed of any deaths that occur and let us have any details you have that might be appropriate and of interest.

### Thanks

Thanks to – **Chris Biggins** and **Graham Bowerman** for being the service reps in Oman at the end of their tours of duty.

## WARNING ORDER FOR 2010!

Subject to approval we hope to be able to take a party of thirty to the Sultanate for the next Veterans' Day in December 2010. We also hope to combine this with another Historic Tour of Dhofar and the Jebel Akhdar on similar lines to the tour in May 2008.

If this interests you please send your names to **Nigel Knocker** so that we can have an idea of the response. Details will be circulated, probably in the Journal in March 2010.

# MESSAGE TO AIR VICE MARSHAL YAYHA BIN RASHID AL JUMA COMMANDER ROYAL AIR FORCE OF OMAN

On behalf of all members of the SAF Association I have much pleasure in sending you our good wishes and many congratulations on the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Royal Air Force of Oman which began its life on 1 March 1959.

As you know all of us who had the privilege of serving in the Sultan's Armed Forces have the greatest respect for all branches of the air force. For those in the army on the Jebel during the Dhofar war, it was most reassuring to know that our air force colleagues were always on hand to give close air support whether from Piston Provosts, in the early days, to Strikemasters and Hunters in the later stages.

In the late 1960s the skill of the Beaver pilots was responsible for many hazardous casualty evacuations often under considerable difficulties. The arrival of the helicopters transformed the operational capability whether it was resupply, casualty evacuation or

troop deployments, once again under hazardous conditions. The crews of the fixed wing aircraft, the Skyvans, Caribous and Defenders, ensured that the ground forces were re-supplied in many different Jebel locations.

None of this would have been possible without the whole structure of the air force which backed up the aircrews and of course the reliable aircraft servicing and maintenance activities provided by Airwork.

We have seen with great admiration the way in which the Royal Air Force of Oman has developed to meet the challenges of the coming years, continuing to support the people of Oman and to earn the respect of your neighbours and allies.

We salute you on this auspicious anniversary and are proud to have served with you.

**Colonel Nigel Knocke**  
Chairman Sultan's Armed Forces Association

## SAF MEMORIAL BOOK IN MEMORIAL CHAPEL, RMA SANDHURST

The Memorial Book to commemorate those who lost their lives in the Dhofar War is held in the Chapel at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. It has been necessary to amend the Book notably because **Tony Fleming** died of wounds in 1993 which had been sustained in 1972. **Don Nairn** was killed in a contact after Dhofar had been secured for civil development and **Geoff Mawle** when the 90mm gun exploded at Taqa.

We are grateful to **Rev Duncan MacPherson**, the Assistant Chaplain at Sandhurst for making the necessary arrangements to have the Book amended and returned to the Chapel in time for the Remembrance Service this year.

Rank	First Names	Surname	Regiment	Date of Death
Captain	Richard Geoffrey	MAWLE	Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment	10 Oct 1971
Major	Donald Charles	NAIRN	Royal Green Jackets	9 May 1979
Major	Anthony	FLEMING MBE	Army Physical Training Corps / 22SAS	3 Mar 1993

## THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM

We have had worrying reports of the state of the SAF memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas, and these have been taken up with the management there. Their response is below:

"The cracks in the structure are superficial, and have reappeared every year since the memorial was built; we give it a coat of masonry paint twice a year and this fills the cracks and gives a nice clean finish. Unfortunately, this year we have only managed to give it a coat in the spring due to staff shortages, hence the appearance when your member visited. We have struggled to get a new caretaker but now we have one in post, one of his tasks will be to clean up and paint the memorial. The memorial itself is solid

and not subsiding; the only thing noticed during a recent inspection was that the compo had come out from under one corner where it met the paving slabs. This can easily be rectified by resetting the slab and re-grouting the gap. This will be done as part of our normal winter maintenance regime. All costs are covered whether involving shrubs or the memorial itself."

Hopefully all will now be well, but if any member is visiting the area and can let us have a report it would be very helpful. The Memorial Management report that the new trees are flourishing and that the plinth has been repainted. The whole site will be looking good for the Mirbat Dedication Day during the summer. (See page 10.)

# 2008 SAF ASSOCIATION DINNER



The 2008 dinner was held in the Army and Navy Club on Friday 28 November 2008. 112 members and guests attended. Amongst the guests was **John Keebill** who is the nephew of the late **Stuart Rae**, NFR, who was killed in action in an operation from Akoot in 1971. It was good to see him. ■



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# 1970s GUNNERS IN OMAN LUNCH

We held our annual lunch at the Honourable Artillery Company in London on 4th September 2008 – based on those Gunners who served in Oman in the early 1970s and joined by friends and guests. We were very pleased that **General John Graham**, CSAF at the time, was able to be with us. **Neil Fawcett** was our principal guest and **Mike Hardy** proposed the toast to **HM The Sultan**.

**Hugh Colley** then welcomed General John and Neil to Armoury House. On behalf of all of us Hugh thanked Neil for his dedicated work as Membership Secretary and Website Manager of the SAF Association and expressed our appreciation of the support that we had. Hugh reported on the outstanding Association visit to SAF earlier in the year saying how much the party was greeted with enthusiasm and respect. It was rewarding to see that during the visit to the Sultan of Oman's Artillery at Izki the video presentation

focussed on our early days – the forming of 1st Regiment, action in Dhofar and training at Rostaq. General John then gave us stimulating reminiscences of commanding SAF during what could be judged as the most critical time in Oman's history. The audience was fascinated by the talk and bombarded the General with questions. **Nick Holbrook**, who served in SOAF as a helicopter pilot, thanked the General for such an interesting account and especially for sharing his unique experiences with us.

Neil concluded the event by endorsing Nick's comments on General John's talk and thanked us for inviting him to the lunch.

Attendees: **General John Graham, Neil Fawcett, Hugh Colley, Antony Cawston, Chris Long-Price, Dougie Maclaine, George Correa, John Dean, John Lewis, Nick Holbrook, Tom Brembridge, Mike Hardy.**

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## OMAN ARTILLERY LUNCH ON FRIDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2009

*For the visit of Ameen Rukn Saud Bin Suleman Bin Nassir Al-Habsi AlCOSSAF  
Operations & Planning*



Back Row: John Lewis, Mike Hardy, Janet Hughes, Julian Paxton, Ian Ventham.  
Front Row: Hugh Colley, Zena Al-Habsi, Audrey Allfree, Saud Suleman Al-Habsi, Bugs Hughes.

**Hugh Colley** hosted a Gunner lunch at Armoury House for **Saud Al-Habsi** and his wife during their stay in London. Also present was **Audrey Allfree**, whose husband was the author of 'Warlords of Oman' in which the role of Saud's father is described in some detail. When **Philip Allfree** was the SAF intelligence officer in 1958, he

recruited **Suleman Al-Habsi** as his loyal and efficient assistant. In the book there is a picture of him with **Malcolm Dennison** to whom he also gave loyal service. Unfortunately he was later thrown into prison on a false charge. He was only released on the accession of **His Majesty Sultan Qaboos** in 1970 and died in 1977.



1999-2009

# MIRBAT DAY

*It may appear that an unusually large number of names have been recorded. This is because there were, on the 19th July, an unusually large number of gallant actions at Mirbat.*

Commanding Officer – Northern Frontier Regiment – Dhofar, Oman

The British Army Training Team situated at the ancient capital port of Mirbat in the Southern province on Dhofar, Sultanate of Oman were attacked by over 250 communist rebels on the morning of 19th. July 1972.

Adoo breached the light fortifications and barbed wire defences surrounding the Gun Pit where the 25 pounder artillery weapon was being fired by a Fijian SAS soldier known to all as Labalaba.

Rocket propelled grenades, mortars and heavy machine guns rained down on the BATT team and the Dhofar Gendarmerie Fort. Groups of assaulting rebels known as the



The dedication will commence at 12:30pm on the 19th July, 2009.

This will be held in the Allied Special Forces Grove National Memorial Arboretum Alrewas, Staffordshire  
[thenma.org.uk](http://thenma.org.uk) • 01283 792333





ground from the BATTI house to the Gun Pit and take up the fight for survival. If the Gun had been captured then the Aduo would have turned it on the defenders of Mirbat and all might have been either killed or captured.

***This is but one of the gallant actions that day.***

As incoming fire increased Laba was gravely wounded and his friend and fellow Fijian ran across 600 metres of open ground under fire to help him. Takavesi took up the fight in the Gun Pit and defended his friend against the Aduo at close quarters. Takavesi was soon wounded and this led to Mike Kealy, the BATTI team OC and Tommy Tobin, the medic to cross the open

Further information is available from Mike Colton and Pete Scholey both ex. 22 SAS Regiment.

c/o Allied Special Forces Association

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mikecolton@hotmail.com

memorialgrove.org.uk

***“Lest we forget”***

The man who lost  
his life in Iraq, now  
lives in Birmingham.

Wars such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, The Gulf and the Falklands have resulted in many victims. For some their battle scars are invisible psychological illnesses.

These casualties have experienced things few of us would want to imagine even in our worst nightmares and they carry the mental scars around with them, often adversely affecting their employment, family and friends.

Many become tragic victims of alcohol and drug abuse, homelessness, and some even become suicidal. These brave ex-Service men and women desperately need help and support.

If you are reading this as an ex-Service man or woman and you think, ‘this sounds like me’ or you know someone ex-Service who is suffering, please contact us on:

**01372 841 680**

or email us:

**contactus@combatstress.org.uk**



THEY FIGHT OUR WARS. WE FIGHT THEIR BATTLES

# ARMED FORCES DAY RECEPTION

CARLTON HOTEL LONDON

WEDNESDAY 10 DECEMBER 2008



Above: The Attachés from left to right: MA – Brigadier Salim Al Jadhmi, Air Attache – Wing Commander Ali Al Harji and Naval Attache – Lt Cdr Majid Al Qasmi.  
Below: The Attachés greet Hugh Leach.



# SULTAN ARMED FORCES' GOLF MATCH

Monday 16 June 2008

Dorset Golf and Country Club – Near Wareham, Dorset

## Thirteenth Anniversary Match

This fixture is for those who have served in a military or civilian capacity in or have a strong affection for the Sultanate of Oman or adjacent countries. Ladies are most welcome to attend either as players or for the lunch only. In addition, we are encouraging offspring to play if they so wish. This year we had a slight reduction in numbers with 28 sitting down for lunch and 26 players venturing out on the course. No lady players but two attended the lunch which greatly enhanced the occasion. I did have a lovely e-mail from **Alan Howard** who said 'McFadden in Shangai, **Rick Williams** having an op tomorrow and I am up in town but will make a better effort next year.'

The weather was not brilliant being overcast but fortunately remained mainly dry. Players ventured out from 1000 and there were no hold ups so a round took a very pleasant 4 to 4 1/2 hours. The match was followed by an excellent lunch where **John De Winton** presented the prizes.

This year we had 26 competitors on the Lakeland Course. It was nice to see some new faces attending our gathering for the first time. They were **John McAnally** (Royal Navy) guest of **Robin Gainsford**, **John Knight** (Royal Navy) guest of Robin Gainsford, **Jack Thompson** (Salalah 77-80), **Tim De Winton** (Son of John De Winton).

We had the same winner as last year **Brian Whittingham** (14) from the Royal Navy who had a very credible score of Gross 85 and won with 37 points. Equal second were **David Sandiford** (30) and **Sammy Stubbs** (14) SOAF, with 35 points, equal third with 34 points were **Richard Tregarthen** (15) British Army and **Chris Quarrie** (21) Royal Navy. Longest drive was achieved by **Neil Fawcett** (15) SON, and the nearest the pin was **Philip Sevier Summers** British Army. **Mark Whitley** won the Heads and backside competition.

The competitors were: **Alex Armitage** (British Army), **Robin Burnett** (British Army/Trucial Oman Scouts/Matrah Cold Stores), **Tom Brembridge** (British Army/SOLF), **Peter Clarke** (Royal Navy), **John Clayton** (British Army/SOLF), **Nick Cocks** (Royal Navy/Naval Attache), **Neil Fawcett** (Royal Navy/SON), **Robin Gainsford** (Royal Navy/SON/Ministry of Environment), **John Gunning** (Royal Navy/CSON), **Nick Harrison** (BBME), **Henry Hogger** (British Ambassador Syria/Basra), **John Knight** (Royal Navy), **John McAnally** (Royal Navy), **Bruce Moore** (RAF/SOAF), **David**

**Sandiford** (Royal Navy), **Patrick Sheahan** (British Army/Iran), **Robin Snaith** (Military Insurance Broker), **Sam Stubbs** (Royal Navy/SOAF), **Philip Sevier Summers** (British Army), **Chris Quarrie** (Royal Navy/Gulf patrol), **Jack Thompson** (British Army/SOLF), **Richard Tregarthen** (British Army/SOLF), **Mark Whitley** (Royal Navy/Gulf LCTs), **Brian Whittingham** (Royal Navy), **John De Winton** (Royal Navy/SON) and **Tim De Winton** (Guest).

It was really a very enjoyable day and the course was in immaculate condition but there is plenty of room for others to join us and let's try and make the next occasion up to 30 competitors, especially with more lady players and guests for lunch on Monday 15 June 2009. There will be plenty of prizes. Please encourage all your eligible friends to join in. E-mail me, if you have not already done so, to show interest and I will put you on my e-mail list. If you would like to stay at the club hotel, we can offer Bed & Breakfast for £40.00 per person and you could have another round the next day at 50% green fees.

**Robin Gainsford • 01929 - 471419**  
[robingainsford@hotmail.com](mailto:robingainsford@hotmail.com)



Tim De Winton, John Gunning and John De Winton.

# OMANI MILITARY RIBBONS

Ribbons most likely to be seen on Omani Military Uniforms  
(Colours and dimensions are approximate.)

## Military Order of Oman (WO)



1st & 2nd Class



3rd Class



4th Class



5th Class

## Order of Renaissance (WNO)



1st to 3rd Class



4th Class

## Order of the Special Royal Emblem



Omani Officers



Expatriates



Royal Commendation  
Medal



Gallantry Medal  
First (WSH)



New (WSH)



Bravery Medal  
(WB)



Distinguished Service Medal  
Gallantry (WKhM(G))



Merit (WKhM)



Commendation  
Medal



Royal Guard Service  
Medal



Special Forces  
Service Medal



Accession Medal



Campaign Medal



General Service  
Medal



As Sumood  
Medal



Peace Medal  
w/Op Emblem



10th Anniversary  
Medal



15th Anniversary  
Medal



20th Anniversary  
Medal



25th Anniversary  
Medal (25 year bar)



30th Anniversary  
Medal



35th Anniversary  
Medal



Sultan's Shooting  
Medal



Long Service  
Medal

**Ribbons most likely to be seen on Omani Police Uniforms  
(Colours and dimensions are approximate.)**

**Civil Order of Oman (WO)**



**1st & 2nd Class**



**3rd Class**



**4th Class**



**5th Class**

**Order of Renaissance (WNO)**



**1st to 3rd Class**



**4th Class**

**Order of the Special Royal Emblem**



**Omani Officers**



**Expatriates**



**Royal Commendation Medal**



**Qaboos Police Medal**



**Police Bravery Medal**



**Police Meritorious Service Medal**



**Accession Medal**



**General Service Medal**



**As Sumood Medal**



**Peace Medal w/Op Emblem**



**10th Anniversary Medal**



**15th Anniversary Medal**



**20th Anniversary Medal**



**25th Anniversary Medal (25 year bar)**



**30th Anniversary Medal**



**35th Anniversary Medal**



**Long Service Medal**

## WESSEX LUNCH

Sadly, it has not been possible to find a venue for the Wessex Lunch and we have decided not to hold the event in 2009. There have been eight Wessex Lunches since the first was held at the home of **John and Judith Blashford-Snell** in 1993 and we are reluctant finally to call it a day, hence this year is hopefully only a temporary "blip" and, if we can find a suitable venue, we shall try again in 2010, always assuming that the cost can be kept within affordable limits. If there are any offers to host a lunch in 2010, or suggestions for an alternative method of holding the function, please let me know.

**John Quinn**

### LOST & FOUND

The Metropolitan Police are holding a large number of photographic slides (several hundred), found in London at Victoria bus station on the night of 10th February 2009. The slides are of the Sultan's Armed Forces and the SAS in the 1970s. They include pictures of Wessex 5 helicopters and armoured vehicles, parades, a road sign to TABAK and a general presentation of the orb of 22 SAS. The slide mounts are date stamped 1980.

We have been asked to try to trace the owner and if any member can help, please contact **Police Sergeant Richard Sparks** at MSC-OSU South Base, Sydenham Police Station, on 020 828 45272 or the editors.

It is important that these slides find a home – any help will be much appreciated.

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# BOOK REVIEW

## THE NATIVE PLANTS OF OMAN; AN INTRODUCTION – WITH NOTES FOR GARDENERS.

By Clive Winbow  
Published in Muscat in 2008 by The Environment Society of Oman.  
ISBN 978-9948-03-775-0; OR. 8.000

In the last three years there has been an interesting development in Oman. A number of people who formerly worked for the RAFO Directorate of Education and Military Culture have left SAF, but not the Sultanate. Instead, they have successfully transplanted themselves in other Omani educational establishments, where they appear to be thriving. The author of this book is a case in point. Now teaching at the Caledonian College of Engineering, he is to be congratulated for having produced a truly outstanding first book.

"*The Native Plants of Oman*" offers succinct descriptions of no fewer than 117 indigenous plants from North and Central Oman, and 37 from Dhofar. These are illustrated with 343 of the author's own photographs, and yet the pages remain clear and uncluttered. The book is divided into four principal sections. The Introduction makes the case that the desert is not devoid of vegetation, but that the increasing development of Oman has endangered certain species – particularly the juniper trees of the Jebel Akhdar, and the *Dracaena Serrulata* of Dhofar which was being eaten into oblivion by camels. Winbow warns that amateur gardeners can also have an adverse effect on conservation if they proceed with more enthusiasm than knowledge, and he offers tips of "ethical" gathering of local species, together with a list of "plants to avoid" because they are uncontrollable.

The section "How to Grow Omani Species" justifies the book's sub-title – "with notes for gardeners". These pages offer solutions to problems like excess ground salt and excess sun; drainage, mulching, fertilizer and how to propagate plants. They also warn that Omani plants come from a desert environment, and that frequent watering may do more harm than good. The central chapters of the book are an alphabetical list of the plants themselves, including *Boerhavia elegans*, the "Jimmy Hendrix plant" which casts a purple haze along the track behind the Ammunition Depot at MAM; *Echiochilon persicum*, *E. thesigeri*, discovered by the famous explorer; and *Plectanthus barbatus*, which stands tall even among the pasture of Dhofar just after the khareef. When appropriate, the author appends notes concerning the uses of many of these plants, either as food, medicines or as dyes.

The book concludes with Appendices on "Near Natives", "Other Edible Plants" and comprehensive lists of websites. The book caused a definite stir on its first publication. There was a launch and author's signing party at Turtles Bookshop at Shatti al Qurum, and a double-page feature in the weekend newspaper HI. This publicity was welcome and entirely justifiable. I cannot think of a better book as a gift for an expatriate family wishing to establish a garden in Oman. Everything is here; a comprehensive guide to an array of quite astoundingly beautiful flowers, plants that are edible,

and a form of horticulture that conserves water and protects the Omani environment. Clive Winbow's book is a deeply impressive achievement which deserves every success. *Inshallah* it will soon appear in an Arabic translation.

Neil McBeath

## "WAR, COUPS & TERROR"

By Brian Cloughely, published in hardback in 2008 by Pen & Sword Military, at £25.00. ISBN 978-1-84415-795-2

This is a particularly opportune and important publication, with the role of Pakistan, its government and its army more and more under pressure to take effective action against terrorist bases in Pakistan's territories bordering Afghanistan, and the author, one-time deputy head of the UN mission in Kashmir and also for six years the Australian Military Attache in Islamabad, is well qualified to write it. He tells the extraordinary story of how Pakistan's army has developed since its defeat by India in 1971, in the war that saw the secession of East Pakistan and its creation as Bangladesh. The turbulent history of Pakistan has involved numerous changes of government, and the active involvement in politics of senior army officers, sometimes leading to arbitrary military rule and sometimes to rule by political parties riven by corruption and incompetence. The author displays an understandably strong sense of cynicism, particularly in respect of Pakistan's politics and those involved in government of whatever hue – civil or military. He describes the swings of opinion between the pressure for a fundamental Islamist society from both Islamic extremists and also from elements in the army and the desire of many politicians and industrialists for a more relaxed and tolerant western style of life (without prohibition!). This is a complex story of a country that sees itself under military threat which must therefore support a large and efficient army, but which suffers from endemic corruption both in commerce and politics and which is unable to separate one problem from the other. But it is not all politics and there is a good description of how the army has attempted to modernise in terms of equipment and training, with its sights set on defence against the threat of Indian aggression and the implications of two suspicious neighbours each with a nuclear capability, while at the same time being involved in a growing commitment to curb civil unrest, which inevitably brings it back into the realm of politics. The use of the word "Terror" in the title is considered in the context both of the US-led "War on Terror" and also of the threat of violent insurrection within the tribal areas of the North West Frontier province. US policies, which involve incursions into Pakistan, as well as pressure on the Pakistan army to step up their activities against alleged terrorists have created considerable opposition to the West, both from those seeking a strict Muslim state and also from within the army, where a number of officers resent pressure from the West to advance what they see as solely US interests. This is a book of importance for military specialists who might become involved in the struggles that beset the region, as well as for the student of international politics, and perhaps too for anyone with a nostalgic feeling for the Raj. **JQ**

# STAFF COLLEGE NOTES

Regular readers will recall that Course 21, which graduated in July 2008, was the last course to complete the four term syllabus. Course 22, which formed up with 87 students in September 2008, is the first to undergo the new three term programme. At the time of writing this in November 2008, it is interesting to observe how smooth the transition from a four term programme to one of three terms has been. This is testament to the attention to detail which the Commandant, **Ameed Rukn Khamis bin Rashid Al Mandhari**, now in his third year as Commandant, pays to the running of the Course, as well as the fact that a dedicated team responsible for the change to the programme has been working behind the scenes for some time to ensure the change was as seamless as possible. The early signs are all very positive.

Course 21 finished in July 2008 with 78 students graduating. Course 22, with 87 students, is the largest to go through the College. There is representation from within Oman from the three Services, the Sultan's Special Forces, the Royal Guard, the Royal Oman Police and the Royal Office, and there are 'overseas' students from all the other GCC countries as well as officers from Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen, Iran and France. The course is divided into eight syndicates, each led by a Muqadam Directing Staff (DS). The increase in numbers this year results from a welcome rise in numbers of Omani students, particularly from the RAO and RNO.

A particular feature of 2008 was the liaison between the College and the UK Joint Services Command and Staff College (JSCSC). A five man Omani delegation led by the Deputy Commandant, **Aqeed Rukn Bahry Mahfoudh Hamood Mohamed Al Wahaibi**, and including the then Head of Army Studies (now Head of Studies and Special Development Cell) **Aqeed Rukn Ismail Shihab Hamed Al Baluchi** visited the JSCSC for a very worthwhile and informative 3 day visit. The Commandant JSCSC, **Rear Admiral Neil Morisetti**, visited Muscat twice during the year, once for an Office Call on the Commandant and the second time to lecture to the course in their final term. His talk – a personal perspective of training for, and execution of, joint and combined operations – was particularly relevant to the students and stimulated many questions. Additionally two members of the Directing Staff spent two weeks at JSCSC in October on the 'Overseas DS Training Course' – the third time that Oman has sent College Directing Staff on the course.

The Staff College continues to thrive. The Commandant and the College get tremendous support from COSSAF and the three Service Commanders, all of whom are regular visitors. The change from a four term syllabus to a revised one of three terms has gone smoothly and with increased numbers of Omani students benefiting from the instruction at the College, the future looks rosy. ■



Graduation of Course 21.



Opening Course 22.



The Commandants of Oman's and UK's Staff Colleges.

# ROYAL ARMY OF OMAN

2008 has been a quiet year for RAO with no major exercises or operations taking place.

No major new equipment from that reported last year was introduced, although some of the Armed Forces Hospital improvements started last year began to come on stream, as various of the new departments were opened. Work on the new SAF Signals HQ is nearly complete and it should open in the new year, and the new HQ building for FOS and EME is progressing well.

The only change in command from those listed last year was in SAFE, where **Aqeed Rukn Salim bin Said Al Salehi** became Commander in July. At the same time Commander MSO was promoted to Ameer.

RAO Band, which is slowly expanding towards becoming two 300 man bands in early 2011, again sent their Pipes and Drums to

Scotland to take part in the International Bagpipe Competition and other Highland Competitions, winning several of them and coming runners up in others.

As well as attending the GCC Military meeting in Qatar, CRAO undertook two major visits abroad during the year, firstly to Malaysia in April, and then a long one to visit the British Army Training Area in Suffield, Canada, followed by a visit to RMA Sandhurst where he attended the "Music on Fire" evening on 18 September.

The year culminated with the Armed Forces Day Dinner on 11 December, being held for the first time at the Al Shamookh Fort near Adam, where the firework display was spectacular. This was followed on 14 December by the bi-annual KSQA Passing Out Parade for the officer cadets, reviewed by **HE Fareeq Awal Ali bin Majid Al Mamaari**. ■



CRAO opening new Lithography Department at Armed Forces Hospital – April 2008.



KSQA Officer Cadets Fire Power Demonstration – October 2008.

ROYAL ARMY OF OMAN



CRAD opening new HQ FMS in January 2008.



RAD Pipes and Drums in Scotland July/August 2008 – Pipe Major (Instructor) John Bruce (in civilian clothes).



CRAD Hosts SAF Association Dinner Party – May 2008.



# ROYAL AIR FORCE OF OMAN

On the face of it, it would appear that RAFO has not been as active over the past 12 months as it was over a similar period last year. This is probably because 2007 was so unusual given the crucial emergency operations that took place so successfully following cyclone 'Gonu', plus the staging of the combined Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Exercise Deera Al Jazeera in Oman. These activities tested RAFO in different ways, but in both cases it was not found wanting! This year has in fact been an equally busy year, but for different reasons. As ever, internal and external exercises have tested both air and ground crews at the various operational stations, but developing capabilities have also generated additional specialist training. At the HQ level the pace has quickened as personnel have found themselves extremely busy staffing vital issues key to RAFO's future. Clearly the Nation's security depends on up to date armed forces able to meet current and emerging security threats - military, economic, ecological - with capable systems and effective techniques and procedures; RAFO is alert to this need. Thus the positive focus has been on moving forward, particularly in the field of new aircraft projects.

Under the lead of **Ameed Hamood bin Issa Al-Rashdi**, Director General (DG) Projects, many officers are busily engaged in various project teams tasked with evaluating replacement systems for



Strategic Air Transport (Airbus 320 to replace the BAC 1-11); Tactical Transport Helicopter (NH90 to replace the AB205); Tactical Air Transport (Skyvan replacement); Maritime Surveillance (Seavan replacement); Airborne Early Warning (new role), all of which must integrate fully to ensure interoperability of each system with one another as well as with existing equipment. RAFO is modernising at a great rate and the challenges are significant, but without doubt foundations are now being firmly laid for the future.

When considering the future we tend also to think of the past. Significantly RAFO will celebrate 50 years of operational service to the Sultanate on 1 March 2009. This is a huge milestone for any air force, but is all the more impressive for a country with such a rela-

**Super Lynx on deck.**



tively small population; it says much for the forethought and vision of its leaders. Indeed the efficacy of airpower was identified not only for protecting the realm against threats, but also as a means of providing support to the overall development of this modern state. It is clear to see the impact that RAFO, and its forebear SOAF, has had on Oman especially during the Renaissance of the past 38 years. At the time of going to press the RAFO 50th anniversary celebrations have yet to take place but these activities will be fully covered in the next edition of the Journal.

Although overall air activity has been a little less frenetic than last year, Exercise Magic Carpet (1-12 Mar 2008) provided, as ever, a major training arena for RAFO aircrew as well as representatives from the RAF, RN, USAF and USN. By combining two other exercises with MC'08, RAFO F-16, Jaguar and Hawk fighters were able to participate along with Super Lynx helicopters from 3 Sqn, RAFO Salalah. These elements integrated with RAF Tornado (F3, GR4), VC10 Air-to-Air Refuelling (AAR) and E3D AWACs, as well as US F-16, F-18 and KC135 AAR. A dedicated Combined Air Operations Centre was set up and all key areas were manned by RAFO personnel. Tactical Operations (Tac Ops) units were also deployed into the field, under the command of **Muqaddam Nasser bin Saif Al-Harthi**, and provided ground support functions whilst also exercising their own improving capabilities. It is acknowledged that deployable Tac Ops teams must be able to enhance the capabilities of existing air systems whilst also being able to interoperate with new systems. Therefore emphasis is now being given to ensuring that the Tac Ops equipment, techniques and procedures keep pace with such upgrades. Accordingly more comprehensive field deployments have now taken place to enhance the effectiveness of the units with all RAFO aircraft types. This has involved the delivery of live ordnance in close air support exercises.

The new airbase, RAFO Musana, on the Jebel Akhdar, continues to develop rapidly and following the inclusion of additional water diversion and drainage structures from experience gained in Cyclone 'Gonu', the runway foundations and sub-structures are now moving into place; it should be ready for fixed wing operations by early 2010. Full helicopter operations have been conducted since April 2007 and for both 14 (Puma, AB205) and 15 (Super Lynx) Sqns these continue apace. In particular, maritime embarked operations are moving ahead rapidly and smoothly. The RAFO air and ground crews are particularly enthusiastic about this new skill set and a number of pilots from 15 Sqn have now been converted utilising flight decks on the current RNO warships and logistic support vessels. Overnight embarked operations have also taken place, as well as weapons' trials for the forward firing ordnance on the Super Lynx. Longer evolutions are now planned with a view to having a core of expertise ready to embark as organic targeting and weapon systems on each of the three new 100m Corvettes due delivery in late 2010.

As expected the F16 continues to prove to be a significant leap in capability for RAFO and all student pilots graduating on the aircraft have been enthralled by its performance. The aircraft have been fully involved in the SAF exercise programme this year and conducted a significant amount of weapons and tactics training. Deployments to RAFO Seeb and Masirah have expanded the operating envelope, particularly low level training in rugged terrain.

The first of the two new Airbus 320 aircraft arrived on 31 December 2008 and a magnificent enhancement it will be to the

RAFO strategic AT fleet. Although everyone has a soft spot for the venerable BAC 1-11, the Airbus will be a major improvement in RAFO's ability to move large numbers of personnel (more than double the BAC 1-11) and freight around the Sultanate and further afield; the second aircraft is expected towards the end of 2009.

With the procurement of new aircraft in mind an opportune enhancement to the fast-jet flying training system took place in October 2008. RAFO secured a Hawk Mk115 two-seat trainer from the NATO training school in Canada. The aircraft matches closely the existing Hawks Mk103 operated by 6 Sqn at RAFO Masirah. It was flown to Oman from Canada on a northern trans-Atlantic crossing by a company delivery pilot and **Raa'id Salim bin Nasser Al-Jabri**, a Hawk QFI who was part of the original inspection team. The aircraft remained serviceable en route and **Raa'id Salim** logged some 20hrs flying during the 10 day staged transit.

As can be seen by the procurement of another Hawk aircraft, training is an expensive pursuit and accounts for a significant proportion of any military budget. It is therefore vital that all training adds value and this is especially true of officer and airman technician training which, unlike flying training, tends not to be in the limelight. Located at RAFO Seeb, the Air Force Technical College (AFTC) is a critical RAFO asset. It provides a range of ab-initio and specialist training courses whilst continually identifying training needs, developing and delivering up-to-date training packages, validating the results and actioning feedback.

The Sultan Qaboos Air Academy (SQAA) is another key training institution for RAFO. The Commandant is acutely aware of the importance of a solid foundation of education and training for young officers and airman recruits. Accordingly he has embarked upon a



CRAFO and Spitfire.

## SAF ASSOCIATION TEE, SWEAT AND POLO SHIRTS

For 2009 the embroidered SAF emblem is being offered in the colours of your choice. The original version is in red with black detail and lettering, but should you wish to have the design in another colour, please do specify with your order.

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review of the Academy to ensure that it fits people for the demands of modern military service. One of his first challenges has been the selection and training of 80 young women who, will form an all female band. This will put RAFO on equal footing with its sister services and the Royal Oman Police. It also further extends the integration of women into established organisations. The graduation of these ladies along with some 240 other recruits took place at RAFO Ghalla on 23 December 2008; it was the largest ever graduation parade in the history of RAFO.

Some 218 personnel attended training courses in the UK over the past 12 months. One such example is the RAF College Cranwell which continues to retain strong links with the Officer Cadet Training Wing (OCTW) at RAFO Ghalla and provides four places for RAFO cadets annually on the Initial Officer Training (IOT) course. This year, in mid-Summer, it was decided to conduct the IOT transactional leadership camp 'Dynamic 3' at RAFO Masirah. The cadets found the exercise to be one of the highlights of their course as the weather, location and the more challenging tasks devised made the training all the more enjoyable. Other events in their final year included a four day camp to Jebel Akhdar which started with a beautiful but arduous five hour mountain climb to the summit; this has been a tradition for some 35 years. Once at the top cadets were able to hone their skills with grenades, machine guns and mortars on the live firing range. Additionally rock climbing and abseiling proved to be hugely rewarding. The final six day 'Tactical Camp' saw cadets putting into practice all they had learnt over the previous two years and they were examined on their leadership ability and tactical understanding. Eventually 29 officer cadets were recommended for commissions; they graduated on 24 January 2009.

One of the main events of the year was the official visit to UK by **CRAFO, Liwa Yahya bin Rasheed Al-Juma**. His first point of call was the Royal College of Defence Studies where he participated in a strategic seminar. This was followed by the 90th Anniversary parade of the RAF at RAF Fairford in the presence of Her Majesty The Queen, to whom CRAFO and his wife were presented. The Royal International Air Tattoo (RIAT) was unfortunately washed out by rainfall, the majority having fallen over the preceding two weeks. However, the Gala Dinner and the following day's activities did allow CRAFO to meet with many of his RAF senior colleagues, most notably **CDS, Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup** and **CAS, Air Chief Marshal Sir Glenn Torpy**. Following RIAT, CRAFO visited a number of RAF venues which included three air stations and RAF Air Command where he was warmly received by **C-in-C Air, Air Chief Marshal Sir Clive Loader**. Here CRAFO presented a magnificent gift from RAFO of a silver falcon on a gloved hand to mark the 90th Anniversary of the RAF; this was gratefully received by C-in-C Air. Following visits to RNAS Yeovilton and **C-in-C Fleet, Admiral Sir Mark Stanhope, Liwa Yahya's** UK tour culminated at the Imperial War Museum at Duxford where he flew in a 2-seat Spitfire. On landing his smile said it all!

In summary, this year has been very busy for RAFO and the pace looks set to continue as projects develop, come to fruition and enter operational service. Even then there is the continuous process of ensuring that each piece of equipment is utilised to the maximum and optimum capability maintained by exercising both air and ground crews. RAFO continues to show that its training systems are robust and that it can perform at the highest level internationally, thus rightly enhancing its professional reputation. ■

# ROYAL NAVY OF OMAN

The year in review 2008, has been a busy and productive year for the RNO. Several ships of the fleet have been on foreign deployments to neighbouring GCC countries, including *RNOV's Al Mabrukah* and *Nasr Al Bahr* to Bahrain, *Qahir Al Amwaj* to Qatar and *Mussandam* to the UAE. Meanwhile *Shabab Oman* sailed in May on a major overseas deployment to Europe to participate in the annual Tall Ships' races, returning to the Sultanate in November, having won two coveted Friendship Trophies for the series.

During the year four Passex were conducted with the navies of Korea, France, Italy and the UK. The highly beneficial annual RNO exercise of 'Asad Al Bahar' was conducted twice this year in March and again in October. The final exercise of the year between the Pakistan Navy and RNO, 'Thamar Al Tayyib' will be run in late December.

*RNOV Al Sultana* was renamed *Al Maded* and resumed her operational role having been re-engined, to extend her life within the fleet.



*RNOV Al Maded* formerly *RNOV Al Sultana*.

On 3rd November, RNO Day, a parade was held in the Naval Base and the chief guest was **Admiral Forissier**, the French Naval Commander-in-Chief, and the guest of honour was HE the Minister of the Environment and Climate Affairs, **Sayyid Hamoud Bin Faisal Al Bu Saidi**. **Liwa Abdullah Bin Khamis Al Raisi, CRNO**, hosted the annual dinner at SBSNB when the guest of honour was HE the Minister of Manpower and Labour, **Shaikh Abdullah Bin Nasser Al Bakri**. CRNO reviewed the achievements and future plans for the RNO in his after-dinner speech.

National Day this year was held on the parade ground at Muaskar al Murtafa'a and the RNO provided a fine marching contingent of 150 men in review order and 110 musicians from the band before His Majesty the Sultan, at this notable event in the annual calendar.

The RNO marked Retirement and Armed Forces' Day on 3rd December with a parade in the Naval Base which was attended by a large number of retirees. The guest of honour on this occasion was HE the Minister of Oil and Gas **Dr Mohammed Al Rumhi**. ■

The RNO Day parade at Said Bin Sultan Naval Base.



CRNO presents Long Service and Good Conduct medals.



**Admiral Forissier**, the French Commander-in-Chief at the RNO Day parade.

# DHOFAR HISTORIC TOUR 2008

by *David Houlton*

It was pretty ambitious: assemble a cross-section of those who had served on operations in Dhofar from the beginnings of the conflict in the late 1960s; take them back to walk the terrain once more, and pool experiences to build a bigger picture; and witness how Dhofar has developed since being declared secure at the end of 1975. The breakthrough came when **His Majesty the Sultan** graciously approved the concept of a Historic Tour and COSSAF, the Association's President, offered extremely generous support in-country. More applicants than places, inevitably, but a group of thirty was assembled to cover the whole period and all three Services. The planning and administrative arrangements were organised by **Nigel Knocker, Neil Fawcett** and **Douglas McCully**; ably supported by the very helpful Defence Attache and his staff at the Embassy in London; and **Mqm Ian Buttenshaw** delivered a *tour de force* at the Oman end.

After the inevitable last minute changes the complete party finally assembled at Gatwick Airport on 16 May. They succeeded in boarding the scheduled Oman Airways Airbus and were soon airborne and on their way. The eight hour flight passed very quickly not the least because for some of us, it was the first time we had seen our contemporaries from the Dhofar days for in excess of 30 years – so there was a lot of catching up to do!!

We arrived on time at Seeb Airport at around 2100 hours and were met by Ian Buttenshaw, our conducting officer for the Tour, and his team. After a speedy passage through the Customs we boarded a coach and moved to the hotel. Having settled into our rooms, most proceeded to the bar for a welcome nightcap which was accompanied by some rather high decibel music and singers!



Arriving at Salalah with BAC 111 in the background, Mike Hardy, Nick Holbrook and Peter Sincock.

The next morning we were on parade at around 0900 hours and moved by coach back to Seeb; here we received very special treatment and were shown into the VIP lounge. Soon we boarded the aircraft to take us to Salalah – much to my surprise one of the very same BAC 111s I had left Dhofar on some 30 years before.



Bill Prince and Dick Peters on Salalah Beach but definitely not for early morning swims!

On arrival at Salalah we were met by a fleet of land cruisers and moved to the Crowne Plaza Hotel. This proved to be a very comfortable hotel providing good service and located adjacent to the beach which many of us were to take advantage of over the next few days – some for early morning swims! That evening we had been invited to a welcome dinner at the UAG Officers' Mess by the Commander and Officers of 11 Infantry Brigade. Sadly, the Brigade Commander was unable to be present but we were given a very warm welcome by **Aqeed Mohammad bin Abdullah Al Rabi**, the Firqat Commander and the other Brigade Officers. We had a most excellent welcome dinner in the old UAG Mess which many of the group remembered.



The Welcome at UAG Mess, Ian Buttenshaw, Nigel Knocker, Peter Isaacs and Knobby Reid.

The next morning we were on parade at 0800 hours and this was to become the routine for our visit to Dhofar – no lie ins and woebetide anyone who was late and incurred the wrath of Ian Buttenshaw! This day we were to visit the central part of the jebel and were soon all on our way in the fleet of land cruisers driven by some very cheerful and competent drivers – these were to remain with us throughout our Dhofar visit. The first thing that struck me was the much improved road network which now criss-crossed the jebel and above all the amazing developments which had taken place. Most of the larger settlements on the jebel seemed to have a mosque, very smart schools and medical centre, and a selection of shops. We even came across the odd petrol station! From my perspective it was truly amazing to see how things had moved on over the last three decades. Having visited the areas of the old Diana and Hammer positions we moved on to Hugaif and then to RAFO Thumrait.



Assembled Company at RAFO Thumrait.

Here we were met by the Station Commander **Ameed (Tayyar) Al Zubair bin Mohammad Al Zubair** and his Squadron Commanders. We were given a very professional briefing and question session; this was followed by an excellent lunch where we met up with amongst others three loan service RAF officers who were assisting with training.

## DHOFAR HISTORIC TOUR 2008



**Lunch at RAFO Thumrait with the Commander at the Head of Table and the rest tucking in – some even without kfs!**

We then returned home stopping off at the Ravens Roost locations and had a chance encounter with some Firqat who remembered some of our number working with members of their tribe during the conflict. At these locations we were reminded of some extraordinary feats that had been accomplished with very basic weapons, transport (donkeys) and communications (HF and morse) at the beginning of the conflict; this was in stark contrast to our visit to Thumrait and was an illustration of the amazing strides forward that had been made since the late 1960s.

The next day we moved to the Western area with a stop off at Tarqah and then on to the Fort at Mirbat; the fort was little changed though the town had grown considerably.



**Briefing at Mirbat Fort.**

Then on to the Wadi Darbat. The latter has been developed into a very pleasant area – complete with hard top access and picnic areas.



**Wadi Darbat – Picnic Area!**

Tawi Attair was the next stop which now has a very impressive school and many other facilities and is obviously a thriving community.



**Tawi Attair with School in Background.**



**Picnic near Jib Jat – How many teddy bears under one tree!**

A drive to Jib Jat followed with a very pleasant picnic under a shady tree!

It was an early start the next day for Sarfait. From my point of view it was amazing to see the road which crossed the Wadi Saiq. Who could have believed thirty years ago that one would be able to actually drive through that rugged terrain – quite a feat of engineering. After a briefing at Sarfait we were entertained at the Officers' Mess – this is positioned right on the scarp overlooking Capstan.



**Briefing at Sarfait.**

The views are as spectacular as ever – the only difference being the road network down the scarp and the development of several villages. We were given a very effusive address by a Raiid in the Oman Coast Regiment who said our support would never be forgotten and we would always be welcome in Oman. This was particularly moving for as a relatively young major he may not even have been born at the time of the conflict.



**Nigel Knocker makes a presentation to Ra'aid Ahmed bin Salim Al Masheni.**

We then moved on to the Darra Ridge via Dhalqut. It was a bit of an eye opener to see a signpost to Hauf!



**Sign of the Times – get there by camel!**

The final day in Dhofar consisted in the morning of a trip to the area of the Damavand Line and the Everest and Stonehenge positions and then after a picnic lunch we moved on to the Southern end of the Hornbeam Line in the area of Mughsayl



**The Druids of Stonehenge – Zic B Coy (Clive Ward) CO (Jonathan S-T) and OC A Coy (Peter Isaacs) all of FF – 33 years later.**



**Mike Lobb on the Damavand Line.**

That evening we were invited to the Firqat Mess and were greeted again by the Firqat Commander and a very jolly evening followed with an excellent meal and music provided by the Firqat Pipes and Drums – with a particularly spirited performance provided by the solo drummer! **Ian Gordon** made an excellent address at the end of the meal in Arabic which the Arabs clearly understood if not the guests!



**Solo Drummer performing for Nick Holbrook.**



**Arm Chair Soldiers?**

The next day ended the Dhofar part of the tour and that morning we returned to RAFO Salalah and after a short stay in the VIP suite were transported in a very elegant coach, complete with armchairs, to the waiting BAC 111.

On arrival at Seeb we were met by more land cruisers and were soon on our way to the Jebel Akhdar; the route now being a dual carriageway – the last time I had undertaken this trip it had been over a rather bumpy track! En route we stopped off at Birkat Al Mawz where we were entertained for lunch by **Liwa Yahya Nasser Al Fahdi**, his family and other serving and retired officers.

## DHOFAR HISTORIC TOUR 2008



**Ian Gardiner meets Yahya.**



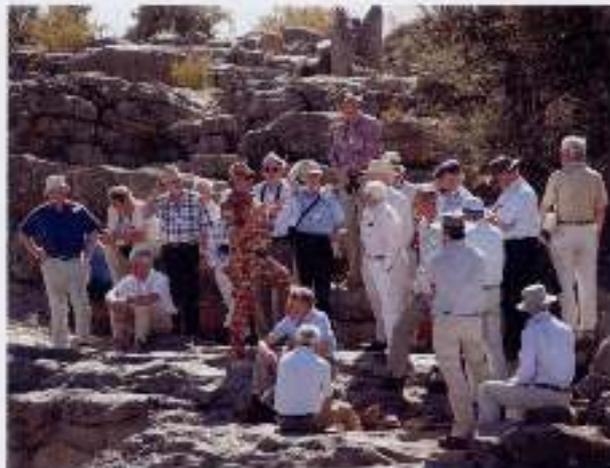
**Incorrect Postures! Hugh Colley, Jonathan S-T and David Houlton.**

He welcomed us all and informed us we were to have a proper Omani Fuddle which was greeted with a cheer from all his guests. There followed a most enjoyable meal in a very happy and relaxed atmosphere. Some of us had a little difficulty in adopting the right posture – sign of old age creeping on! From my point of view it was a delight to meet up with Yahya – I had last met him some thirty years before when he had taken over from **Alan Abbot** in 1976 as the first Omani G3 Int and Security in HQ Dhofar Brigade. After lunch we drove up to the Jebel Akhdar and booked in at the Hotel. That evening we were entertained at the JA Battle Training Centre by COSSAF, **Fareeq Ahmed bin Harith Al Nabhani** who had very kindly interrupted his leave to entertain us. All three of the individual service commanders were also present. We had a delightful meal outside in the relative cool of the evening.



**Johnny Kirkham and Neil Fawcett meet COSSAF.**

The next morning we had a short trip around the Jebel Akhdar which included a brief description of the operations there in the late 50s and a visit to the site of the crashed Venom. There followed a visit to the Fort at Nizwa which had been restored and obviously become quite a tourist attraction.



**Ian Buttenshaw in full flow on the Jebel Akhdar.**



**Drivers at Nizwa Fort.**

We then moved to the very smart and extensive SOA barracks at Izki and were met by the Commander SOA **Ameed Khamis bin Ali Al Sheedi**. A briefing was followed by a display of guns and other equipment manned by what must have been at least 100 jundis and all on a very hot Jummal



**Shell Shocked!**



**Bugs Hughes Presenting!**

We had an excellent lunch in the Officers' Mess and after an exchange of gifts we returned to Muscat and booked in at the Crowne Plaza Hotel which overlooks the beach.

That evening we were invited to dinner at the very impressive Shafaq Club hosted by CRAFO, **Liwa (Tayaar) Yayha bin Rasheed Al Juma** and his officers. We were once again given a splendid welcome and there followed a delicious meal to the accompaniment of the RAFO Band.



**Tony Nicholson dining with CRAFO.**

A tour of the main British Cemeteries in Muscat took place the next day; it was a very moving occasion and some wreaths were laid. It was also heartening to hear that the gravestones, some of which were deteriorating in the heat, were to be replaced by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission; this matter was being dealt with through the Defence Attache at the British Embassy.



**A Visit to the British Cemetery.**



**Peter Sichel laying a wreath at the grave of Trooper Bembridge KIA on the Jebel Akhdar in 1959.**

A visit to the SAF Museum followed and then lunch at the Muscateer BAF Officers' Mess. This brought back many memories for those who had served in the old days at HQ SAF.



**Entering SAF Museum.**

That afternoon we were taken to sea in *SNV Al Said* and cruised along the Omani coast for a few miles. Some intrepid sailors had a go at the helm with some degree of success.



**Nigel Knocker under instruction at the wheel.**

## DHOFAR HISTORIC TOUR 2008



**All at Sea!!**

On the final day we visited the Grand Mosque in the morning – and very impressive it was too. I was particularly struck by the enormous carpet in the main part of the mosque – made by hand in Isfahan.



**Overwhelmed by the magnificence of the Grand Mosque.**

That afternoon we were let loose to do shopping before our final appointment, the farewell dinner, with CRAO, **Liwa Said bin Nasser Al Salmi** at RAO Officers' Mess at MAM. This was a fitting farewell and once again we were made to feel very welcome and it was a first class meal with one of the bands of the RAO playing us out.

After fond farewells we proceeded to Seeb Airport and having said 'au revoir' to Ian Buttenshaw and his staff, we were soon on our way back to Gatwick. We arrived at around 0500 hours the next morning to be greeted by a typical British weather – wind and torrential rain!

I am sure we would all agree that this trip surpassed all our expectations. It is certainly an event I shall remember for the rest of my life. Not only for some of the incredible shared experiences of people who had participated in the conflict from beginning to end but also for the amazing gratitude and hospitality shown by the Omanis. We were treated so well and the generosity we encountered at all levels was quite overwhelming – from very senior officers giving up their valuable time to brief and entertain us down to the drivers who so cheerfully and expertly drove us throughout our visit. I also left with a strong impression of the strides in development that have been made over the last three decades since the time Dhofar was declared as secure for civil development in 1975.

I think it is fitting to conclude with two extracts – one from a letter written by Nigel Knocker to COSSAF thanking him for the visit

*"Words cannot express our deep gratitude to you, Suleiman and Ian, for all the wonderful and detailed arrangements which you made for our recent memorable tour. The reaction which I have had from everyone who was in the party is truly ecstatic.*

*I think that we achieved our aim of covering the whole period of the Dhofar campaign, which as you know, most of us only really knew what happened during our respective tours in SAF. It has completed the story for us all. It has made us very proud once again to have been so involved in the early development of the Sultanate.*

*Thank you for entertaining us so generously at Saiq. It was good to visit the Jebel Akhdar again and experience the contrast with Dhofar.*

*I believe that the visit admirably captured the essence of the lasting bond between the Association and all our friends in Oman."*

and the other from an email sent by **Nicol Cameron**

*"What a truly marvellous and very memorable 'Historic Tour' you arranged for us. It was a wonderful experience. I got everything out of it that I was hoping for. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for including me in the group of 30.*

*"It was incredibly interesting and enlightening to meet everyone in the group, and Ian, and to hear and see on the ground what everyone had done, when and where and how, and to learn how the war had developed and been prosecuted after my time in Dhofar. And it was astonishing and wonderful to see how the whole of the Sultanate has developed since my departure on 1 Jan 1969. It was very humbling to discover that the small part that I had played in the process which led ultimately to the successful conclusion of the war, and that what we all did in our various ways, was so demonstratively and genuinely appreciated by everyone who hosted us."*

I am sure that all those who took part in the tour would agree with these sentiments. ■

### 2009 SAF ASSOCIATION DINNER

The 2009 Dinner will take place in the Army and Navy Club, 36 Pall Mall, London, commencing at 1900 hrs on FRIDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2009.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE APPLICATION FORM ON PAGE 98 AND SEND IT TO STAN EDWARDS TO REACH HIM BY 13 NOVEMBER 2009 AT THE LATEST.

### 2009 SAF ASSOCIATION COCKTAIL PARTY

The Cocktail Party will take place in the Army and Navy Club, 36 Pall Mall, London, between 1830 and 2030 hrs on THURSDAY 4 JUNE 2009.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE APPLICATION FORM ON PAGE 98 AND SEND IT TO NIGEL KNOCKER, TO REACH HIM BY 26 MAY 2009 AT THE LATEST.

The following photos were taken  
by Nicol Cameron, Oman Artillery, in 1968-69.

Ayun. Letting down a 25 pounder.



Defa: Dinner is served.



Op Lance. Donkey loaded into a  
Beaver for a flight to Defa.



Musri Donkey Area Shabrum Caves



Op Lance Iraqi. Three 25 pounders deployed.

Ayun  
Developing a track.



THIS WAS A RECRUITING LEAFLET PRODUCED IN JUNE 1959 CALLING FOR SERVICE IN SAF.

THINGS ARE A BIT DIFFERENT NOW! *Courtesy of Ian Buttenshaw*



THE SULTAN OF MUSCAT'S ARMED FORCES



THE SULTAN OF MUSCAT'S ARMED FORCES

In the south-east corner of Arabia is the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, whose ruling family date back over two centuries, and which has been an ally of Great Britain since 1798. Within its territory are mountain ranges which have been penetrated by fewer Englishmen than have attempted to climb Everest; a desert wilderness which has been crossed by fewer Britons than have reached the South Pole. Yet, throughout the past two centuries, there have been frequent friendly contacts between our two countries, mainly by visiting ships of the Royal Navy—the Sultan has a unique Visitor's Book in the form of a vast rock-face at Muscat, upon which visiting ships paint their names; some are becoming indecipherable now, but local tradition has it that Midshipman Nelson saw the name of his ship *H.M.S. Seahorse* entered on the roll in 1775. Until recently the Sultan possessed large and rich territories in East Africa and Baluchistan. The last of these overseas estates was given up in September 1958, when the Sultan ceded the enclave of Gwadar, on the Mekran coast, to Pakistan as an act of goodwill.

This pamphlet is about Muscat. Its purpose is to make known that His Highness Sultan Said bin Taimur, a staunch friend of Britain, wants British Officers to help him train his Armed Forces, and to command them in action if need be.



*75 mm. guns from the S.A.F. artillery on typical terrain.*

*Two Baluchi 'contract' officers with Omani tribal irregulars.*



## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MUSCAT AND OMAN TO GREAT BRITAIN

On the map of Arabia is a boomerang-shaped strip of territory running round the south-east corner, and marked "Muscat and Oman". Until comparatively recently little was known about its interior, and much of it has never been fully explored or mapped.

Economically, the importance of this State probably lies in the future. Since the War British and American oil companies have been granted concessions to search for oil, and should it be found in commercial quantities the country would be transformed—as some of the Persian Gulf States have been transformed within the last few years. Early surveys have raised hopes of finding substantial oil deposits; other minerals such as coal, copper, iron ore and gypsum are also known to exist, but their commercial possibilities have not yet been established.

The political and strategic importance of Muscat, however, is very much in the present. Great Britain's relationship with the Sultan forms an important political link in the chain of her Persian Gulf interests, and in these days the Persian Gulf is most important to the very existence of Britain. Moreover, this independent country flanks our main sea routes to the oil-fields in the Gulf, and if it ever fell into hostile hands our supplies of oil could be seriously threatened. In addition to external dangers, and not entirely disconnected with them, Muscat has faced a dissident tribal movement in its wild and almost inaccessible interior. As is well-known this movement broke into open revolt in 1957, when it was put down by the Sultan's forces with the help of British troops. The situation has recently been cleared up.

In these circumstances one thing that *must* be ensured is that the Sultan's Army remains loyal and dependable. There is, therefore, no doubt about the importance for Britain and the West of fostering close relations with the Sultan of Muscat, and of the role to be played by the latter's British officers in this process. Here is a responsibility that it is a challenge and an honour to help to discharge.

## THE GEOGRAPHY OF MUSCAT AND OMAN

The Sultan's territory divides into five parts:

- The shores of the Gulf of Oman (known as the "Batina" Coast) provide a narrow littoral between mountains and sea. Chiefly notable for long, clean and palm-fringed beaches, it has only two towns comparable in size with other centres of population in the Persian Gulf area: Muscat, the capital, and Mattrah, the commercial centre, standing in adjacent rocky coves.



*Muscat and Oman, an independent country, largely unexplored, whose Sultan is a firm friend of Britain.*

- The littoral is cut off from the interior by a belt of rugged, tangled mountains, rising in places to a height of 10,000 feet, and scarcely surveyed away from the few traditional camel tracks.

- On the inland face of the mountains lies a wide gravel strip containing a few important and attractive oases, such as Ibri, Firq and Nizwa. The Sultan is also part-owner, with the Shaikh of Abu Dhabi, of the Buraimi settlements, where occurred the 1952 Saudi-Arabian incursion. (Attractive and detailed descriptions of these places will be found in James Morris's interesting book: *Sultan in Oman*.)

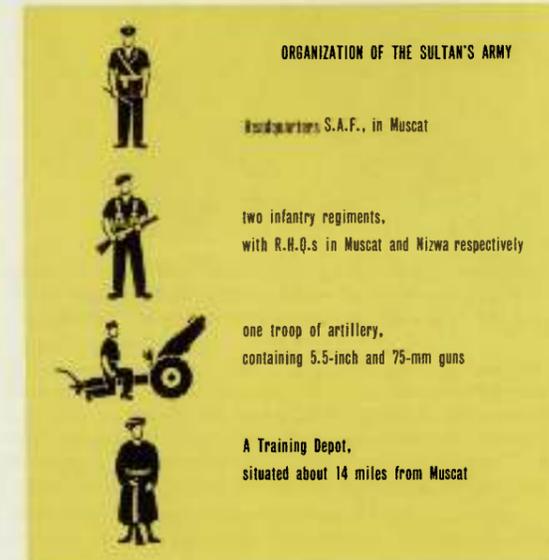
- A hundred miles south of Muscat the main mountain ranges merge with a somewhat dreary desert wilderness, stretching far to the north and west and with attraction only for such men as Wilfred Thesiger and Bertram Thomas, with their deep affection for the true desert and its nomad peoples.

- Finally, half-way along the southern coast of Arabia, is the comparatively fertile and green district of Dhufar, which has excited much admiration from the few English travellers who have written about it.

In the background to the whole of Muscat and Oman is the vast "Empty Quarter"—the Rub'Al Khali desert. The frontier between the domains of the Sultan and those of King Saud has never been officially delimited. Indeed, the whole concept of international boundaries has been foreign to nomad tribes, until the "possession" of oil-bearing lands became of first importance.

## THE SULTAN OF MUSCAT'S ARMED FORCES

Briefly, the Sultan's Armed Forces ("S.A.F." for short) contain an Army element about a small brigade group in strength, a naval element (2 gunboats) for customs control and fishery protection, and an air force reconnaissance and support element.



The Muscat Regiment has one company on guard duties in the capital, responsible for the security of the Sultan's Palace and the Treasury, and two companies which carry out patrols to maintain internal security on the Batina coast. The Northern Frontier Regiment at Nizwa is chiefly employed in maintaining law and order in the interior. Each regiment is at approximately battalion strength, and is commanded by a British Lieut.-Colonel. The whole S.A.F. is commanded by a British Colonel, who also acts as Chief of Staff to the Sultan. The other seconded British Regular Officers should comprise six Majors and fourteen Captains, thus making a total of twenty-three seconded officers. Besides these, there are eighteen "contract" officers who hold the Sultan's own commission; they are mainly retired British and Indian Army Officers, and include one or two Pakistani Officers. To this officer-cadre must be added a number of Pakistani Jemadars and Subedars of the old Indian Army—loyal and staunch friends of British Officers.

## THE SULTAN OF MUSCAT'S ARMED FORCES

The soldiers are about half-and-half Baluchis and Arabs. They are easy to command and teach, by officers they respect. Familiarity or bluster does not go down with them any better than with British soldiers. If an officer has a working knowledge of Urdu, he will find that he can converse with most of his men straight away, but all officers are required to learn Arabic.

### THE STATUS OF SECONDED BRITISH OFFICERS

As Muscat and Oman is a completely independent state, there is no question of any form of "Whitehall control" over the Sultan's Armed Forces, whose officers take their orders from the Sultan—the Commander-in-Chief. Hence, for as long as they are seconded to the S.A.F., British officers owe allegiance to the Sultan, but the Agreement between the latter and H.M. Government safeguards their prior allegiance to Her Majesty the Queen, and they remain subject to British Military Law. By the Agreement, also, they have power of command over all other officers in the S.A.F. who are of junior rank.

British officers may not be posted away from Muscat without the permission of the Sultan. In any matter of dispute they have the right of appeal to H.M. Government through the Commander, S.A.F., and the Commander, Land Forces Persian Gulf.

*An S.A.F. driver (left) with sheikhs from the Sultanate.*



*The crew of a 5.5 stand-10.*



### THE EFFECT ON AN OFFICER'S CAREER IN THE BRITISH ARMY

As the British Regular Army shrinks in these days of "peace", so is the value to an officer of a temporary outlet elsewhere enhanced. It can never be right for a professional to stick too long in any one form of service. Pre-war regulars were blooded on the North-West Frontier of India, and an earlier generation opened up Africa. Only that man is "whole and well-rounded" who has experience out of the common and can match convention with rarity, and orthodoxy with the unheard-of. The Sultan of Muscat's Armed Forces offer one avenue of escape from the ordinary. Service in it may well entail experience of active operations in a tough and little-known part of the world. Any recommendation which can be earned in British service—be it for Command, the Staff College, or promotion—can similarly be earned in the S.A.F., and it carries just as much weight. Such service will give an officer that little something extra in his record which may indicate to future selection boards that he has learnt self-reliance in a hard school, and can stand on his own two feet. The nature of the country, and the constant patrolling create many opportunities for comparatively junior officers to exercise independent command of detachments. The Regular who makes good in the S.A.F. need have no fear for his future in the British Army.

### LIFE IN MUSCAT AND OMAN

Life in Muscat is very much what a man makes of it by his own efforts. It can be very testing. Muscat is no place for any man who has to rely on others to make life stimulating, or who leans heavily on the comforts of western civilization. There are three tough drawbacks to face up to: the great heat in summer, the comparative lack of social life, and, for married men, separation. These drawbacks must be carefully weighed in the balance against, not only extra pay and generous leave, but also against chances to gain professional experience, the lure of exploring the unknown, and above all the satisfaction of doing a job that is vital to the future of Britain.

The climate from May to September is very hot, and on the coast is humid and unpleasant. Inland the summer is drier, and though temperatures rise high, the heat is not so enervating. But once the hot season has been weathered, the rest of the year can be delightful—warm, sunny days and cool nights—it can vie with the best Mediterranean climate.

Social life is practically non-existent—not that military duties and patrolling leave a man with a lot of time to kill.

For recreation officers are mainly dependent on the basic materials of sea, mountains and desert. Energetic men may plan exploration or organize hawking or bird-watching. There is excellent swimming and sea-fishing (including under-water fishing) to be obtained by those situated on the coast, and two motor boats have been presented to the officers by the Lord Nuffield Trust.

Up-country there are sand-grouse and partridge, and it is worth while bringing out a shot gun. In the desert, of course, there are plenty of gazelle, but it is no longer fashionable to



*Muscat is an ideal place for the pursuit of photography.*

shoot these harmless and graceful little creatures. For some men the climate, lighting effects and cheapness of cameras make a happy conjunction for the avid pursuit of photography. For others archaeology offers a wide field, for there are many remains of previous civilizations dating back 3-4000 years. To the student of history, the picturesque mediaeval castles built by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century repay investigation.

There are few horses, and it is not worth bringing out a private car—there are no macadam roads outside Muscat, and the use of military 4 x 4 vehicles is not only permissible but essential for getting about the country. Drink and tobacco are duty-free. There is a sort of shopping centre in Mattrah, where most forms of Western goods may be bought at reasonable prices. Tropical clothing can be made up cheaply and well by local Indian tailors, but all other clothing and footwear are best brought out from Home.

Married officers below the rank of Lieut.-Colonel cannot have their wives and families with them as there is no accommodation, either State-owned or civilian. The Commander, S.A.F., and the two regimental commanding officers get a quarter each. It is a small bungalow, of a type that will be familiar to officers who served in India before the war. No facilities exist in Muscat for the education of children.



*For recreation  
officers are dependent on the basic materials of  
sea, mountains and desert.*

### THE REQUIREMENT

The Sultan wants a hard core of tough, thoroughly up-to-date British leaders, who will ensure him a well-trained and loyal army, which is able to withstand anything that any enemies within or without his domains may put into the field. To be eligible, officers must be fit for service in hot climates, and have at least four years on full pay to serve. Subalterns who are well reported upon will be considered for Captains' vacancies, but they must have completed a minimum of two years'

service. The majority of posts are for infantry officers, but a proportion of officers from other arms will be accepted.

Lieut.-Colonels and above must volunteer for two consecutive periods of 18 months of duty with the S.A.F. Other officers are only required initially to volunteer for one such period, to prove the stuff they are made of. If they turn out to be the right men for the job, they will be allowed to stay on for a further tour.

### ARE YOU THE MAN?

There you are—a chance for interesting service in a little-known part of the world, where the opportunities for seeing some real action are promising, and where every British Officer is doing a job of vital importance to Britain. The job will broaden your outlook, give you an unusual entry in your

record of service, and teach you a lot. Like all service anywhere it can have its drawbacks, but if you readily let these put you off, *you are not* the Man for the Sultan of Muscat's Armed Forces. Why not find out more? Look up A.C.I. 416 of 1958 or write to the Commander, S.A.F., Muscat.

### PAY AND ALLOWANCES

Basic Pay and Allowances, including Local Overseas Allowance and Tropical Kit Allowance, of the rank held, whether temporary or substantive, are paid at ordinary British Army rates. When it is not possible to issue rations in kind, ration allowance is admissible.

Additional Pay calculated at the rate of one-fifth of the Basic British pay of the rank held is paid for every day that the officer is on the strength of the S.A.F., including sick leave, mid-tour and end-of-tour leave.

A secondment credit will be paid annually in arrears in one lump sum, which is calculated at one-quarter of the total of Additional Pay and Basic Pay during the first 18 months' service, and one-third of that sum during the second (or any subsequent) consecutive tour of 18 months.

As an example of what this arithmetic means: a major, with one year in the rank when he starts serving with the S.A.F. will have received by the end of two 18-months' tours, a sum of £2050 gross over and above what he would earn in a similar period in British Service—taking account of additional pay and secondment credits only. To this must be added language pay, which is admissible when the necessary qualifications have been obtained, at the following rates:

Higher (written and oral proficiency)	4/- a day
Lower (oral proficiency only)	2/6 a day

Officers may continue to receive their pay through their normal Army agents in the U.K., or through the District Paymaster in Aden, as they prefer. British Income Tax rules apply in the normal way.

### LEAVE

Leave will be admissible to all officers under current British Army rules except that officers who are not married accompanied Lt.-Cols or above may be granted 42 days' leave in the United Kingdom after nine months' actual service with the Sultan's Forces and after a further nine months an increase to 61 days leave in the United Kingdom. Should an officer undertake a second tour similar periods of leave may be granted. Disembarkation leave under normal rules will be admissible at the end of a final tour. All leave mentioned is at public expense.

Married accompanied Lt.-Cols and above may be granted 91 days' leave to the United Kingdom after eighteen months' actual service with the Sultan's Forces plus a further 42 days' leave to the United Kingdom once during a three-year tour of duty. On completion of 36 months' actual duty officers may be granted 61 days' leave plus normal accrued disembarkation leave. All leave mentioned is at public expense for both the officer and his family.

# I WONDER HOW MUCH MUSCAT HAS CHANGED!

*by Mike Wolfenden, Cable and Wireless, Muscat 1963*

(Mike contacted Ian Gardiner who forwarded this article with permission to publish it. We are grateful to both for providing such an interesting insight into life in Oman in 1963)

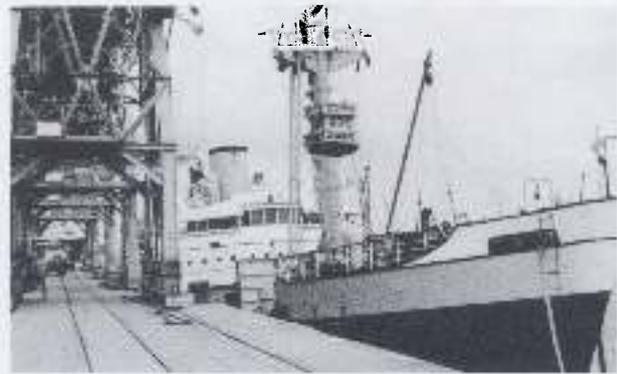
When **David**, my younger son, told me that he was thinking of buying a property in Oman at some time in the near future I had a look at the information about the country that is to be found on the World Wide Web. I wasn't really surprised to see that 6-lane high-ways now link Muscat to Seeb and Salalah and probably other places as well. Nor was I thrown to see how many major hotel groups are now to be found there, creating what has plainly become a significant holiday destination. This had the effect of taking me back 45 years to the time when I knew a very different country which nobody visited for pleasure.

At the time of my appointment as Manager/Engineer of the Muscat branch of Cable and Wireless Ltd in August 1963 I was working in the Nairobi Central Telegraph Office as Assistant Engineer, and we were not really sorry to be leaving East Africa for Oman, which was likely to be a very different and challenging experience.

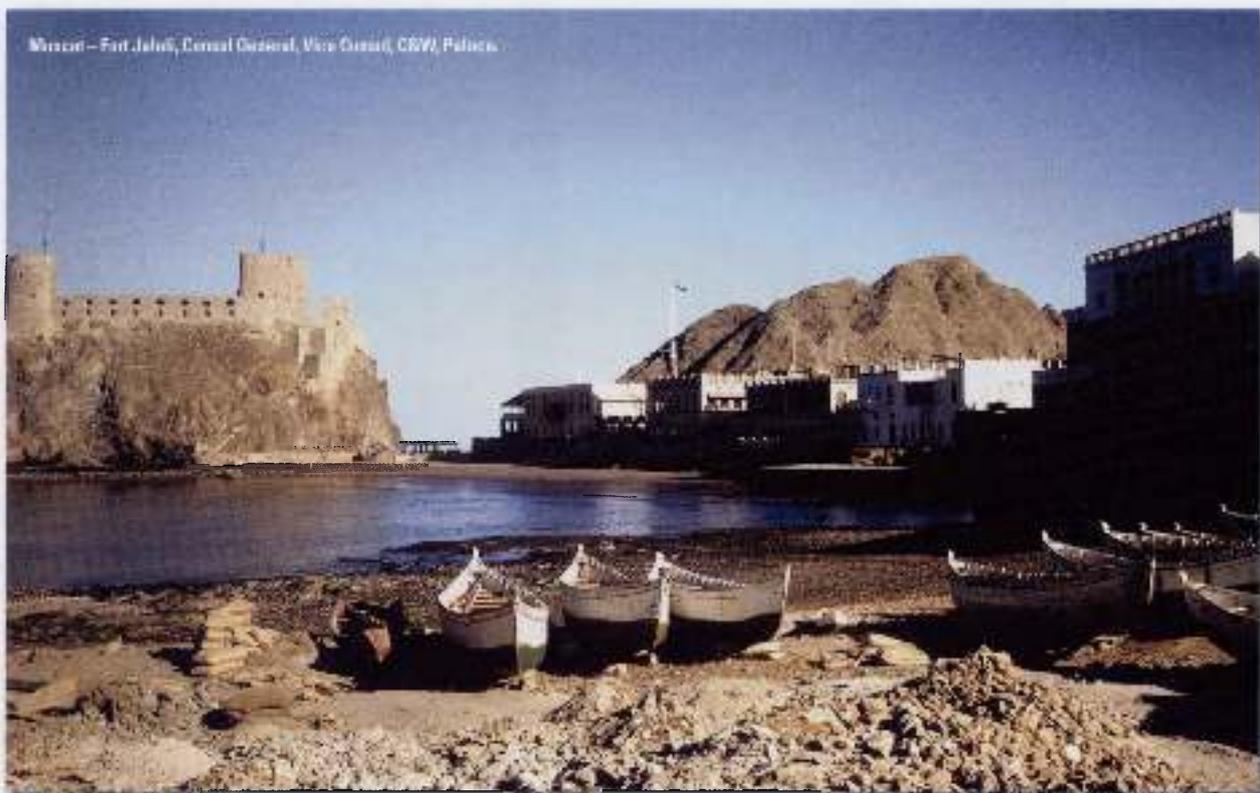
We went down to the coast by train to join the ship in which we were to take passage to Muscat. When we first scanned the quayside we were disturbed to find no immediate signs of our ship, the Dutch-flagged KPM freighter "*Siloendong*". The only visible ships were quite large and easily seen so we decided we should look down over the edge of the jetty, and to our amazement found a tiny coaster with the expected name painted on the bows and stern. A gangway led down from the quayside onto the port wing of the bridge. We estimated the size of the ship at about 1000 tons and

we wondered what sort of voyage we were likely to experience in the Indian Ocean's Southwestern monsoon. We had seen this ship once before in 1956, when she was lying at anchor off Singapore.

We sailed from Mombasa and quickly found out just what the weather was going to do as we experienced very rough seas all the way to Aden. **Connie** was expecting our second child and we felt it might be wiser for her to stay in her bunk for the rougher parts of this passage as the ship carried no doctor and there was a real risk of her being injured had she tried to move about. For most of the Mombasa-Aden leg of our journey the three-island ship was exactly that, with waves sweeping over the forrard and aft hatches – at times the ship resembled a submarine.

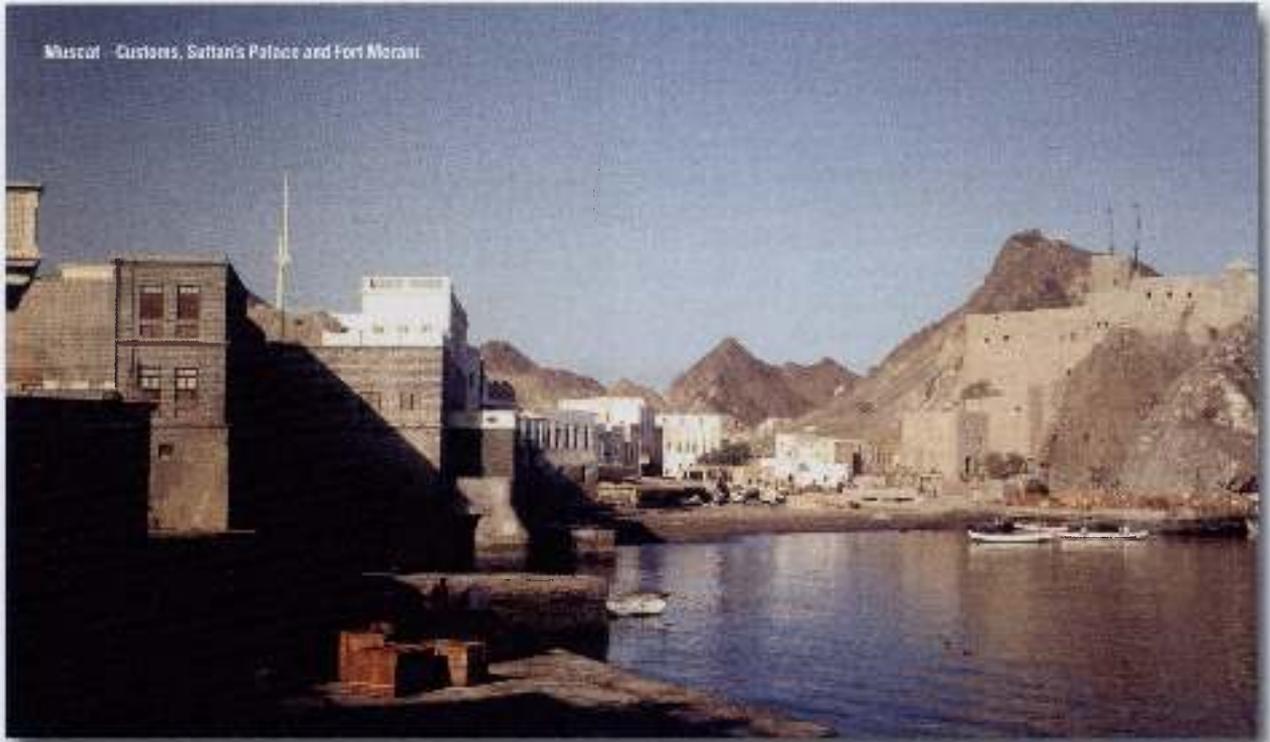


*Siloendong.*



Muscat – Fort Jalali, Central District, Vasa Quay, CRW, Palace.

## I WONDER HOW MUCH MUSCAT HAS CHANGED!



We were glad to anchor off Aden to discharge a thousand tons or so of cement, which was the major part of the ship's cargo, and we found quite a lot had percolated into our hold baggage when we later came to unpack. Somewhere between Aden and Muscat the ship's engine broke down and we were stopped for several hours without power of any sort, the extreme heat from the not too distant shore rolled over us and we appreciated how the ship's air conditioning had made life tolerable up to that point. I came across the Captain going through his food store and swearing about somebody forgetting to buy the "blotty butter"! This could have been serious as the menu was already unusual in having a strong bias towards Dutch tastes. The bad monsoon weather had by this time left us and the ship rolled gently on an oily swell.

Repairs were successful and the passage resumed until early one morning we awoke to find ourselves at anchor in Muscat Cove, surrounded by rocky hills emblazoned with the names of war and merchant ships that had, at some time or other, called at Muscat. Not a sound emanated from the shore and there were few visible signs of life apart from whispers of smoke rising over buildings. A dugout canoe fitted with a cloth awning over the stern approached the ship and we discovered that this was to be our transport ashore. Connie boarded the canoe without undue loss of modesty and I handed **Gavin** down to her. The two boatmen paddled us ashore and we landed onto a stone jetty where we met the in-post Manager, **Ron Field**, and **Chris Friend**, the Assistant Engineer, who welcomed us to Muscat and Oman. The heat, even at this early time of day, was intense and we later discovered that the date of our arrival in August was just about the middle of the hot season and perhaps not the best time to travel to this part of Arabia, when peak temperatures in the mid 50s Celsius are quite common.

The one-week handover was hectic with official visits to be made to HM Consul-General, the Sultan's adviser, **Colonel Leslie Chauncey**, members of the governing family, senior officers in the armed forces and some of the commercial community. The visits

to members of the Omani Royal Family introduced me to the protocol of such visits where one drank no more, nor less, than three minuscule cups of coffee, ate some of a local sweetmeat delicacy called Halwa and enquired about the prospects of the Lime crop grown in Oman. Any other topic was necessarily handled with some care, especially by a newcomer. An emergency was in progress at the time of our arrival and travel outside Muscat was very limited. I was introduced to the company staff and the local Omani staff who carried out their work in the three buildings of the branch and, in the case of the telephone linesmen, out-of-doors. The Manager and the Branch Accountant, **Shamis Saud**, worked on the ground floor of the house, which accommodated the Manager and his family on the first floor. The Assistant Engineer lived a short distance away in the Bachelor Mess which dualled as accommodation for visiting expatriates; another building near the Mess was the Exiles Club which had a membership well in excess of the total number of our staff and was in effect the only licensed premises in the country. The Manager had an additional role as Licensee and this function tended to create the only real worry of all his duties.



Muscat - Exiles Club.

## WONDER HOW MUCH MUSCAT HAS CHANGED!

Ron Field duly flew away in a Gulf Air DH Heron 1 and we settled into life in Muscat and Oman. When we arrived most of the expatriate ladies were enjoying the benefit of cooler climes elsewhere and at the time only one other lady was in situ, at the hospital of the Dutch Reformed Church. As time passed and the temperature lowered people began to return and we were introduced to the active and quite formal social scene. Written invitations to dinner, lunch or drinks were the norm as was the habit of writing acceptance and thank you letters. During the warm weather the men's dress for dinner parties was what is called "Red Sea Rig", which is well known to anyone who has served at sea and for men it consisted of black trousers with a white shirt and a black bow tie. When the temperature had fallen to a more tolerable level the dress code was slightly modified and specified either a white or black dinner jacket to complete the ensemble: the ladies dressed quite formally for both the warm and cooler times. Catering for social events was difficult as only limited stocks of food were to be found in the Souk and it was necessary to import many items such as frozen meat, vegetables, butter, bacon, etc., from one of the British India liners which sailed the route from Bombay to the far end of the Persian Gulf; an order placed on the westward voyage of the ship would be landed, if weather conditions allowed, after the ship had completed its circuit of the Gulf, returned to India and begun the next voyage. It was the practice to take the ordered items out of the cold store as the ship approached Muscat and to make up each list on deck so that if there was any delay in landing and passage through the customs, the chances were that everything had completely defrosted and often many items had to be thrown away as they were no longer usable. Another route for food supply was by air and we were able to arrange to put salad items on a Gulf Air aircraft for transportation to Muscat.

Our arrival proved to be of interest to some local folk – when we came to have our heavy baggage cleared by customs we had to open every box and container so that a full rummage could take place and onlookers helped the customs staff by prodding interesting-looking items with their camel sticks. During our short second stay in Kenya the one acre garden accompanying our bungalow was found to be beyond the grass-cutting abilities of our panga-wielding gardener **Bebe**, a Kikuyu lady, and I bought a Qualcast rotary mower which we were reluctant to give away when we left. So we took it to Muscat and this proved to be the highlight of the customs event as it was completely beyond the experience of anybody there – "What does it do?", was the first question to which the answer was "cut grass", and this in turn prompted a second query "What is grass?" It was considered to be a novelty and non-chargeable for customs duty! This was an all day happening and I spent it in extreme heat, dust and surrounded by clouds of flies, but the presence of so many friendly and courteous people took the edge of what could have been an onerous chore.

The buildings surrounding the cove at Muscat were very unusual with two 16th century Portuguese forts located one on either side. Fort Jalali was the prison and Fort Merani the police barracks. The prison was a forbidding place and we were told that the custom was for relatives of the incarcerated to provide their food, as nobody else was going to do so. Shortly before our arrival a mass breakout took place and about 30 prisoners climbed down the precipitous rocks to sea level. The alarm was raised the same night as one man felt obliged to honour the curfew regulation of carrying a



Muscat – Mosque by Fort Merani.



Muscat – Fort Jalali.

lighted blue hurricane lantern ("*Butti*"), which was mandatory between dusk and dawn when the gates of Muscat were locked. In his innocence he went to the police station and asked if he could borrow a "*Butti*"; that let the cat out of the bag and moves were immediately put into place to recapture the runaways. Next day the Air Force and Army carried out patrols to locate the missing men but it took quite a while to find them all. Muscat was a very law-abiding place and we were interested to be told by our cook one evening, "please lock the door tonight, there is a bad man in town – but he is not a Muscati!" Another unusual practice was for armed men entering the town to hang their weapons on the internal wall of the gatehouse before entering the town. There was quite an interesting range of guns to see – ancient Jezails, 19th century Martini-Henry drop breech single shot rifles and more modern Lee Enfield .303" rifles, the first two would probably have been more dangerous to the user had they been fired. I never heard of any being stolen.



Young Omanis by the Town Wall.

## I WONDER HOW MUCH MUSCAT HAS CHANGED!

During our first week in Muscat HMS "Nubian" paid an official visit and it is the custom when HM Ships do this to exchange 21 gun salutes with the country being visited. I learned that the return salute from the shore would be a particularly rare sight as it would be performed by a gun battery on Fort Merani. It certainly was fascinating as the saluting guns were muzzle-loading cannon of some antiquity and my viewing point was directly above the gun battery. The technique, which mostly worked well, was for a gunner to put a calico bag of gunpowder into the barrel, use a rammer to push it to the "breach" end where a pricker was inserted into the touch-hole to pierce the bag and expose the gunpowder. A fulminate of mercury capsule was placed on the touch-hole and firing the gun used a most effective and simple device – a bent nail connected to a cord was placed in the centre of the capsule and the cord drawn taut. The gun captain then chopped his hand across the cord which caused the nail to pierce the capsule and the resultant flash travelled down the touch-hole to ignite the powder. The battery was soon surrounded by dense clouds of acrid smoke. 20 charges fired without difficulty but one did not go off and one of the gunners broke the basic rule of how to deal with a misfire, which is to leave it alone and wait as it might be a delayed firing. This proved to be the case and the gunner who put his arm down the barrel to remove the charge did so just as the gunpowder exploded, enveloping him a cloud of smoke and severely burning his arm. During the afternoon "distinguished guests" were invited onboard "Nubian" for drinks and to view an exercise during which we fired various weapons and watched a Royal Marine fire an RPG at a floating target which he totally destroyed. The Air Force carried out strafing runs on a target towed astern of the ship using their machine guns and we could clearly see the splashes of their very accurate shooting.

The curfew impacted on me three times during my time in Muscat, the first being when I took a late night telephone call from the Manager of the Gray Mackenzie trading company who begged me to get him out of prison. He had driven his Landrover up to the gates of his garage and dismounted to open the doors. As he walked the short distance he was stopped by an armed policeman and arrested for not carrying a lit *Butti*. The second time it happened when Connie was about to go into labour for the birth of our second child; I had a dated pass to take her to hospital but had she failed to start the process on time I would have found myself trying to get another pass and this could take a week, leaving her little option but to walk through the gate as labour overtook her. The only option was to create our own arrival time by induction, not the electrical kind. The third time we had any contact with the curfew was during a visit by Managing Director **Henry Eggers**. After the evening of entertainments that we staged we bade farewell to our guests from the front door of the house and when this was completed Henry announced that he would take a stroll to cool off. I asked him to wait whilst I lit a *Butti* but he told me not to bother as it wasn't necessary. So I told him "watch that tree as you step out" – he did so and a shadowy figure carrying a rifle materialised from the shadows. "I see what you mean," he said and beat a hasty retreat. I doubt my career would have gained any benefit from being instrumental in putting the Managing Director in jail.

Life was highly traditional in other ways and Omanis were not allowed to wear western dress in place of their white Dishdash robes. Operator **Zuhair Al Jamali** tried to board a British India liner

to take him for leave in India wearing western clothes and was arrested by the police who put him in a cell. We managed to get him out of jail and he duly left for his furlough. A highlight of our stay occurred during the summer of 1964 when intelligence was received by the Armed Forces of an armed insurgent dhow being on passage for Muscat. An Air Force "Piston Provost" on patrol found what they believed to be the vessel and fired across its bows to turn it toward Muscat Cove. It duly arrived alongside the Khor



Muscat – Khor Jetty.

Jetty and the occupants found themselves looking up the barrels pointed down by a line of rifle-carrying soldiers; they asked the reason for such an unfriendly reception and were told that they were terrorists, to which they replied – "No, we're Trucial Oman Scouts going on leave." For a short time there was concern that more serious rebellion was indeed in the air and rumours were spread that the Europeans were poisoning the wells but I don't think anybody took them seriously. We were asked to broadcast news bulletins on one of our radio transmitters to reassure the population but I doubt whether many people received the broadcasts as Omanis did not generally own radio receivers.

Shortly after my arrival in Muscat an oil exploration company, Petroleum Development (Oman), announced that they had found oil in commercial quantities so it was plain that we needed to act quickly if we were to be in any position to provide the services this could generate. Our visible profile was unsatisfactory and we set about modernisation of the office to create a good environment with air-conditioning and better lighting. At the same time we worked on the radio room to make that look more convincing. A new diesel-alternator was ordered and it arrived within a very short



Muttrah – Transport by the Camel & Donkey stables.

## WONDER HOW MUCH MUSCAT HAS CHANGED!

time. An installation engineer was flown in from Bahrain to take out the old plant and to install its replacement but we had to handle the movement of the incoming boxed engine ourselves. Cargo was landed from ships anchored offshore into wooden lighters which were towed to the jetty and unloaded using a mobile crane. From there we were on our own as the only user of trucks and trailers of any size, the government, was not prepared to help. We managed to borrow a trailer, fitted with metal wheels onto which the boxed diesel was craned – the only motive power was the branch SWB Landrover which proved capable of handling the load until the point where we left the concrete road to enter the Consulate compound, which gave access to our engine room. This was a mix of soft sand and gravel which made it impossible for the Landrover to haul such a heavy load but we were able to assemble in the region of 50 men and with ropes attached dragged the trailer into position. The box was broken down and the engine "jimmied" into the engine room; I think the door clearance was only a couple of inches and had it been less would have created another problem.

The domestic side of life in Muscat at that time was also quite unusual to the point of being unique as the Manager's house employed a staff of Cook, Cook's Boy, Bearer, Chokra and Bhisti – it was a closed shop and any attempt to get people to overlap each



Muscat – Bhisti.

other was doomed to failure. On the cook's day off it was the practice for the Manager's wife to do the cooking but Cook **Talib** decided after she had done it twice that she had shown quite dramatically that she was unable to manage his kerosene cooker which became heavily coated with soot – as was the high ceiling. For the rest of our stay he left a cold meal in the refrigerator. Despite the number of staff in the house none were prepared to clean the toilets and this was also a job for the Manager's wife. The Bhisti, our water-carrier, brought goatskin bags of water to supply the tanks in both expatriate houses. The supply was by no means

pure and it was necessary to boil and filter it twice before use; in retrospect this was probably over-optimistic. Sanitary water was not brought in goatskin bags but piped along a Roman aqueduct and this was definitely brackish, nor did it raise much lather for washing or shaving.



Muscat – A short section of the 3 mile length of surfaced road from the roof of the Manager's house.

Water is surprisingly plentiful, but not necessarily visible in Oman as it is largely underground and brought to the surface by the most amazing means at the wells (or *fala*) which are constructed every few hundred yards in the area which they serve. Ramps were cut into the earth and a bipod made of palm trees erected over the well. A hide rope was passed over a pulley between the legs of the bipod and fastened to a cow-skin bag. The other end of the rope was tied to a cow which had been trained to walk up the excavated incline and thus hoist the cow skin full of water to the surface, where it was tripped and the contents discharged into an aqueduct which supplied the town. Very simple, few moving parts and a power supply that could be eaten when it was no longer able to provide the necessary lift.

A badminton court behind the Muscat branch of the British Bank of the Middle East provided one of the few ways of taking exercise and this was well used. One of the Sultan's relatives, **Sayid Abbas**, was a good player as well as being an interesting person. The only other recreational facility was the film show staged regularly by the Consulate General, in an open-sided building. Expatriate men and their children were allowed to swim from the beach in front of the Consulate compound, which was quite clean, but their wives could not and if they wanted to swim they had to travel to the excellent beach at Saih Al Malah where we were also able to sail in dinghies owned by the Armed Forces. Shortly after we arrived Head



Muscat – Traffic Policeman on the only roundabout in the country by the Main Gate.

Office agreed to supply a small GRP open launch for recreational purposes and this became well used by the staff. **Shamis Saud** and I went to the neighbouring fishing village of Ruwi to buy a dug out "Houri" so that we could paddle out to the boat on its mooring near the coaling jetty – we boarded rather clumsily and managed to capsize the craft, throwing us both into knee-deep water which was by no means unpleasant as the water was quite warm; onlookers were greatly amused. The first excursion in the new boat came perilously close to being the last when the flexible rubber hose connecting the Perkins diesel outboard engine to its fuel tank parted when we were about a mile offshore. This was brand-new equipment and the cause of the failure was due to perishing of the rubber hose. Oman had no rescue services of any sort and any attempt to find us from the air after we had failed to return later in the day could well have taken a long time. Over the coming months we explored the coastline around Muscat and Muttrah and in the course of our travels discovered the Christian burial place to the south of the main cove, which was located in an isolated cove which could not be reached by land. This was a very sad experience and we noted that seamen from ships, who had been killed in accidents on board ship, were buried there as was an Anglican Bishop. There were no recent interments and any expatriate servicemen who died in Oman were usually airlifted to Aden. We did hear of an RAF pilot who had died when his aircraft had crashed in the interior of the country and we were told he had been buried under a pile of stones, leaving a skeletal hand exposed, which visiting airmen were in the habit of shaking when they passed by. This might well have been true but we had no means of verification.



Muscat – mystery building.



Muscat – Dhobi Ghat.



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## WONDER HOW MUCH MUSCAT HAS CHANGED!

The Armed Forces of the Sultanate were also quite unusual, consisting of infantry and artillery troops, armed police, the Sultan of Oman's Air Force and the Sultan of Oman's Navy. All were commanded by officers who had either been seconded from the British Armed Forces or were engaged on contract having retired from the Indian Army. The Commander of the Naval dhow was a retired RAF Group Captain and his charge was armed with a single .303" Lee Enfield rifle. The Air Force was equipped with piston-engined "Provost" aircraft with reinforced wings capable of carrying a significant war load, and de Havilland "Beavers" for transport purposes. The aircrew were all seconded RAF officers and engineering services were provided by Airwork. The World Wide Web reveals that the armed forces of Oman now have much more modern equipment and in quite large quantities and Omanisation of the Armed Forces now has taken place to a high level.

The birth of our daughter **Caroline** took place in the hospital of the mission run by the Dutch Reformed Church on 11th January 1964. She was the 19th expatriate child to be born in Muscat and we were interested to discover that another Cable & Wireless baby had been born in the country 19 years earlier. The hospital was quite basic but adequate, with excellent medical care; there were no cooking facilities for patients and relatives brought in food for each meal and some people actually slept on the floor by the patient's bedside or in passageways nearby. The Omani people who saw our baby were amazed at Caroline's size as they were more used to much smaller children at birth. Connie recovered



Muscat – Gulf Aviation DH Heron 1 at Bait Al Falaj.

All good things have to come to an end and in November 1964 **Harry Hey** came out to relieve me for leave. Somebody had told him that we were anxious to go home and this was a real mystery as we were perfectly content with life in Muscat and could cheerfully have extended the tour. The night before we flew out from Bait al Falaj the town echoed to the sound of a heavy explosion which turned out to be an attempt to blow up the house of the Sultan's Adviser; my relief offered to let me stay in post but as we were all packed up to go we declined!

Our over-riding feelings on leaving Muscat were surprisingly of sadness as we had thoroughly enjoyed our stay and we had met many friendly, hospitable people of all races, the staff were pleasant to work with and they met any adversity with a marked sense of humour; I wonder from time to time how their lives have progressed in the much-developed Oman of Sultan Qaboos bin Said. ■



Muscat – Omani children.

quickly and discharged herself three days after the birth as she wanted to get back to young Gavin. A number of expatriate and Omani people came to visit the new arrival and it was the very happy custom to place two Maria Theresa Thalers over the eyes of the new baby. We had brought a pushchair for Gavin from Nairobi and converted it to become a mobile carry-cot, complete with a sunshade awning and mosquito net, to keep the flies off Caroline. She became a regular visitor to the Souk and was barely 3 weeks old when she went offshore in the recreational boat for the first time and shortly afterwards she went into the sea at Saih al Malah. We had no problems with her and she settled down well post-birth.

## SAF ASSOCIATION DINNER 2009

The 2009 SAF Association Dinner will take place in the Army and Navy Club, 36 Pall Mall, London, commencing at 1900 hrs on **Friday, 27 November, 2009.** Dress: Black tie with miniature medals.

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# BOOK REVIEW

## OMAN'S INSURGENCIES

By John Peterson

A personal review by Colin Richardson

I have now belatedly read John Peterson's book 'Oman's Insurgencies' and the very fair review of it in last year's Journal. Reading the book in detail and with a degree of background knowledge, there are many inaccuracies and inconsistencies that could have been avoided with better proof reading and which, for me, detract from the overall work. There is a lack of photographs to illustrate military equipments and, for added interest, army positions on the jebel, and the maps at the end of the book though neatly drawn, are shrunk so small that the place names are very difficult to read, and they should appear near the pages where the reader wants to follow the action, and show all the place names mentioned. The text dodges forwards and backwards chronologically so that some incidents are mentioned twice, and three times even in the case of **Roger Furlong's** ejection following a hit by a SAM-7. The helicopter rescue from enemy held territory was extremely hazardous and the pilot was rightly decorated, but this is not mentioned.

Three other specific instances bear comment. The 'sky shout' Pembroke from Cyprus is reported as being withdrawn after a few ineffective sorties over the jebel. Actually there were two aircraft, and the last sortie was when the aircraft was seriously damaged by a rebel Heavy Machine Gun, not surprising considering that they were flying at low level over the plateau at reduced speed. One round severed the elevator cables and passed between the knees of the audio technician. Another destroyed the aileron controls and a third hit the oil reservoir of the port engine which immediately seized. The underwing loudspeakers were jettisoned to reduce drag, and the pilot was just able to clear the edge of the plateau and land at the Firq airstrip. It was an outstanding feat of piloting skill to land an aircraft on asymmetric engine power using only the trim tabs on the ailerons and elevator.

There are mentions of SOAF participation in helicopter assaults and close air support, but independent SOAF operations get scant coverage. For instance there is no mention of the Hunter low level photographic

reconnaissance of the al Ghaydah airfield where there was evidence that PDRY MiG fighters had arrived. The Hunters' photographic evidence showed that the 'MiGs' were wood and canvas dummies. This obviated the need to attack them, with all the attendant risks that this would have entailed. Another omission from the book is 'Operation Saif Jawwi' which lasted for nine days in October 1987. This was a border incursion from the Yemen, but by forces independent of the Yemen government. It was in the general area of Makinat Shihan by heavily armed Landcruisers which attacked the WFR. The incursion was repulsed by the "heavy mob" from SOAF Thumrait, and the Yemen government apologised.

There were reports in the Daily Telegraph and Observer, but there is no mention here. This is an important book for future historians to pick out the fine detail to be gleaned from the 'sitreps' and other in-depth research, but for readers like us some of it is heavy going. I would have preferred a lighter touch with more to hold the interest.

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# BOOK REVIEWS

## THE CAT FROM THE SOUQ

By Catherine Lonie Jebel Publishing UK  
ISBN 978-09556056-0-4 Pp. 56

"The Cat from the Souq" was launched at the Shatti al Qurum branch of Turtles Bookshop in March 2008.

Described as "A Story for Children" on the front cover, the book is actually a story for children aged, I would suggest, about ten and upwards. It contains 21 illustrations by **Majid al Khajari** (some monochrome, some colour wash) but none of these are full page. The frequency of illustration also declines as the plot proceeds.

As a result, the ten chapters of this book rely on the plot to carry the reader forward, and in this respect **Catherine Lonie** has succeeded in creating a charming fable.

The cat, who remains anonymous, is born into the comparative safety of a carpet shop somewhere in Muttrah Souq. One day, his mother goes missing, and so he sets out for the fish souq, hoping to locate her.

We then follow the cat's rather complicated adventures as he moves to a bedu encampment in the Sharquiyya, then down to the coast (Ashqara?) and back to the Capital Area (Kalbuh?). En route, he is able to observe bedu life at close quarters; watch a camel race; go fishing; meet a friendly turtle and watch other turtles laying their eggs.

For children, and for some visitors to Oman, this is as good an introduction to the Sultanate as you are likely to get. The story has pace; it holds the attention and it all ends happily. I would recommend it very highly indeed.

## ISSA AND THE COIN

By Sean and Shannon Butler 2007, Stacey International  
ISBN 1-905299-41-9 Pp. 30

This is a charming book, designed for children between the ages of four and seven, and is published as a solid little hardback that will withstand reading, and re-reading.

**Issa** is given an old coin by his father. Through no fault of his own, the coin disappears, and we follow it on its journey until we come to the happy ending.

Of the 30 pages, no fewer than 21 are beautiful colour illustrations, all of which focus attention on the plot. There are a number of recognisably Omani scenes, but these function primarily as a background – there is no feel of a tourist guide.

For SAF Association members who are looking for presents for young godchildren or grandchildren this would be ideal. It evokes Omani life, and does it very well indeed.

Neil McBeath

### CHANGES OF ADDRESS

We are well aware of our shortcomings, but in the majority of cases in which a Journal has not been received it is because the Membership Secretary has not been notified of a change of address.

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## BAIT AL FALAJ AIRFIELD 1972. NOW THE WADI KABIR AND RUWI!



# DEVELOPMENTS IN OMAN

*By Ian Buttenshaw*

The last few years have seen increased development in Oman within all sectors.

Roads have continued to be black-topped throughout the country. You can now drive down the coast to Salalah on tarmac road. The Salalah to Thumrait road is being dualised and the Muscat Expressway around Muscat, from Qurum towards the hills around the back of Ghallah and MAM eventually joining the Sohar Road at Halban is well underway. The dual-carriageway toll-road from Quriyat to Sur is almost finished and the dual-carriageway link between Amarat in the capital area and Quriyat is progressing well. The reconstruction of the Wadi Adai road following the Gonu destruction has also begun. There are now three tarmac roads over the Hajar Mountains from the Batinah Coast to Ibri.

A new coastal highway from the Capital Area to Sohar is to be constructed, and this will be aligned with a possible Barka to Sohar railway line, as the first stage of a possible country wide rail network, which is under study at the present time.

Ports and Airports are also expanding. The second runway at Muscat International (formerly Seeb Airport) is under construction and a new terminal between the runways will eventually be built. International capacity airports are planned for Ras Al Hadd, Duqm and Sohar and preliminary work has already begun on these. The

Sohar Port between Falaj A' Qabail and Liwa, just north-west of Sohar town is now massive and should be complete by 2010. It has a large industrial complex, as well as an Aluminium Smelter and Oil Refinery. The new port at Duqm, which will contain large dry docking as well as trans-shipment facilities, is under construction and a huge breakwater which will eventually be 4km in length has been constructed out into the sea from Ras Duqm. The Duqm port will have a large industrial area aligned with it. Salalah Port continues to expand its activities and has become the major container trans-shipment hub of the area. Numerous small fishing harbours have sprung up around the country and Shinas harbour is also to be expanded to cater for the new fast car ferries that have been recently purchased to run between there and Khassab. New fast ferries will also service the Shannah to Masirah Island route and eventually Hasik (Dhofar) and Hallaniyat Islands (formerly Kuria Muria Islands), once the new Hotel Spa Resort has been constructed there.

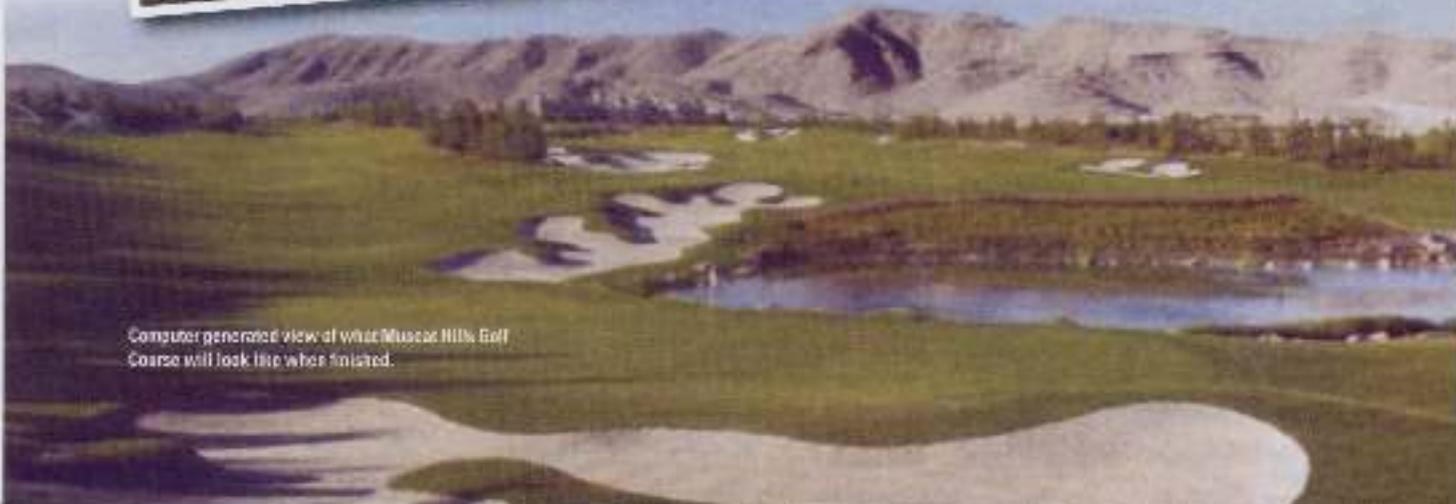
Tourist Development has been the major expansion over the last few years, although the recent credit crunch has cast a shadow over some of those projects not actually started or financed yet. Tourist integrated complexes containing marinas, golf courses, hotels, residential complexes open for expatriate purchase started a few years ago. The first launched was the Muscat Hills Golf and Country Club, just inland from the airport in the Jebel. After several hiccups, it eventually got going early last year and is now well on its way to completion by the end of 2009. The setting is magnificent and it will be the first green golf course in Oman. "The Wave" development on the coast north of the airport was the second major project, and is now well ahead of the others and looking excellent, the first buyers moved into their houses in November last year, and the whole project is developing well.

The first phase of the Blue City ("Madinat al Zarqa") has commenced in the Al Sawadi area on the Batinah Coast. Two other Tourism projects have also started, one in Salalah towards Mirbat and one at Sifah Beach, south of Muscat. The other major development is the Yiti Project, which comprises residential villas, apartments and town houses, both on the coast and in the surrounding hills as well as marinas, hotels and a golf course. Its reclamation survived Gonu, and the new road through the hills to it has been completed.

Bridge being constructed across Wadi Tiwi on the new Quriyat - Sur Toll road.



Computer generated view of what Muscat Hills Golf Course will look like when finished.

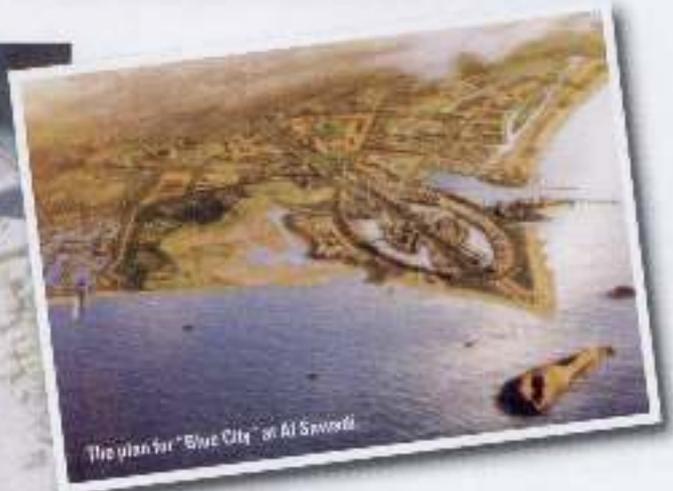


## DEVELOPMENTS IN OMAN



Plan for new Duqm Port (Ras Duqm on right).

There are several smaller developments either finished or scheduled. The Six Senses Hideway – Zighy Bay Spa Complex just north of Bayha (Dibba) in the Musandam – is now open, Barka also now has a Spa Hotel and the residential villas and town houses in the New Shangri-La complex in Muscat are nearing completion. A Crowne Plaza Hotel has opened in Sohar near Falaj A' Qabail on the Buraimi Road, and a 5 Star Hotel is about to be built in Duqm.



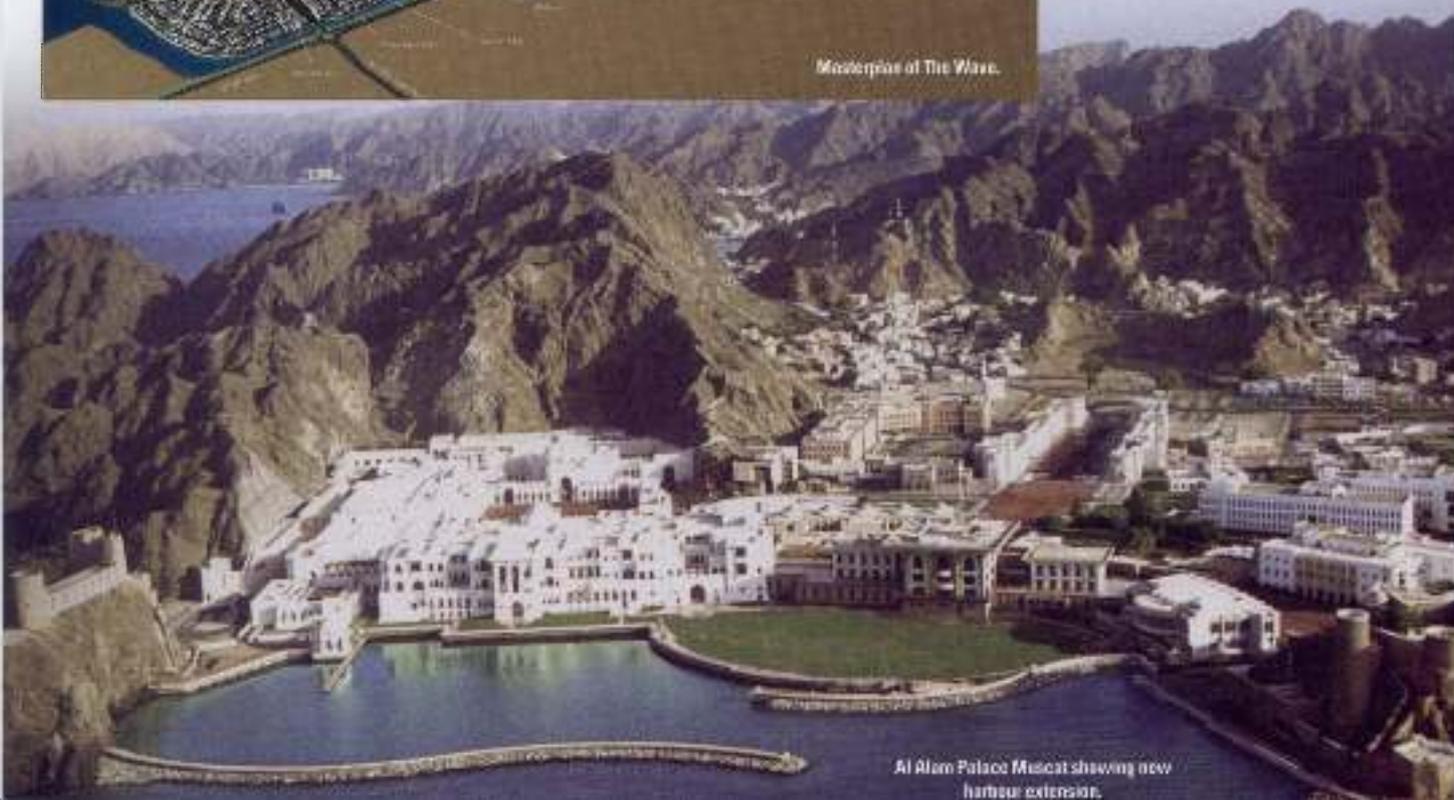
A whole new Marina/Hotel Complex has started at Musannah on the Batinah coast. This will house the competitors and provide the venue for the 2010 Asian Beach Games being held in Oman.

Generally the tourist developments in Oman continue to grow as the influx of tourists increase.

Overall, the recent high oil prices has spurred on developments in all sectors in Oman. New hospitals and schools are still being built, the road network expanded, the Capital Area continues to grow, and generally there is growth throughout Oman. Fortunately,

Oman's growth is being done tastefully, and we have no high rise developments as in the countries further north. Omanisation throughout the workforce continues apace, with Omani women playing an ever growing part in the workforce.

Despite the developments, Oman is still a great place to live and work, and there are wide open spaces to enjoy away from the urban growth. ■



Al Alam Palace Muscat showing new harbour extension.

## OMAN'S MARITIME

# HISTORY

*The Sultanate of Oman has a long, diverse and far-reaching maritime history*

WORDS: MIKE WILSON

The earliest evidence of its coastal trade dates back to the Bronze Age, and a Sumerian text mentions a Mesopotamian king of the time who travelled to Majan (of which Oman was a part) to buy vessels. By the 8th century, Omani ships had reached the distant ports of China, spreading Islam through the Far East on their way, and bringing about that exchange between cultures that furthers mankind's knowledge and development. It is thought that the Omanis have traded with the East Coast of Africa for over two millennia, but it was in the latter part of the last millennium that they became famous, not just as intrepid sailors but as a people at the heart of the Indian Ocean's trade. In the 19th century their navy of modern European-designed warships helped consolidate their expanding monsoon trade between India, Africa and the Middle East, and by 1840 their first representative to the United States of America had arrived in New York.





1747 map of the Persian Empire (de

**T**his is the extraordinary story of a largely desert country whose sea captains and sailors came to dominate the Indian Ocean and its monsoon trade links. Strange, that a desert country, with little or no wood, should have centuries of significant maritime history as a sea and trading power, and be famed for traditional shipbuilding. But that is Oman, and this same seafaring spirit is very much alive today as its young men embrace the new challenges of modern competitive sailing.

With over 1700 kilometres of coastline, which offers some outstanding natural harbours, and a pivotal location on the edge of the Indian Ocean, it is not hard to see why the early Omanis turned to the sea and the lands beyond in their pursuit of trade. In many ways their expertise as ship builders, sailors and navigators have helped to shape their national character.

Bold and adventurous, they ventured far and wide and in so doing met and interacted with hugely differing peoples and civilizations. As a consequence, they became open minded and tolerant, for with trade also went meetings with other cultures and religions, and the exchange of science and innovation.

Oman's principal harbours and ports ranged from Khasab and its numerous khors and inlets on the Musandam peninsula, to Sohar, Muttrah, Muscat, Qalhat and Sumhuram in Dhofar. Places like R'as Al Hadd, Bandar Jissah and Bandar Khayran, though of less value as trading ports, being locked in by mountains or desert, were nonetheless excellent staging posts for littoral sailors and vital havens in times of turbulent weather.

In a gradual process over countless generations, shipbuilding, navigational skills and the Omani seafarers' deep understanding of the region's seasonal conditions, currents and winds were honed to a fine art, until they became masters in the exploitation of the monsoon winds that linked India, East Africa, Arabia and the Far East.

From 100 BC to 400 AD, the natural harbour of Sumhuram in Dhofar (Ophir in the Bible) was unquestionably the most important on the whole of the Arabian coast. Its wealth and fame was based almost entirely on one product – frankincense. Frankincense is the dried resin that is harvested from a unique tree (*Boswellia sacra*). It is hardy, stunted, has minimal foliage and sheds its thin bark in strips that flutter and rattle in the desert winds of the Negd desert and the slopes of the Dhofar jebel. Conditions in Dhofar produce resin of the very highest quality, white in colour and sometimes with a palest hint of olive green. It seems that the harsher the conditions, the more concentrated and intense the sweetness it gives off when burned. At one time frankincense (luban in Arabic) was more valuable than gold because of its use in places of worship as far flung as Rome, Egypt, the Holy Land and all points east, even to China.

Legend has it that one of the Magi who gave gifts at the birth of Jesus was from Dhofar, and from other information available this seems highly likely.

This frankincense trade was controlled by the kings of Shabwa, who also controlled the trade in myrrh. Perhaps the most famous of these was a queen rather than a king, and her name is still well known today – the Queen of Sheba. This remarkable woman was a contemporary of King Solomon of Jerusalem, and together they coordinated the overland routes thus protected the frankincense trade across Arabia to the Holy Land.

Frankincense was also exported by sea to other countries.

#### *Trade with the Far East and China*

By the 8th century Omani sailors had reached many of the ports of China. In this gradual process of extending their maritime activities further east, it was inevitable that they should establish small trading missions with an Omani representative in the principal ports of the Far East. The tasks of these representatives would have been to establish sources for goods and buyers for Omani imports.



Kumzari boatmen

Roger Garwood, 19

They also maintained good relationships with the local rulers and government officials involved with trade.

It was a task that could only be done by men with an intimate knowledge of the local language and customs, and, therefore, demanded a long-term commitment. Many such men would have married local wives, integrated into the community and remained in their posts for the rest of their lives. A son who had never visited Oman might follow his father in the post, and so Islam spread east, beginning through intermarriage and family, and succeeded by example and explanation, for to spread the word of Allah is the



Omani ship builder working on a 'sewn' hull

Tom Vosmer, 1980

duty of all Muslims. Arguably the most famous sailor of all time, Sindbad, who many believe hailed from Oman's port of Sohar on the Batinah coast, is thought to have sailed to China. A wealth of Arabian seafaring folklore combine in the stories of Sindbad's bizarre adventures during his seven famous voyages, but none of his tales mentions China as a destination, rather his shipwrecks threw him up on the shores of locations that were every bit as fictional as Gulliver's Lilliput. In 1980, as a celebration of Omani seafaring, the Omani Government gave their full backing to the adventurer, historian and writer Tim Severin, who reconstructed an early Omani ship, Sohar, and sailed it to Canton.

One of the largest, the ghanjah would have had a cargo capacity ranging between 150 and 300 tonnes, and a length of between 75 and 120 feet. For a ship of its times, it would have been the equivalent of a decent sized container vessel.

It would be inaccurate to represent the trade voyages re-enacted by Sohar as a one-way street. The Chinese Ming Dynasty of the early 15th century sent a series of trading fleets as far as the west coast of India. It was trade on a truly formidable scale and evidence of the huge markets that existed regionally, as well as further into the Mediterranean and the heart of Europe. Massive Chinese junks with up to eight masts, and with crews of a thousand sailors, perpetuated a parallel commercial exchange to those that set out from Oman, for one of the principal Silk Routes was by sea.

*Trade with India and Africa.*

A small but highly profitable Omani export to India from the 12th century onwards was thoroughbred Arab horses. At this time huge herds of horses numbering tens of thousands were being driven south from the central Asian plains to the same markets. Horses from Oman were highly prized and were the pride of maharajas and kings, while those from the steppes and plains were used as mounts for the use of common cavalry.

It was a great achievement for all involved. Not a single nail was used in the reconstruction; the planking was sewn together with approximately 120 miles of natural twine soaked in coconut oil. Coconut fibre and oil were also used in the caulking between the timbers. With a crew of twenty, comprising Omanis and some Westerners, Sohar set out to re-trace the ancient route of the silk and spice trade across the Arabian Sea to India, and then on to Sri Lanka, Sumatra and the Malacca Strait.

*Ship building in Oman*

Sohar, Shinas, Muscat, Sur, and Salalah were all centres of early shipbuilding.

The industry was a traditional craft followed by families who handed their skills down through the generations, and who worked without drawings or designs.

For centuries the hulls were sewn together with coconut fibre twine soaked in coconut oil. The ancient Arabs and Persians imported this from India, as well as the wood, which was mainly teak and another wood called banteeg, although it lacked some of the qualities of teak. The frames of the ships, called shalman, used wood from the lotus jujube and Omani trees called qarat and sidr (*Ziziphus spina christi*), as well as a timber called al meet from Somalia.

If trade to distant lands was a stimulus to the development and refinement of Oman's ocean-going mercantile fleet, it was not the only factor. In the wake of expanding trade came a parallel need to develop an effective navy to protect both trade and the country's sovereign integrity. Oman had been the victim of foreign invasion by sea on a number of occasions, including three waves of lasting and deep incursions by the Persians, and the seizure and occupation of occupied key ports and towns on Oman's coast and interior regions by the Portuguese and in the 16th century, the Portuguese seized and occupied key ports and towns on the Omani coast and interior. Given the subsequent havoc wreaked by Portuguese conquests in the region, it is ironic that Vasco da Gama should have been guided round the Cape of Good Hope and beyond by a famous Omani sea captain, Ahmed bin Majid. Each of these occupations was eventually repulsed and ejected, but the Omanis realized that, as a largely coastal nation, in the long term their safety from seaborne invasion could only be permanent if they were to have a strong navy capable of meeting the threat.



'Sewn' hull, detail

Tom Vosmer, 1992

At the start of a ship's construction a ceremony is held, and the practice continues to this day, where a goat is slaughtered and when construction is finished, another ceremony takes place. As part of this, the women present a special rope braid that is fixed to the prow, which is believed to bring good luck and seaworthiness.

Boats came in many shapes and sizes, according to their intended purpose. Boom, ghanjah, shu'i and badan are some of the boat types that were constructed.



Sewn hulls were

Roger Garwood, 1994

Having expelled the Portuguese from their homeland, the Omanis also ousted them from their settlements along the East African coast, in Zanzibar, Lamu, Pemba and Mombasa, and much of the area then came under the Oman's rule.

There were other reasons for having a strong navy. Coastal piracy was rife and its ruinous effects on trade were felt as much by the British East India Company along the Indian and Mekran coast as by the Omanis themselves. On a number of occasions the two governments cooperated against the pirates, but these were difficult operations as the pirates were able to withdraw into the desert hinterlands and, if their boats were burned, they simply replaced them with new captures. When a boat was taken, the crews were led one by one to the prow where their throats were cut and their bodies tossed to the sharks.

It would be a mistake to think that Oman's dominance of East Africa was confined to its coasts. Omani traders had spread and established themselves deep within Central Africa. An excellent example of this was when the explorer Henry Morton Stanley, of Dr. Livingstone fame, made the arduous and incredibly dangerous first east-west crossing of Africa. As he acknowledged himself, he could only have done so with an intimate team of the toughest and most intrepid men who had knowledge of routes into the interior and previous relationships with the tribes they would encounter before they finally reached unknown territory. His brave and loyal head men were four Omanis recruited in Zanzibar. In spite of an appalling death toll from months of continuous attacks by hostile tribes, to say nothing of disease and the predations of wild animals, all four survived and returned to Zanzibar from the mouth of the Congo by ship.



Dawn at the ship building yards of Sur

Roger Garwood, 1994

#### *Sayyid Said bin Sultan Al Busaidi*

One of the Sultans, or Imams as they were then, who was paramount in expanding the country's formidable merchant fleet and navy of the 19th century was Sayyid Said bin Sultan, whose long and beneficial rule ran from 1804 to 1856, and whose tomb lies deep within the walls of the fortress at Al Hazm near Rostaq.

Sayyid Said bin Sultan must have been an extraordinary man. He was clearly a ruler with many statesmanlike qualities, but also a tough, hands-on leader with a formidable personality. On a joint operation with the British against pirates he was in the thick of the fighting, and when he received a musket ball through his wrist, his antagonist was so close that Sayyid Said was also badly burnt by the gunpowder.

Parts of the Gulf and both barren shores of the Strait of Hormuz were dominated by Sayyid Said's naval bases. From Mogadishu to Mombasa it was the same, and Sayyid Said himself often traveled with his powerful navy as it patrolled between its bases throughout the Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

In 1824 Sultan Said presented the massive 74-gun Liverpool to King William the Fourth of England as a gift. The King renamed it Al Imam as a mark of his appreciation. An American merchant visiting Zanzibar in the 1830s described Sayyid Said's arrival there on board a warship of 64 guns, accompanied by three frigates and many other smaller warships. With them was an army of 5000 Omani fighting men aboard over a hundred transports.

Oman's importance as the paramount regional naval and mercantile power is demonstrated by its foreign relations of the time. In 1840 Al Haj Ahmed bin Nu'man Al Ka'abi arrived in New York on board the warship Sultanah, on an embassy to



© Lou Lumb

the United States of America. Although of European design, the Sultanah was built in the Mazagon Dockyard in Bombay in 1833. She arrived in New York having taken only 87 days from Zanzibar, a particularly fast passage.

These first visitors to early New York, with their flowing robes, turbans, khunjars and swords, caused a huge stir everywhere they went. They were followed by crowds and stared at until American hospitality stepped in and moved the Sultanah to the naval dockyard where their guests could be suitably looked after. Sayyid Said's gifts to President Jefferson included two Arab thoroughbreds, a gold-mounted sword and perfumes. In return he was presented with a large ship, rifles and revolvers. However this was a trading as well as a diplomatic mission as Sayyid Said wished to buy modern weapons for his struggle against the Portuguese in Mozambique. For this purpose the Sultanah also carried a cargo that included 1000 sacks of the finest Omani dates, carpets from Iran, coffee from Yemen, spices from the East, and hides and ivory from Africa, and these were sold to make the necessary purchases.

While in New York Ahmed bin Nu'man had his portrait painted by Edward Mooney and in the picture the Sultanah can just be seen riding at anchor through the window behind him.

#### *Shabab Oman*

And so from the past to the present. Although the Sultanate now has a modern 21st-century navy that carries out a wide variety of important tasks, Omanis remain

proud of their long history as sailors, maintaining this link with their maritime heritage is best illustrated by the RNO Shabab Oman (Youth of Oman).

This 484-ton sailing ship was built in 1971 in Scotland from Scottish oak and pine from Uruguay, and after a period of stalling in a well-known series, was purchased by the Sultanate to be used by the Royal Navy of Oman as a sail training ship. Personal development and leadership courses are run on board for young men from the Sultanate Armed Forces, the Royal Guard and the Royal Oman Police. More recently, passages have been open to young men from other countries.

Since becoming part of the RNO, Shabab Oman has traveled to a great many countries, including Australia, Russia, Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, the Baltic and Mediterranean. In the summer of 2005 she took first place in the Tall Ships International Friendship Cup that began in Waterford, Ireland, and concluded in Norway's Frederikstad port. This was the fourth time in succession that the RNO Shabab Oman was awarded this globally coveted cup.

The ship has a crew capacity of 240, in addition to keeping alive the old sailing skills, act as proud ambassadors for their country around the world.

# CLEAN-UP AT CEMETERY BAY

By Wkl 2 Nick Jordan, British Loan Service Oman



The site from a distance; surrounded by mountains was accessible by sea only.

Work started shortly afterwards and we all got stuck in painting, clearing shrubbery and picking up many bags full of rubbish.



Early February in 2008, and I was enjoying a boat trip and a little snorkelling with some family and friends in Cemetery Bay some 10 minutes sail from the marina, near Haramel. Some of my Loan Service colleagues had told me that British Servicemen and Sailors were buried at the two grave sites at Cemetery Bay, and so I decided to have a look for myself and swam in the 100 meters or so to the site on the left.

Cyclone Gonu, which hit Oman in June 2007 had left its mark on the cemetery and there were a few broken head stones lying around as well as a lot of rubbish spread over the bay. The site was also looking a little overgrown with shrubs and bushes sprouting in between the graves.

Anyway I had a good look around at the 18 or so graves on this the smaller cemetery of the two situated in the bay and found one grave which was the final resting place of an SAS soldier, **Cpl D Swindells MM** who was buried there in 1958. Another interesting grave was that of REME **Cpl R W Lloyd** who also died in 1958. Some of the other graves dated back to 1912

Once I had finished looking around I started to make my way back down towards the sea. It made me feel sad to see the cemetery in this poor state and to see the graves of

these British soldiers and sailors surrounded in rubbish and weeds. I decided there and then that I was going to try and do something about it.

At 0700hrs on Thursday 20 March 2008, with three boats full of Loan Service family and friends, we anchored at Cemetery Bay. The heavy equipment such as shovels, shelters, paint etc all had to be floated 60 meters in to the shore on

small inflatable dinghies as we could not take the boats any closer due to the rocks. Work started shortly afterwards and we all got stuck in painting, clearing shrubbery and picking up many bags full of rubbish. By 1100hrs it was starting to get quite hot and the clean-up was nearly complete, and so the wives and children were taken out on one of the boats dolphin watching while the men finished off the work. Luckily they were rewarded with a school of approximately 200 dolphins just five minutes out from the bay. At 1200hrs we finished off the day with a beach BBQ and then started ferrying the equipment back to the boats. As we sailed out of the bay heading for the marina we were all satisfied with our efforts as the cemetery looked great.

## CLEAN-UP AT CEMETERY BAY



Wakil Nick Jordan at the grave of Cpl Swindells MM, SAS.



The Love, Sandra, Team

All who took part enjoyed the day and we are now planning to clean the second cemetery which is on the opposite side of the bay and have already conducted the recce. I would like to thank all those who helped with this very worthy task, and special thanks go to **Wkls Steve Barrett, Baz Bastable** and **Rob Murray** for allowing us to use their boats for the day. ■

**Wakeel Nick Jordan**  
British Loan Service Oman

## 19th ARABIAN GULF FOOTBALL CUP (4-17 JANUARY 2009) *by Ian Buttenshaw*

The Arabian Gulf Football Cup started in 1970. However Oman only made their debut in the Third tournament where they lost all their matches.

The Oman team have come a long way since those days and were runners up in the last two tournaments in 2005 and 2007. So with the tournament being held here in Oman, expectations were high, even though Saudi Arabia started out as favourites.

The fans, both Omanis and expatriates of all races, came out in force to support the Oman team. Motorists really got into the spirit of it and creatively decorated cars appeared all over the Capital Area.

Oman won their Group stage and then went on to beat Qatar in the semi finals 1-0. In the Final despite the 0-0 final score, Oman had dominated the game throughout, so it was fitting that they won the penalty shoot out 6-5 to win their first Arabian Gulf Cup. The country was



jubilant and celebrations in the Capital went on late into the night, and His Majesty declared a national holiday the next day in honour of our team's achievement. ■



*The pictures illustrate the celebrations!*





Sandy Dawson (Adj NFR) and Carl Beal (CO NFR) at Bid Bid, 1969.

# THE MASIRAH TIGER

by Colin Richardson

In the last Journal there was an article about the Leopards of Oman by **Tim Michels**. Three months prior to its publication I attended an Anglo-Omani Society lecture by **Tessa McGregor** on the same subject. After the lecture I spoke to her about my sighting of the 'Masirah tiger'. She was most interested and suggested that its existence should be more widely known.

Mammals of this type need a source of fresh water, and there are only two sources of perennial surface water on the island. There is a trickle out of the Jebel Suwayr at the south end of the Island and it was here that **Michael Gallagher**, curator of the Oman Natural History Museum, was camped one night and saw the eyes of a large cat reflected by torchlight. Later, over two winters in the early 1990s, a team of Swiss geologists carried out a detailed analysis of Masirah. They told me that they had seen a very large cat a few kilometres further north from the Jebel Suwayr, close to the 'grotto' in the Wadi Qattari. Here there is a pool of fresh (but slightly mineralised) water about three meters deep under an overhang. I had been at Masirah for eleven years, exploring the island in my spare time with various friends but the only cats that I had seen were domestic feral cats.

Four years after leaving Oman I visited Masirah on holiday with my wife and wanted to show her, together with **Bruce and Trisha Watts**, an artefact on high ground near the 'grotto'. I was leading them up a gentle slope, and on reaching a shallow saddle I saw a large cat sideways on just a few meters away in front of me. I immediately stopped. It was far larger than the feral cats and completely unperturbed by my presence, and I was able to watch it for half a minute or more before it eventually ambled off. It was over half a meter long, excluding its tail, dark grey in colour with light grey vertical stripes down its body. This is good camouflage in those dark igneous hills. I followed it round the edge of the saddle and saw it again quite close for a few moments before it once again wandered off out of sight. The other three, lagging behind me, never saw it. Regrettably I did not have a camera.

It did not have the markings of a leopard, and was smaller than an Omani leopard. It was more like a small monochrome tiger. I understand that mammals isolated for millennia on islands can become quite small. I suspect that this large cat, like the original white donkeys, came to the island before it became detached from the mainland many years ago. Possibly it is related to the tigers which existed in northern Arabia up to historical times.

Then in October 2008 I was on a visit to Oman with a party of the Anglo-Omani Society. We were driving up via Shisr into the dunes of the Empty Quarter in Toyota Landcruisers. My driver, **Musalem**, lived in a village near Thumrait where he had been brought up. I asked him if there had been sightings of large black cats, and he said that he had seen them himself – on one occasion a pair of them. ■

## JOINED IN 2008

<b>Qasim Ali Muhammad Hashim</b>	Chief Clerk Garrison Salalah 70-90
<b>Allan McLoughlin</b>	Adj RAF Salalah 75-77
<b>Richard McMahan</b>	SBLSO(O) 05-DATE
<b>David Bellamy</b>	DR 72-74
<b>John Mandeville</b>	SON 77-79
<b>David Naylor</b>	Pathology Service (MAM) 78-80
<b>Billy Fullerton</b>	Training Advisor 08-10

## MISSING IN 2008

<b>PRD Aplin</b> – Banbury	<b>REBC Gibson</b> – Barclays Bank
<b>JP Ayliffe</b> – Australia	<b>THM Mahwinney</b> – Chatham
<b>AR Brown</b> – Brighton	<b>JH Marshall</b> – Taunton
<b>JA Cox</b> – Stonehouse	<b>J Noakes</b> – Devizes
<b>G Davies</b> – London	<b>VT Smedley</b> – Langstone
<b>P Durrant</b> – Blandford Forum	<b>PGB Smith-Pigott</b> – London
<b>AC Evans</b> – Washington USA	<b>JD Taylor</b> – Penarth
<b>DR Freeman</b> – Bexhill	<b>MME Thornton</b> – Bushey Heath
<b>J Grantham</b> – Aberdeenshire	<b>SG Wright</b> – Frensham

### SAF ASSOCIATION PLAQUES

These are available at £16.00 each (incl. p&p) from **Nigel Knocker**.

### ASSOCIATION ICE BUCKETS

Ice Buckets are still available. Cost £20. Apply to Nigel Knocker and send cheque payable to The SAF Association.

# OBITUARIES

## **Colonel David Smiley, LVO, OBE (mil), MC\* CSAF**

**Colonel David Smiley**, who died on 8th January 2009, aged 92, became one of the most celebrated cloak-and-dagger agents of the Second World War, as well as serving with his regiment, the Royal Horse Guards (The Blues), into which he had been commissioned in 1936 in Palestine, at Habbaniya and Mosul in Iraq and in the capture of Tehran. His regiment moved to the Western Desert on 1940 and Smiley left them after commanding an armoured car squadron at El Alamein. In this period he also found time to serve with the Somaliland Camel Corps and as a commando in Abyssinia.

In 1942 Smiley joined the Special Operations Executive (SOE), committed to disruptive activities behind enemy lines. In this guise he operated in Albania in support of the partisans against the Germans and later against the Japanese in Siam (now Thailand) and French Indo-China (Vietnam)

After the war he was a military attaché in Russian-occupied Poland (from where he was expelled) and Sweden and he was part of a British/American venture to subvert the newly-installed Communist regime. But **Kim Philby**, who was secretly working for the Russians, was the liaison between the British and Americans; almost all the 100 or so agents dropped by parachute or landed by boat were betrayed, and nearly all were tortured and shot. This failure haunted Smiley for the rest of his life.

He then returned to peace-time soldiering to command his regiment, but the pinnacle of his post-war career was his three-year tenure as commander of the Sultan of Muscat and Oman's armed forces during a civil war which threatened to bring down one of Britain's closest allies in the Gulf. By now in his early forties, Smiley ran a gruelling counter-insurgency campaign against the rebels in their mountain retreat, the 10,000ft high Jebel Akhdar, which had never been successfully assaulted. With two squadrons of the SAS and a squadron of Life Guards under his command, as well as SAF's Northern Frontier Regiment, elements of Muscat Regiment and SAF's Artillery Troop, Smiley planned and led a classic dawn attack on the mountain fastness, finally crushing the enemy in February 1959.

After his assignment in Oman, he organised royalist guerrilla resistance against a Soviet-backed Nasserite regime in Yemen. Smiley's efforts helped force the eventual withdrawal of the Egyptians and their Soviet mentors, paved the way for the emergence of a less anti-Western Yemeni government, and confirmed his reputation as one of Britain's leading post-war military Arabists.

After ending his Arabian career, Smiley moved to Spain, where, for 19 years, he grew olives, carobs and almonds, and continued to advise Albania's surviving anti-Communists, by now all in exile, before returning to live in Somerset and then London.

He is survived by his wife, **Moyra**, who he married in 1947, two sons, a step-son and a step-daughter.

## **2009 SAF ASSOCIATION DINNER**

The 2009 Dinner will take place in the Army and Navy Club, 36 Pall Mall, London SW1, commencing at 1900 hrs on FRIDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2009.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE APPLICATION FORM ON PAGE 98 AND SEND IT TO STAN EDWARDS TO REACH HIM BY 13 NOVEMBER 2009 AT THE LATEST.



David in Suleiman's Cave (the fire was still burning).

## **Lt Col LGS Sanderson, OBE, MC, Defence Dept**

**Lt Col LGS Sanderson, OBE, MC\***, (late KOSB and Oman Defence Department), died on 17th February 2007, aged 90. Louis had a varied and very active career, both with his regiment and elsewhere. Prior to the start of World War II, he was ADC to **Major General Bernard Montgomery** in Palestine, rejoining his regiment in France during the "phoney war". He took part in the evacuation from Dunkirk, the landings in Sicily and Italy, where he was awarded his first MC, rejoined Monty as a Liaison Officer at D-day and subsequently earned a Bar to his MC during the battle of Falaise. He later saw action in Salonika and Malaya and ended his regular service as CO of the Royal Sierra Leone Regiment at the time of independence.

He served in Oman for some years from the mid 1960s, as No2 to **Pat Waterfield** as Assistant Military Secretary, after which he spent ten years as an RO in Cyprus with British Army Adventure Training.

(We are grateful for the above notes provided by **Euan Scroggie**, NFR/SAFTC/MR/Saiq – 1968-70.)

## **CHANGES OF ADDRESS**

Please ensure that you let us know of change of address. Neil Fawcett is the membership secretary. Contact details on page 3.

**Barrie John Cheverton, SOAF 1975/76 and ROP Airwing 1981/92**

**Barrie Cheverton** died on 29th September 2008, aged 72. Barrie joined the Royal Air Force in 1956 and left in 1974 having flown transport and training aircraft. During his time with SOAF he flew Defenders. After a period with the Emirates Air Force, he returned to Oman in 1981, joining the Royal Oman Police, flying various aircraft. He was keen on go-karting in Oman and also enjoyed golf, and clay pigeon shooting and loved cooking and wine. Our sympathies are with his wife **Caroline** and daughters **Ann, Tamsin** and **Samantha** and their families.

**Mqm Bah Denis Connell, RN and SON**

**Mqm Bah Denis Connell**, late RN and Sultan of Oman's Navy, died on 31st October 2008, at the age of 63. Denis began his career at Britannia Royal Naval College Dartmouth and in the Royal Navy he served as a submariner. He joined the Sultan of Oman's Navy in 1970 during its formative years when its operations were based on an armed dhow or *Boum*, known as *Charlie 1*. His first task was to act as one of the three Sultan's representatives during the delivery voyage of *SNV Al Said*, the Royal Yacht. The voyage was eventful; *Al Said* was damaged in a minor collision in Portsmouth Harbour, and despite the best efforts of Denis and his colleagues, lost all of her boats – including the Royal Barge – in a gale in the Bay of Biscay.

In 1971 three Dhofar class Fast Patrol Boats (FPB) were ordered from Brooke Marine of Lowestoft, and entered service in the first half of 1973. *Al Bushra* arrived in February 1973, and Denis was its first Commanding Officer and later senior officer of the FPB squadron when the other boats were commissioned that August. These were the Sultanate's first modern warships. The FPBs commenced operations in the waters of Northern Oman often on joint operations with SOAF, then started patrolling off the coast of Dhofar during the non-monsoon seasons, in an interdiction role in support of, and under the control of Commander Dhofar Brigade.

In early 1975, Denis was moved to a shore appointment in the Muscat Naval Base, and while in that role served as a liaison officer onboard one of the Imperial Iranian Naval frigates laying down Naval Gunfire Support during the final and eventually successful campaign to finish the Dhofar war in late 1974. In 1976 Denis was appointed Deputy Commander Sultanate of Oman's Navy (DCSON) and served in that capacity until leaving Oman in 1979.

After leaving Oman Denis became involved in the shipping and oil business, being based successively in The Hague, Bahamas and Andorra, with occasional calls back to England. He and his wife **Shirley**, who he had married in Oman, were always enthusiastic and generous hosts – wherever they and daughters **Natalie** and **Jennifer** happened to be living. Shirley pre-deceased Denis in 2005, and he married **Lynette** on 16th May 2008. She was with him when he died, and our condolences go to her, and to Natalie and Jennifer.

**Major Ernie Cooke, Royal Marines, DR, JR**

**Ernie Cooke** was killed on 11 May 2008 when he was knocked off his bicycle, returning home from playing squash. It was a meaningless end to the life of a colourful chap, who had been the Sales Director at Cygnus Marine for some 25 years. Many of those with whom he came into contact – and were the better for it – were unaware of his previous existence as a Royal Marine who had also served with SAF.

Ernie (a Yorkshireman from Redcar) joined the Royal Marines in September 1967. Amongst others who joined at the same time

were several who also later saw service in SAF – **David Nicholls, Nigel Marshall (KIA), Stephen Sefi, David Collins, Ali Patrick** and **Al Howard**. In late 1972 Ernie went to Beaconsfield and then joined DR in February 1973. After learning his way around the Jebel, he assumed command of 2 Coy DR, thus continuing a RM command tradition started by **Peter Ward**, and carried on by **Rick Williams**, who handed over to Al Howard, in turn handing over to Ernie. I still remember clearly many nights spent together on the Jebel in Dhofar in 1973 as we did the handover of 2 Coy – Ernie had a great sense of humour, and despite the seriousness of our situation, we did have some fun in between putting the world to rights.

He left SAF in October 1974 and returned to the joys of life in the Corps. As well as commanding the Rigid Raider Squadron in Plymouth and serving as adjutant at RM Poole, he served on board HMS Fearless in 1976, when he managed to get arrested during a famous run ashore; after scaring the wits out of the locals in the middle of the night, and making the now famous quote "*Telephoner les gendarmes si vous plais, j'ai malade*", he was rescued from the said Gendarmes by a French Foreign Legion Adjutant and returned to the ship a hero, even being given a large brandy by the Ship's Captain.

He finally left the Corps in 1979 and returned to SAF on contract, joining JR as Training Officer, where he served from September 1979 to March 1981. He then toured the Sahara for 6 months as guide to a writer, before working for Q Boats on the Isle of Wight, selling a civilian form of rigid raider, finally joining Cygnus Marine based in Cornwall in 1983.

Ernie married **Jenny** in 1984 and they had two sons, **James** and **George**. The words of another colleague, David Collins, sum up the feelings of all who have known Ernie: "I didn't serve with him, but in recent years saw him at a few of the early batch reunions. Ernie was a gentle, warm, decent, funny man, and there was something else about him, which always made it such fun to see him at reunions; I've only just thought it out. It was because I have never met anyone who was so deliriously happy with his life, his Jenny and his family. He didn't have to say it; it just radiated out from him that he knew he was the luckiest man in the world. When I think of him now, there is the same impression of warmth, and I hope that Ernie's own happiness with his life may bring some comfort to Jenny and their sons," a sentiment we all share.

**Alan Howard, 2 Coy DR, 1971-73**

**Raai'd Noel Anthony Hickey, SAFTR**

**Raai'd Noel Anthony (aka John) Hickey**, SAFTR and SAF Shooting Team 1978 – 82, died in November 2008. John started life as a soldier in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, transferring to the Small Arms School Corps in 1958. He served as a Weapons Instructor at Warminster and at Hythe, in Hong Kong, with the Queen's Division at Basingbourne and finally as a WO1 at the RMAS where he ended his British Army career in 1978. Apart from his weapons' skills, he had a reputation as a boxer, rugby player and a golfer and also as a storyteller. The adoption of the name John was referred to at his funeral and explained as, "Like his numerous jokes, difficult to fully understand!"

In SAF, John was attached to SAFTR where he established and trained the SAF Shooting Team with the aim of getting it to a standard to compete at Bisley. In this he was eminently successful and by the time he left SAF, the Shooting Team was recognised as a serious contender, each year leaving with an impressive selection of trophies, a standard maintained without fail by his successors.

## OBITUARIES

### **Major Michael Davis, NFR**

Major Michael Davis, late Staffordshire Regiment and Northern Frontier Regiment (1965-67), died after a long illness on 11th November 2008. He arrived in Oman in January 1965 and joined NFR at Nizwa, as 2i/c A Company at Rostaq and Saiq. He contracted jaundice twice that year. During his mid-tour leave he was married to **Vivienne**, with his NFR colleague **John Woodisse**, (*to whom we are grateful for these notes*) as his best man. On his return to Oman, Mike went with the battalion to Dhofar during the earliest phase of the war. His company commander, **Alan Woodman**, and twelve soldiers were killed in action two months later and Mike organised their recovery.

At the time SOAF had only two Beavers and on one flight, the pilot, knowing Mike was a glider pilot, gave him the controls and promptly went to sleep, Mike waking him up to take over the landing. On another occasion, Mike was in an aircraft with an unhappy Arabian oryx that had come round too soon and burst out of its box, driving the other passengers up the wallbars!

In addition to being 6' 7" tall, Mike Davis was unremittingly good humoured and a good chap to have around. He had a great range of interests and he would really have liked to have become a cathedral architect, but, as he said, all the great cathedrals had already been built by the time he left school. In retirement, he was a SSAFA representative in Buckinghamshire and in his spare time obtained an Arts Degree from the Open University, studied for two diplomas in Archaeology in Oxford and was awarded an MSc in Archaeology by Oxford University in 2006.

In addition to John Woodisse, the **Rev Tom Hiney MC**, who had also served in NFR, was present at Mike's funeral. Our thoughts are with **Vivienne, Susannah, William and Richard**

### **Major Jonathan Nason, Seaforth Highlanders, Queen's Own Highlanders and OR**

**John Whitelaw**, a brother officer, and one time A Squadron Commander, Trucial Oman Scouts writes:-

Jonathan, invariably known as Jo, died after a long and gallant fight against Parkinsons, on 31 January 2009 aged 75. He and I both served in the neighbouring countries of The Sultanate of Oman and The Trucial States in the late 60s. We met up occasionally out there, once when he made an R&R visit to my patch and another time when I was royally entertained by SAF on a trip to Sohar, Bait al Falaj and Bid Bid. Much of Jo's time with SAF was spent at the "sharp end" down south in Dhofar where he commanded a company of The Desert Regiment from early 1967 to August 1969. Jo was awarded both The Sultan's Distinguished Medal and The Sultan's Commendation Medal for his service on the Jebel.

If there ever was a "Happy Warrior", it was Jo and rarely was he seen without his famous smile. An officer of great integrity, he was much respected by his soldiers, whether Arabs, Baluch or Jocks. Apart from secondment in Oman, he served largely at regimental duty in Scotland, Gibraltar, Germany, Egypt and the Far East. At various times, he was ADC to the GOC Western Command and the GOC Scottish Command. He was a Member of Her Majesty's Bodyguard for Scotland, The Royal Company of Archers. Following retirement in 1988, he lived in Edinburgh. Jo was a distinguished competition rifle shot and represented Scotland. He was also

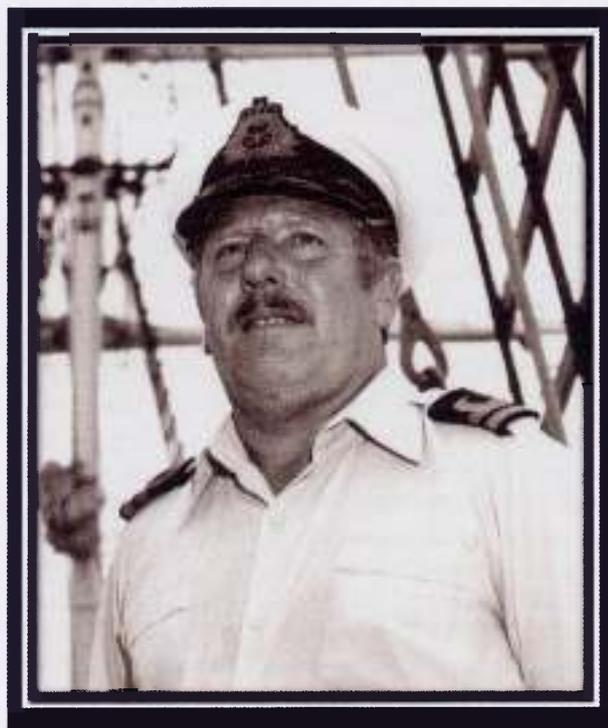
deadly on highland stags and it is only about six years since we used to celebrate, with just a small dram, his frequent success on our local "Jebel".

During his long illness, **Bolette**, supported by his two lovely daughters **Lucie** and **Alexandra** – of whose Scots Guards husband **Chris** he was so very proud – devotedly nursed Jo through very difficult times. This undoubtedly helped him to retain that famous smile right to the end. His funeral was held at the Canongate in Edinburgh on 9 February 2009 and was attended by many friends from far and wide.

### **Raa'id Bahry Walter Pointon, SON 1978-2008**

**Wally Pointon** died suddenly on 10th August 2008, on his 44th wedding anniversary and three months before his 70th birthday.

Wally joined the Royal Navy at 17 and served a full 22 year career, which including service during the Suez Crisis and the Cod War. He served in a variety of ships, including the survey vessel *HMS Owen*, which was on task off Zanzibar during the coup and which rendered valuable assistance to the fleeing Royal Family.



In 1978 his consummate seamanship skills were brought to Oman and he served in *Shabab Oman* from the formative years through to 1993. These were the happiest years of his life and he undoubtedly ensured the continuation of the project by ably training a succession of young men in the joys and rigours of sail training.

Wally was a great character, extremely competent, a loyal friend, beloved by his shipmates and he adored Oman. He rose to the rank of Raa'id Bahry in the Sultan's service and he was awarded a well earned Commendation Medal in 1982. His training and his memory live on and at the request of his wife **Vicki** and the family, his ashes were returned to Oman and scattered at sea in November, from the ship he had faithfully served for 15 years.

**Chris Biggins**

**Robert V Ponter (Bob), RN, RAF and SOAF (1971 – 92)**

**Bob Ponter** died on 4th January 2009. When Bob left school his one ambition was to become a pilot. He approached the RAF and was accepted as aircrew but as a Navigator only. This was NOT Bob's idea of a flying career so off to the Navy he went and was accepted for flying training as a pilot. He did a 12 year Short Service Commission, mainly as a fighter pilot flying Vampires, Sea Hawks and Scimitars. He spent two tours embarked on aircraft carriers. On leaving the Navy he started to take his Commercial Pilots Licence which he passed, and also during this period he flew as Staff Pilot at the School of Aircraft Direction at RNAS Yeovilton, flying Sea Venoms.

In 1971 (for a bit of excitement!) he took up a three year contract offer as a Contract Pilot in SOAF flying Strikemasters in Muscat and Salalah. He took part in many memorable operations in Dhofar including one raid on Hauf where he was number two in formation to the late **Peter Hulme**. During the attack Peter received several hits from enemy fire, starting to lose fuel and also suffering complete electrical failure. Bob accompanied Peter back to Salalah communicating by hand signals, and all the time climbing slowly. Peter ran out of fuel at height and managed to glide and land his aircraft safely back at Salalah, very glad to have had Bob as wingman. Bob stayed with Strikemasters for another year and then moved to the transport side of SOAF, flying Viscounts and eventually the BAC 1-11 when they were introduced in 1975/76.

After a five year stay in Spain, Bob and his wife **Margot** settled in Dorset, where he continued to enjoy his sailing, and was also able to indulge his hobby for model railways, at the same time joining Swanage Railway and becoming a qualified signalman.

My memories of Bob are all happy ones; he was a most professional pilot, loved his flying and took great care to carry out his duties to a very high standard. As a personal friend, I could not have asked for a more honest and trustworthy person. A great social companion who enjoyed life to the full and gave a great deal of love and pleasure to other people. Bob is survived by his two daughters **Liz** and **Sue** and his wife Margot and her family.

**Barrie Williams**

**Lt Col WA Weightman, OG 1973-80**

**Bill Weightman** died on 29th January 2009, aged 83, after a lengthy period of ill health, which, while restricting his mobility, never dimmed his enthusiasm for life, for his family and friends or for Famous Grouse. Bill, who came from Durham, was commissioned from OTS Bangalore in 1944 into the Durham Light Infantry, with whom he served in India, Burma, Sumatra and Malaya. In 1946 he joined the Parachute Regiment and after two years moved to the Para TA. In 1956 he transferred to the RAF Regiment and saw service with them at Suez and in Jordan, Cyprus and Aden, being Mentioned in Despatches in 1958. In 1970 he returned to the TA, and in 1973 joined SAF on contract. He remained with OG for the whole of his seven years in Oman, acquiring the soubriquet "Nimr", although nobody is quite certain how! On returning to the UK he joined the Yorkshire Army Cadet Force, becoming Assistant Commandant.

Bill always retained a close interest in the various veteran organisations associated with the units with which he served – DLI, Para, RAF Regiment, Burma Star Association and SAF – and made great efforts to help members of these groups and to raise money for them.

Since 1991 Bill has written his Northern Notes for the Journal, helping to meet the magazine's aim of offering a means of keeping

people in touch, a principle that has been a cornerstone of Bill's life for a long time. He sent me the first half of this year's notes in the summer, as he was not confident that he would be able to finish them. That he did finish them, albeit with much difficulty, is a tribute to his tenacity and his interest in maintaining his contacts and friendships to the end.

Our thoughts and sympathies are with **Val** and their daughters **Caroline, Alison** and **Vanessa** and their families. **JQ**

**Major Carl Seton-Brown, OG**

**Major Carl Seton-Brown**, late RMP and Oman Gendarmerie, died in March 2008, aged 94. Carl was the Intelligence Officer in OG from 1959 to 1968. He served in the RMP during the war, landing with 1st Airborne Division in Sicily, where he was wounded, then in the Palestine Police and later in the Special Investigation Branch in Malaya, where he tracked down various Chinamen who were stealing military and civilian plant to sell to the tin mines.

In Oman he was stationed in Kashmir House, Sohar, with the late **Sandy Gordon**, who commanded the OG there. **Bill Stanford** remembers the hospitality of their mess, as well as his shock and horror when Carl took a hammer and chisel to the explosive in an Egyptian plastic mine to make it safe for use on demonstrations. Carl was also a very good shot and made a collection of bird skins from the Batinah which he sent to a museum in England. He was an extrovert and an enthusiast summed up by the late **Philip Alfree** in his "Warlords of Oman" as "A pistol-packing Palestine policeman with a zest for arrest".

**Hugh Leach** adds that it was said that Carl had just to look at a rebel suspect and know whether or not he was guilty. There is the story of his interrogation of a suspect captured rebel who protested his innocence with vehemence. Carl just looked at him and said "Shil Thiyabak (Remove your clothes)". Protestations of innocence grew more vociferous as each item was slowly removed until just before the last stitch when a grenade was found hanging between his legs. Guilty!

Our thoughts are with Carl's wife **Brigid** and their son **Justin**.



**Carl Seton-Brown with his tame gazelle at Bait Kashmir.**



**Bill Foxton OBE (FF, Beach Club, Welfare) - 1975 - 1989**

"Whenever we met he shined a little bit of light into my life. An outrageous, funny, talented, brave and good man who lived his life as if he didn't give a damn; but actually did..."

**Stewart Wilson** 11 February 2009

Bill joined the French Foreign Legion as soon as he thought they might accept him and served in Algeria and France. He worked briefly in Doha before joining the British Army in 1969 and after recruit training, was posted to the 1st Battalion, Royal Green Jackets serving in Germany and the UK, including a tour in Belfast in late 1973. He was Mentioned in Despatches for his service as a Company Intelligence Sergeant during that tour. By 1974, Bill was Provost Sergeant of 1RGJ. Sporting a waxed ginger moustache and always immaculately dressed, very few riflemen were prepared to confront his awesome presence. Bill was brakeman to **Jamie Daniel** in the 1RGJ Bob Sleigh team at the European Championships at St Moritz in 1972. Introduced to **Lady Brabazon** at a high society reception as "Corporal Bill Foxton", she replied "What an unusual triple barrelled name," Bill didn't even twitch! On return from Belfast, Bill recruited **Mike Smith** (FF 1976-77) to form 1RGJ's totally inexperienced Luge team, only to find themselves in the selection squad for the UK's 1973 World Championship team. Their achievements are not recorded although the German language Bill picked up in the Legion was useful in chatting up the amazons of the East German womens' Luge team!

Perhaps aspiring to a professionally more adventurous and certainly better paid life, Bill enlisted in the Sultan's Armed Forces, was commissioned and posted to the Frontier Force in January 1975. At the time, FF was manning the Hornbeam Line. Bill's first job was to take over as leave relief from **Harry Hardy** as FF's Quartermaster. Bill promptly issued all the wrist watches and other goodies which like all QMs, Harry preferred to keep secure in his stores! Bill was second in Command of C Company both on the Hornbeam Line and then during the Post Monsoon operations in the Western Area. During the return of B and C Companies from Manston to Raysut by air, Bill sat in the seat usually occupied by a co-pilot. After about twenty minutes flying, he found himself in control of the Skyvan aircraft when the pilot had a sudden epileptic fit. Bill and **Clive Ward** were both awarded the Sultan's Commendation medal for their actions which undoubtedly saved the lives of all the troops aboard.

Bill returned to the UK after completing his contract, but soon re-enlisted. Promoted to Major, he took over from **Raye Barker-Schofield** as Officer Commanding the Baluch Training Centre at Heiron. Whilst there Bill lost his left hand when destroying a blind 60mm mortar round after a training exercise. He was wearing an Omega watch at the time and it didn't survive the blast. Some time later, Bill sent the remains to Omega in Switzerland explaining the watch did not live up to their claim that it was shockproof. Omega sent him a new watch! After BTC, Bill became Force Welfare Officer **Richard John's** deputy. Later, he was made an MBE for services to disabled Omani soldiers. His final posting in Oman and probably his happiest, was as OC the SAF Beach Club. He lived with **Bobby**, whom he had married in 1981, in a converted PortaCabin on the beach next to the club house, and presided over the best beach resort in the Gulf.

On retirement from SAF in 1989, Bill and Bobby made their home in Southampton. He was secretary of the Homeopathic Trust in London until the war in Bosnia erupted in 1992. Like other ex SAF officers, Bill joined the European Commission Monitoring Mission in Bosnia Herzegovina and spent almost two years in Bihac, often isolated by surrounding Serb forces. After the cessation of hostilities in 1995, Bill moved to Sarajevo as the ECMM's Training Officer. It was during this time that a letter from a Serb family was received at the ECMM HQ. The letter described the role played by 'a stocky, ginger haired British Monitor' in saving the life of their child in a mined area in the Vrbas Valley. Bill had made no mention of his selfless act.

In May 1998, Bill joined the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and moved to Albania where the situation in the then adjacent Serbian province of Kosovo was deteriorating significantly. The upsurge in violence was threatening the region as a whole. Bill was chosen to head the main field office, based in Bajram Curri. Through him all reports from this remote and lawless northern region were channelled back to the OSCE mission HQ in Tirana. This was a sensitive operation, for the region was used as a base by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) from which to launch operations into Kosovo, and an area where random violence was a way of life. Bill had to gain the trust of the local inhabitants, as well as the numerous clans and factions, in order to ensure that his teams were accepted as impartial observers. In this he fully succeeded, assisted no doubt by his extraordinary ability to pick up languages surprisingly quickly.

The Serb offensive into western Kosovo in the summer of 1998 saw some 30,000 Kosovo Albanians head southwards for sanctuary in Albania. Under Bill's guidance, clear and accurate reporting emerged from which world leaders could be briefed, and humanitarian assistance directed to the areas most in need. The KLA continued to grow in strength, and incursions by both sides across the border increased, as did shelling and incidents of mining. Albania was a ready source of weapons, and as the KLA became bolder so the situation grew worse. This situation culminated in the NATO bombing campaign in April 1999, and some 500,000 Kosovo Albanians sought sanctuary in Albania. This was a chaotic period but the OSCE monitors, working in extremely dangerous conditions and directed and led by Bill continued to play a large part in sending clear reports and assisting where they could with the humanitarian effort.

In June 1999, Bill was made an OBE for rescuing the child two years earlier in Bosnia and for his outstanding efforts in running

OSCE's northern field offices in Albania during a most challenging and dangerous period

At the conclusion of hostilities in Kosovo, Bill moved there and for the next seven years worked in Prizren for the German NGO Arbeiter Samariter Bund, building thousands of prefabricated houses for refugees. In 2007 Bill joined the NGO Caritas and went to Afghanistan to manage humanitarian aid projects. He returned home in September 2008.

Bill is survived by his wife Bobby and his two children **Sarah** and **Willard** from his first marriage.

PJI

**Major Michael Graham Watson, EME**

Mike Watson died on the 10th of May 2008 after a long illness. After entering Welbeck College in 1956 he went on to RMA Sandhurst and was commissioned into the REME.

He left the British Army in 1977 and then served on contract with SAF as Staff Officer Training HQ EME and OC EME Training Centre from 1977 for 10 years. During his service in Oman he established a firm training structure for engineers and craftsmen. His innovative verbal, written and dexterity selection tests; the training of armourers and mechanics for units and the advanced training of Non-Commissioned Officers, Warrant Officers and Officers to staff Forward Repair Teams, Light Aid Detachments and Workshops, were his devoted concern. The foundation he established provided a highly skilled force of electrical and mechanical engineers, to support all units, especially the artillery, armoured and mechanised infantry components, of the Royal Army of Oman. He also took over the personnel management function in HQ EME helping to plan soldiers' careers and formalising upgrading and equipment training. His command of Arabic was very good and he made many Omani friends, who greatly admired his high intellect and the dedication he showed to his profession.

He wrote many books and had a number of articles published in military magazines and, off duty, his cheerful and humorous nature was exemplified in his membership of the Muscat Hash House Harriers for whom he laid two particular trails for his fellow Harriers and Harriettes to follow. The first one was much too short – less than 15 minutes – and he earned the Hash trophy to wear around his neck at the next meet; it was a lavatory seat! Undaunted, a few months later his next trail disappeared behind one of the jebels to the south of MAM. The runners returned after dark, having covered some eight miles in three hours, and so exhausted that they were too tired to award Mike another award. "Now they will have something to go on!" said Mike.

We send our condolences and sympathy to Mike's wife **Gill** and daughter **Melissa**.

**Major Ron Revell, FF**

Ron Revell joined the Frontier Force in 1980 and spent the next ten years with the regiment as a Company Officer, Company Commander and latterly as Second in Command. Prior to joining SAF Ron had served for 6 years in the Rhodesian African Rifles where he had distinguished himself as a most professional and courageous officer. Originally he was commissioned into the Princess Patricia's Light Infantry in Saskatchewan, Canada.

Ron was an officer of the highest integrity, loyalty and dedica-

tion. Whatever he applied himself to, it was carried out with the outmost professionalism and conscientiousness and he applied the highest standard to himself and those he commanded. He met and married **Gillian**, who was nursing matron at Umm al Gwarif, Salalah, and, on leaving Oman, they returned to live in his home town of Saskatoon where he became Manager of the Veterans' association of the Province.

Ron lost his battle with cancer on 30 April, 2008. He is survived by his wife, Gillian and two young children.

**Wing Commander Peter Fairnty Williams, RAF and SOAF**

**Peter Williams** died on 3rd December 2008. Peter, who from his schooldays was an exceptional athlete and rugby player, playing for Swansea, London Welsh and the RAF, spent his RAF service in the Physical Education Branch, specialising in adventure training, outward bound, survival, canoeing, hill-walking and orienteering. He has been described as an enthusiast who passed on his enthusiasm and expertise to those he trained and by whom he was hugely respected. He joined SOAF in 1985 after retiring from the RAF and served in Oman for some seven years, encouraging members of the force to achieve physical fitness enjoyably.

He wrote a total of nine books on aspects of adventure training, which were translated into other languages, as well as two novels, one based on the First World War, on which he was particularly knowledgeable, and one on WWII.

Peter will be remembered as a kind and gentle man, a strong character with a good sense of humour, sociable and sensitive, and devoted to his wife **Glenys**, and their children **Chris** and **Stephanie**, to whom we extend our sympathy in their sad loss.

DEATHS

The following deaths have also been notified:

- 30 Jul 08 **Sqn Ldr Peter Howarth**, late RAF. Engineer at SOAF Salalah and Seeb early 1980s.
- Aug 08 **Sqn Ldr CP (Paddy) Roberts**
- 23 Sep 08 **Gp Capt Waldemar (Val) Warhaftig** MBE, RAF, late the Polish Army, the Polish Air Force, the Royal Malayan Air Force and SOAF.
- 16 Dec 08 **Mrs Jane Barron**, wife of **Major Leslie Barron**, GSO II Training, HQ SAF, 1975-77.
- 16 Jan 09 **Mrs Margaret Hastings**, wife of **Gp Capt Alan Hastings** OBE, RAF, CO SOAF Salalah, 1974-76.

**\* COPY FOR THE 2010 JOURNAL BY 1ST DECEMBER 2009 - PREFERABLY BY EMAIL OR ON A DISC \***

# MILITARY ENGINEERS ON OPERATIONS IN DHOFAR

by Lt Col Robert (Knobby) Reid

*In the books and articles that I have read on the Dhofar War, there is little mention of the part played by military engineers both during the campaign and the continuing civil development work undertaken thereafter. It is a complex story, but I intend that this article should help to redress the balance and perhaps provide a different perspective for some. Ultimately there was Sapper representation from four different nations: Oman, United Kingdom, Jordan and Iran. Their detailed roles varied, but essentially they provided immediate combat engineer support on operations and contributed to the civil development of the region. I thank those who have been so supportive by providing facts and illustrations, as well as improving the text!*

In his book, "We Won a War", **Brigadier John Akehurst**, recalls how he re-stated at the beginning of his tenure, the mission set for Dhofar Brigade by CSAF, **General Tim Creasey**. It was succinct:

#### 'To secure Dhofar for civil development'

To achieve this was an immense challenge. The success of civil development was dependent on a wide range of engineering capabilities. At one end of the scale were major civil engineering companies with international reputations for large infrastructure programmes such as Taylor Woodrow and Paulings. Another crucially important organisation was Sir William Halcrow and Partners; they specialised in the identification of subterranean water supplies in the jebel and the subsequent well-drilling operations designed to capture this vital resource for subsequent human and animal consumption.

However the other essential function in the equation was military engineers with their inherent quick deployment capability and wide range of skills. All the soldiers in successive British Sapper deployments were trained primarily as combat engineers, but in addition they were all artisans or plant operators who drove the heavy earth moving machines. Working primarily at section or occasionally at troop strength, they enabled commanders to show that the government really meant business by rapidly delivering projects which were designed to make a marked improvement to the quality of the lives of the jebali people.

Military engineers also enhanced SAF's operational capability by taking the lead in the detection and disposal of mines and the construction of major obstacles designed to disrupt adoo operations; the Hornbeam Line is a prime example. Such lines were built with infantry battalions providing manpower from the rifle companies and assault pioneer platoons. In summary, Sappers were required to take on a wide variety of tasks; they worked closely with the Civil Aid Department to construct what might be termed 'Get-U-In Facilities', some of which, 35 years on, still appear to be in daily use!

So in the latter stages of the War, military engineers were crucial in operations designed by Brigadier Akehurst for the Central and Eastern areas:

- A SAF operation in strength, supported by a Firqat, secures a position of the Firqat's choice which dominated its tribal area.

- Military engineers build a track to the position giving road access, followed by an airstrip if possible.

- A drill is brought down the track followed by military engineers and a Civil Action Team to construct and set up a shop, school, clinic and mosque.

- SAF thins out to the minimum to provide security.

- Water is pumped to the surface and into the distribution system prepared by military engineers to offer storage points for humans and troughs for animals.

- Civilians come in from miles around and talk to the Firqat, SAF and Government representatives. They are told that enemy activity in the area will result in the water being cut off.

- Civilians move out into the surrounding area and tell the enemy not to interfere with what is obviously "a good thing".

- Enemy, very dependent on civilians, stop all aggressive action and either go elsewhere or hide.

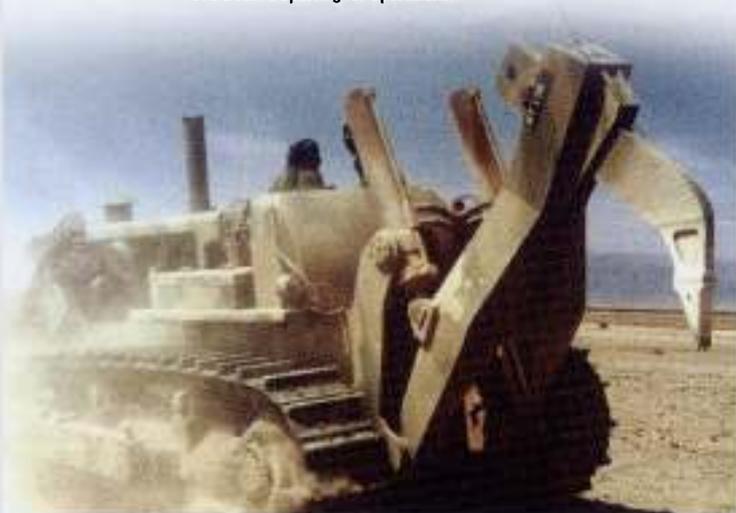
- Tribal area is secure and all SAF is withdrawn.

However, to have reached this stage had not been straightforward. Records show that as far back as February 1971, **Colonel Mike Harvey**, Commander Dhofar Area, had made an initial request for British Royal Engineers' assistance. He was keen to develop the concept of 'hearts and minds' which had been so successful in the Malayan Campaign of the 1950s. Furthermore there had been incidents involving mines, both anti-personnel and anti-vehicle, going back as far as October 1969. This developing threat alone demanded the presence of military engineers. Prior to 1973, small detachments of Royal Engineers had been employed in Dhofar for short periods on various development operations: well-drilling on the Salalah Plain, the development of water supply and sewage systems and the construction of the Field Surgical Team (FST)



Constructing the FST

SFE Dozer Departing for Operations.



facilities. They also were responsible for the maintenance of RAF Salalah. Nevertheless, by 1972 the campaign had been in progress for some seven years, but there was still no integral military engineering capability in SAF beyond the assault pioneers in infantry battalions. A longer term solution was required. In 1972, **Brigadier Jack Fletcher**, Commander Dhofar Brigade, requested urgent support from the Chief of the General Staff when he was visiting from UK. There were two crucial requirements; firstly Royal Engineers to undertake military and civil engineering tasks and secondly to set up a military engineer unit for SAF.

In response, 50 Field Squadron (-) Royal Engineers deployed in February 1973 on Operation *Tenable*, although a field troop under the command of **Captain Paul Adams** RE had been flown in from Cyprus in 1972 as an immediate, short-term reinforcement.

Overall the military engineering resources which were built up in Dhofar reflected the polyglot nature of the whole force. They included, as mentioned, the Royal Engineers who deployed on Operation *Tenable*. They remained in theatre until December 1977. During a typical deployment, there were some four officers and 80 soldiers but, during the khareef, the commitment reduced to a small maintenance party employed fulltime repairing the battered equipment and vehicles.

Basic training of jundeeds for the Sultan's Forces' Engineers (SFE, later SAFE) began in 1974, under Raa'id **Alec Tomlin** and British SNCO instructors. The first field troop deployed to Dhofar under operational command of OC 60 Field Squadron on 4 November 1974. I became the second OC SFE in early 1975; it took a further 18 months for SFE to become a fully fledged squadron of 150 or so equipped with all the requisite tools and heavy earthmoving plant machines. By that stage, we had built up significant experience from the numerous operations towards the end of the campaign.

There was a squadron of Royal Jordanian Engineers on roulement and Iranian Engineers were deployed on the Damavand Line. Some readers may recall there was also a sprinkling of Sappers posted to infantry battalions: **Paul Wright** (there is a tribute to him elsewhere in this edition of The Journal), **Mike Bourne**, **Ian Thompson**, **Ted Wells**, **John Wyatt**, **Mike Wolfenden** and **Steve Lewis** amongst others. **John McKeown** served in HQ Dhofar Brigade and **Gareth Hardwick** was SO2 Engineer Ops in HQ SAF.

As an indication of the scope and volume of civil development work in which successive Operation *Tenable* squadrons were involved over some four years, records kept by Raa'id Gareth Hardwick list the construction of 16 schools, 10 mosques, 13 clinics, 12 shops, 17 government offices, 25 water distribution schemes and about 300 kilometres of gravel roads. Equally, they were involved in the construction of and mining the Hornbeam Line. SFE, as a fledgling sub unit, often worked with the Royal Engineers whilst they built up their experience, but were solely responsible for supporting offensive operations in 1975: FF and MR in particular. Unusual operations occurred. I am sure those who were involved in the early phase of Operation *Hadaf* will not forget the exploits of **Sergeant John Gillan** RE (later BEM, WKhM(G)) who, seemingly unconcernedly drove his borrowed yellow D8 bulldozer from Deefa to Zakhir Tree, followed by another sortie to Stonehenge and later on from Gunlines to above Sherishitti. He was building combat tracks to enable easier mobility for armoured cars and resupply vehicles. A TM 46 anti-tank mine was located in the first 100 metres of the operation.

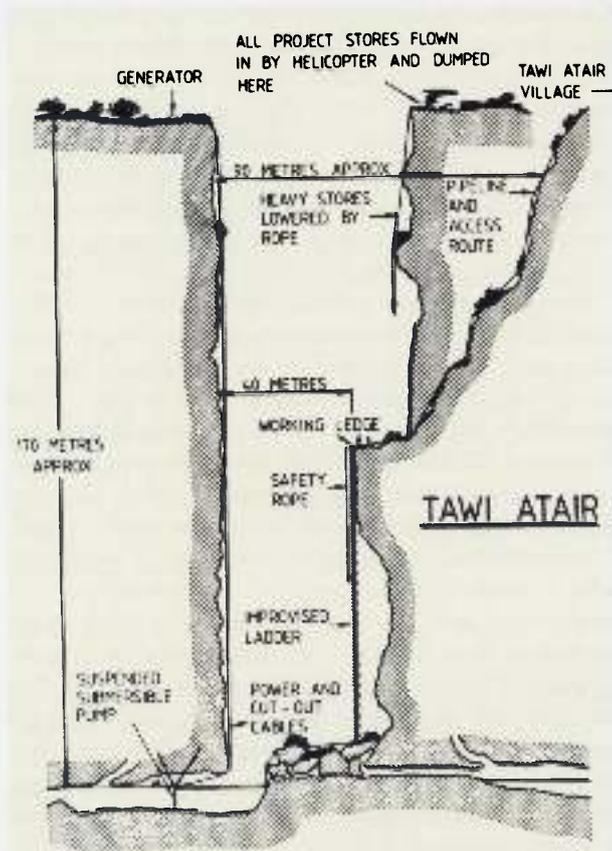
Space in this article precludes anything but a brief overview of a tiny sample of the achievements of military engineers. There are four examples: RAF Salalah, Tawi Atair, the Hornbeam Line and Sarfait.

At RAF Salalah there were several projects undertaken over the years, but two which will bring back memories for some readers are the construction of the facilities for the FST and secondly the blast walls constructed to protect the Strikemasters and helicopters. The former was completed in 1972 at a time when RAF Salalah itself was under

Cattle at Tawi Atair.



## MILITARY ENGINEERS ON OPERATION IN DHOFAR



bombardment. As so many will recall, it gave the Army and RAF medical teams the environment in which they could undertake their amazing, life-saving work. It was basic, but sufficient to get started. On the other hand, the protective revetments for the aircraft, consisting of 40 gallon 'burmails', were filled with stone; much of it had to be done by hand with only limited earthmoving plant support.

Tawi Atair is a fascinating story and perhaps the model for civil aid development in the jebel. In May 2008 during the SAF Association visit, whilst standing near the 170 metre deep sinkhole in the limestone jebel, we saw that the benefits which literally flowed from this civil development operation were many and most gratifying. There on the hillside was a flourishing village, a magnificent Government Centre and, from behind the walls of the school, could be heard the laughter of children playing happily. It seemed that all the sacrifices of so many had been entirely worthwhile.

This was no doubt a far cry from the poverty and despair of the time in early 1973 when **Captain Simon Fogden** RE abseiled 100 metres into the 'well' to undertake the first reconnaissance. The objective was to develop the water source for human and animal consumption. He designed the system and initiated the work which inevitably took time to come to fruition. Before that civil

development operation commenced, for centuries the villagers had obtained their water from the pools at the base of the sinkhole in a difficult and potentially very dangerous fashion. Experienced women and children had climbed down to the bottom, filled goatskins with water and then others had hauled those skins up to the ledge about 100 metres above the pools. (See the diagram showing the cross-section of the sink-hole). They then proceeded to carry the full skins up the gully to the surface and thence onto the village. This was all to change with the arrival of submersible pumps, pipework and a distribution system which provided potable water for humans and some 5,000 animals alike.

Numerous other construction operations were undertaken at Tawi Atair to provide the infrastructure which the jebali people so desperately required; the school, medical and community centres, food distribution point, a bullpen and generator house. These were served by the airstrip and road access. However it was not done without casualties; **Sergeant Thomas** (on secondment to SFE and attached to 51 Field Squadron (Airfields)) and **Corporal Smith** were badly wounded in January 1974, when one of them detonated a mine whilst constructing the clinic. They were airlifted back to the FST and their lives saved.

The Hornbeam Line was a completely different type of operation. In 1973, OC 51 Field Squadron (Airfields), **Major Roger Eagle** RE, was ordered to undertake a reconnaissance of the line formed by the defensive positions from the sea just west of Mughsayl up to Oven some 50 kilometres north. The aim was to construct a wire and mine barrier linking those positions; the objective was to disrupt adoo resupply operations. A plan, under the name Operation Meteor, was developed; work commenced in late 1973 and was completed by the khareef of 1974. The logistics bill was enormous. Some 15,000 coils of barbed wire, 12,000 steel pickets and reels of barbed wire and 4,000 anti-personnel mines were ordered from across Iran, Europe, India and Pakistan. Stores were flown into precarious locations as underslung loads by Wessex helicopter. Sappers from 48 Field Squadron, which was now the Operation



Strikmaster Protection



## MILITARY ENGINEERS ON OPERATION IN DHOFAR

Tenable squadron and commanded by **Major John Blashford-Snell** RE, were on occasion belayed onto rock faces as they fixed in place the wire and a variety of booby traps. There was very close integration with NFR which was deployed at that time along the defensive positions of the Hornbeam Line; they provided a significant proportion of the labour and indeed had commenced the construction operation. Royal Jordanian Engineers were involved. The SAF Newsletter of September 1974 reports:

'This now highly effective obstacle to enemy movement is proving to be one of the most important war-winning factors. During the six month period, only two major breaches of the line occurred, one in February and one in March; but only by enemy on foot carrying small arms and RPG7 ammunition. Since the completion of the wiring and mining, enemy lateral movement has been made even more difficult.'

There was a constant bill for maintenance, not only the wire obstacle but also the minefields – checking serviceability and the vital records. It was dangerous work and no-one could afford to let concentration drop. In recognition of his bravery, **WO2 Barry** of 53 Field Squadron (Airfields) was awarded the Military Medal; **Corporal David Jones** was not so fortunate as he was killed maintaining a minefield at Mughsayl in early 1975.

After the campaign, the minefields had to be cleared. Each mine had to be accounted for and this role fell to SFE; they did this work in potentially treacherous conditions. The mines themselves had deteriorated in the extreme weather conditions and animals had

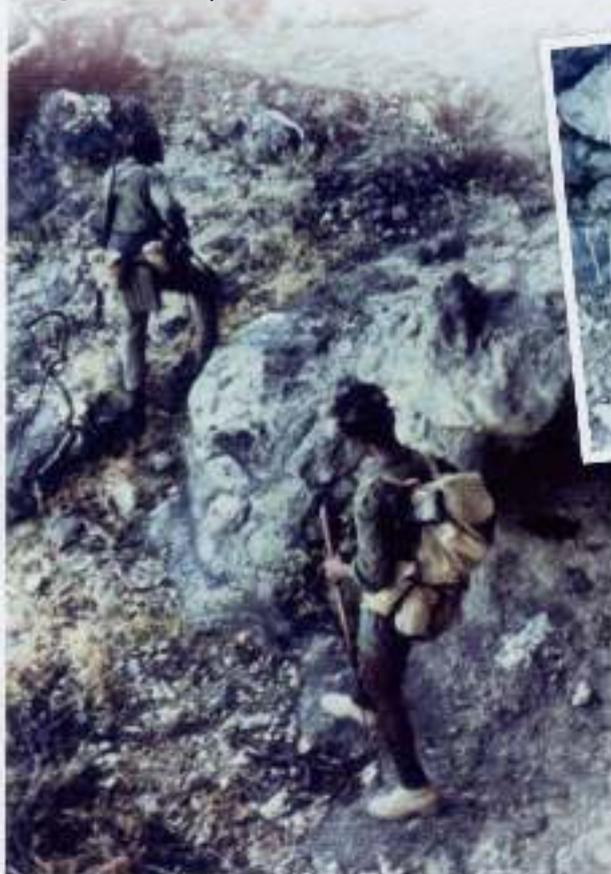
moved some. The following is an extract from a letter from Raa'id Gareth Harwick, then SO2 Engineer Ops at HQ Dhofar Brigade:

'The majority of the mines on the Hornbeam Line have now been lifted; a total of about 3,000. Most of this work has been done by 3 Troop SFE. This has been an operation in which the penalty for a single incident of carelessness or incorrect procedure would have been death or maiming. All deserve congratulations on the way the task has been carried out.'

Finally, Sarfait. SFE was in support of MR in the 1975 post khareef operations. At the beginning of the breakout from the top scarp on 15th October, breaching parties led the way, detecting and clearing PMN blast mines on the western route from below 'Sergeant Major's Wadi' down towards Capstan. They clambered down improvised ladders carrying their equipment, explosives and accessories. The pictures illustrate this. They were very fine men who had received minimal training, but they quickly gained experience – sadly, some of it most unpleasant.

Once CSAF had given his agreement to the revised plan developed by John Akehurst and CO MR, **Lt Col Ian Christie**, there followed the construction of the wire obstacles and the development of the water hole at Deem. A series of four fences, similar to the Hornbeam but broader and heavier in design, were built from the sea to the base of the main scarp. They incorporated the intermediate rock faces to advantage. The many tons of stores were brought in as underslung loads from "SNV As Sultana" lying offshore. The trees, scrub and undergrowth along the alignments had to be cut and removed by hand and in the top sections the areas had to be

Clearing Mines Below Scarp.



cleared of adoo mines. For sound political and military reasons the obstacles were not mined by SAF, although the preliminary plans for a couple of minefields were completed – just in case. Two troops of SFE, one of them mid way through basic combat engineer training in the North, together with four platoons of assault pioneers completed the operations. It was physically hard work, not helped by the ever present threat of mines and 'incomers'.

This is but a glimpse of the contribution made by military engineers on operations in Dhofar. They played a useful role in the successful outcome of the War, thus enabling Brigadier Akehurst to declare in early December 1975:

**'Dhofar is now secure for Civil Development'**

## MILITARY ENGINEERS

It could be argued that much of the work was already underway. Furthermore, the foundations for the rapid development of Sultan's Forces Engineers had been laid in challenging circumstances. Many hard won lessons had been learnt. ■



Breakout at Sarfait.

Sarfait – Constructing last barrier fence.

## SAPPERS IN OMAN, 1967

HUGH COWAN (LATE ROYAL ENGINEERS)

*(I was sitting in church in Lincoln, waiting for the start of a funeral, when I realised that my neighbour was wearing a red and blue tie. He turned out to be a Sapper and, eventually, this is what he told me. JQ)*

At the time that I was in Oman I was the troop commander of 1 Troop, 10 Field Squadron, Royal Engineers. The squadron was based in Aden until the withdrawal of British forces at the end of November 1967, as a Field Squadron (Airfields) supporting the RAF in the Middle East. The squadron then moved to Sharjah as the (Gulf) Field Squadron.

1 Troop had been working in Salalah, but had moved north around March 1967 in order to improve airstrips and helipads, as a contingency measure in case support had to be provided to Omani forces following the closure of the Aden base, and at the same time coinciding with the entry into service of a new range of tactical transport aircraft. I flew in to take over the troop in May 1967. At that time, we were working on the airstrips at Rostaq and at Hazm, hosted by Red Company of the Desert Regiment, in the camp at Rostaq, with a small rear party at Bait al Falaj. We then moved to Nizwa, with the Northern Frontier Regiment and upgraded Firq airstrip. Subsequently, we did minor work on the runway at Sib and then built helipads at a number of locations including Ibri and Saiq. We also converted the track from Nizwa to Birkat al Mawz into a natural surfaced but fully aligned road. Highlights included moving to and from Saiq with the donkeys, receipt of the last Beverley (tactical transport aircraft) sortie when a small bulldozer was flown into Firq several days after that type of aircraft had been formally withdrawn from operational service, and an overland trip from Bait al Falaj to Sharjah via Sohar and Shinas returning inland via Ibri.

Following the departure from Aden, a question was asked in the House of Commons as to whether there were any British troops in Oman and the incorrect answer was given that there were none! Needless to say, we were quickly withdrawn in November 1967. However, a different troop from the squadron took our place a few weeks later and continued the work.

Most of the rest of my tour was spent in the Khorfakkan/Diba area, but I did return to Oman for a short period in 1968 when we supported a British exercise in the Buraimi/Sohar area. In April 1968 the troop was warned for a possible move to Salalah in a combat engineer role but was eventually stood down. ■

### 2009 SAF ASSOCIATION DINNER

The 2009 Dinner will take place in the Army and Navy Club, 36 Pall Mall, London, commencing at 1900 hrs on FRIDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2009.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE APPLICATION FORM ON PAGE 98 AND SEND IT TO STAN EDWARDS TO REACH HIM BY 13 NOVEMBER 2009 AT THE LATEST.

### 2009 SAF ASSOCIATION COCKTAIL PARTY

The Cocktail Party will take place in the Army and Navy Club, 36 Pall Mall, London, between 1830 and 2030 hrs on THURSDAY 4 JUNE 2009.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE APPLICATION FORM ON PAGE 98 AND SEND IT TO NIGEL KNOCKER, TO REACH HIM BY 26 MAY 2009 AT THE LATEST.

# MAJOR PAUL WRIGHT WSH, WB, RE A TRIBUTE TO A VERY GALLANT OFFICER

*Lt Col Robert (Knobby) Reid*



Firm Base –  
Major Paul Wright Killed

**Paul Wright's** military career spanned less than seven years, but it was action-packed and he died a hero. He had already completed a tour in the SAS when he was seconded to SAF in 1971. It was there that he was killed in action on 6 Feb 73 during a day of sustained bravery and personal leadership. Paul had already been decorated in 1972 by **HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said** for his leadership and courage as a company commander in the Jebel Regiment (JR). For his outstanding leadership and sustained bravery during prolonged contact with the enemy on the day he died, he was awarded posthumously the Gallantry Medal (WSH). It was the first (and only) Gallantry Medal awarded to a seconded British officer. HM the Sultan himself presented the medal to Paul's mother in London on 25 Aug 73.

JR, less one company, had concentrated at Manston with orders to carry out vigorous and aggressive operations, and Op DRAGON was mounted by the CO in support of Op SIMBA, the strategically important SAF position at Sarfait on the border with the PDRY. Based on limited intelligence, the plan was to strike south towards the adoo's extensive and important Sherishitti stores complex and to draw the enemy away from Sarfait and the Central Area of Dhofar, and to force them out of the tree line where they would become exposed to attack from SOAF Strikemasters and the JR mortars.

Number 1 Company, under Paul's command, moved out of Manston during the night of 4/5 Feb to set up a patrol firm base to the south. This was accomplished without incident and mortar DFs

## MAJOR PAUL WRIGHT

were registered. Two patrols were pushed forward towards the tree-line some thousand yards south of the firm base just before dawn on 6 Feb. There was a mass of tracks in the area and it is possible that they were now astride an adoo convoy route. The sound of the detonation of a mine by a Baluch soldier in an old sangar initiated the action. The speed with which the adoo regrouped and the violence of their reactions led to some of the most intensive fighting seen in Dhofar. The maximum number sighted at any one time was 60 to 80. Their weaponry was RPG 7 airburst, Goryonov and RPD machine guns, 60 and 82 mm mortars, AK 47 and SKS.

The citation for Paul's Gallantry Medal describes the sustained and intensive fighting:

Major Paul Wright was the Commander of Number 1 Company, The Jebel Regiment on 6 February 1973 on operations in West Dhofar.

Having sited a firm base from which he could mount vigorous and aggressive operations against enemy positions of unknown strength, he personally led a fighting patrol southwards to overlook the enemy main base on the coastal plain. Shortly after 0700 hours, a man of a similar patrol working in support of Major Wright stepped on a mine, the explosion of which compromised the presence of both parties.

The enemy reaction was sudden and violent and for some time the safety of both patrols was in doubt. Major Wright immediately ordered his party to fight its way back to the patrol base in the face of very heavy enemy fire. Immediately he arrived there, he organised the evacuation of the casualty under the cover of jet strikes and mortar fire and covered the withdrawal of the other patrol which had by this time received further casualties.



Major Paul Wright and Major (later Colonel) Mike Ball in Salalah after the investiture in 1972.

Major Wright's conduct during the next six hours of fierce fighting equalled the most notable acts of gallantry in the history of the Sultan's Armed Forces. Sitting in the open under exceptionally heavy fire to control mortars and aircraft; moving from sangar to sangar to encourage his men; treating and recovering casualties and collecting ammunition; he was a

cool, brave and selfless example to all. His military skill, determination and aggressive leadership are beyond praise and the way in which his soldiers responded to his orders in a dangerous situation is a measure of the respect they had for him. Brave officers who were present with Major Wright report that his example gave them confidence to see the task through and that his conduct throughout the action was an inspiration.

At 1543 hours Major Wright was tragically killed by a direct hit from an enemy mortar. However by this time he had rallied and regrouped his men, stabilised the position from which they were ultimately able safely to withdraw. There is no doubt that his brave conduct, military skill and resolute action inflicted a large number of casualties on the enemy and saved the lives of many men under his command.

Through a long hard day of continuous fighting Major Wright showed outstanding qualities of gallantry. His coolness in adversity, his professionalism and his complete and utter disregard for his own life were in the highest traditions of the Sultan's Armed Forces.

One of Paul's company officers was **Mike Austin**, late of the Devon and Dorset Regiment. He participated in the action and was himself decorated for his bravery during it. He recently gave a personal account:

"We deployed at 0500 hours from the firm patrol base. I commanded a patrol 15 strong and Paul had about 30 in his. I was on the right flank as we moved forward. It was cold and misty at first light. We were looking for a location from which we could observe in all-round defence. Then a Baluch soldier

entered an old sangar and stepped on a mine. We were caught out! I tried to contact the main base at Manston, but at this stage I could not get comms. Paul called for casevac support and a helicopter inched its way in up a wadi to remove the wounded soldier to fly him back to the Field Surgical Team in Salalah. This took valuable time. I had now joined Paul Wright. We looked up to the ridge-line to the south and saw figures crouching amongst sangars – probably about ten of them at this stage. I called for mortar fire support which sent the adoo to ground. They were probably on three sides of us, but not behind. There was very heavy incoming 82 mm mortar fire, RPG airburst and machine gun and small arms. We were trapped and then

started taking casualties. Observation was not easy and it was very difficult to control our mortars. At this stage, Strikemasters providing Close Air Support (CAS) came in, but we took more casualties. The helicopter pilots who flew in to collect the wounded were exceptionally brave as they inched their way towards us. Throughout, Paul was giving tremen-

dous encouragement. At this stage, with about five jundeeds left, I withdrew up the forward slope back to the firm base.

By this time Number 2 Company of JR was being worked into the equation and Red Company, Desert Regiment (DR), had also deployed.

I recall I met Paul under a tree. We were in dead ground and the atmosphere was cool and calm. But the adoo brought down fire on us and Paul's signaller was killed. They continued to mortar us and I recall being blown off my feet; there were RPGs and AK47s being fired at us, but Paul continued to move in the open amongst the sangars to encourage his jundeeds and from the crest-line he directed JR mortars and Strikemasters providing close air support (CAS). After a lull, when I believe the adoo regrouped, the attack recommenced. I was in a shell-scraps and Paul was by this stage in a sangar. There was much incoming fire and I then heard a mortar round detonate. A Baluch jundee called out that Paul had been wounded. I ran over and found him on the floor of the sangar in a very bad state. We did our best for him and carried him to the helicopter LZ; he was flown back to Manston."

Number 1 Company JR's casualties that day were two killed in action, three seriously wounded, 17 walking wounded and one missing in action.

The following is an extract from a report which was written by **Denis (Nobby) Grey**, a SOAF Strikemaster pilot who provided CAS during the action:

"6th February 1973 was a very busy day for our squadron and I flew four sorties. The first was to provide top cover to some helicopters who were evacuating casualties from positions to the east of the airfield at Salalah, in support of Operation SYCAMORE.

The next three sorties that day were in support of Callsign 19, Major Paul (Tiger) Wright of JR. We had been briefed that offensive patrols would be taking place from Manston some 15 minutes flying time north west of Salalah. The first of these three sorties was to provide top cover to Callsign 19.

Soon after our formation of two Strikemasters arrived in the area, we made radio contact with 19 (Tiger) and were immediately given targets to attack with our bombs, rockets and guns. The bombs were used against enemy positions some distance from our own troops but the rockets and guns, being more accurate weapons, were used against enemy in close contact with 19's troops. His instructions to us were clear and accurate despite the fact that he was obviously coming under heavy fire himself. It seemed that our attacks

took some pressure off him and his colleagues.

My second sortie for 19 followed a similar pattern to the previous one. 19 was under even more pressure than before. Not only did he have to direct us onto enemy targets, but he had to run the firefight on the ground and try to keep safe himself. There was a period of about ten minutes while we circled overhead squinting through binoculars trying to establish with 19 exactly where the enemy were so we could carry out our attacks without endangering our own troops. There was a long pause of several minutes during which I was unable to raise 19. Another officer, who I recall to be Mike Austin, the second in command, told me that 19 was 'down' and Mike took control of the radio. We soon became low on fuel and returned to base. On landing, our ground-crew found a bullet hole straight through my aircraft's starboard wing.

The final sortie of that day is listed in my flying log book as a 'Pre Planned Strike for 19. Before take-off, we had been given the coordinates and description of a fixed target to attack in their area. On arrival, we cruised to the target area at several thousand feet so that the enemy could not hear us and, once we positively identified the target, made our attacks.

It wasn't until the evening that I learned that Tiger had in fact been killed during my second sortie. I don't recall meeting him in person, but he had a reputation as a fearless and gallant officer. To this day I wonder if there was anything else that we could possibly have done to help Tiger and his team."

**Robert Aplin** was another company officer. In respect of Paul's Bravery Medal awarded in 1971, he writes:

"This was indeed for sustained leadership and bravery during the seven or eight weeks of Op JAGUAR where 1 Company JR was the first to deploy alongside two frigates, plus troops of G and B Squadrons of 22 SAS. We eventually became the nucleus of North Group, once the main operation split into separate groups, with the Southern element securing White City (Medinat al Haq). Our aim was to push far west along the northern flank of Op JAGUAR to harass adoo waterholes and



With Mike Austin and Robert Aplin on Op KATE.

## MAJOR PAUL WRIGHT



Op Jaguar[1]. Top photo, Robert Aplin, Ted Ashley, Paul Wright. Bottom photo, Paul Wright and Mike Austin.



supply lines and to distract them from the establishment by us of Medinat al Haq as the main Government civil aid centre on the jebel.

Paul was gruff and very down to earth, but a "digit in the ribs" soon exposed a sense of humour. He was brave to the point of foolhardiness at times. Mike and I often told him to make himself less conspicuous. The jundeeds, half of whom were Omani and half Baluch, thought he was great and always "waagid, waagid shadeed."

At his funeral in Cheshire, there were wreaths from all ranks of the Corps of Royal Engineers, 22 Special Air Service Regiment and the Sultan's Armed Forces among many other tributes. His mother kept his decorations, medals and personal mementoes. It is as a result of locating these after her death that the full story of his outstanding leadership and conspicuous gallantry has come to light. Major Paul Wright's decorations and medals are a unique set and it is intended that they should be displayed at the RE Museum, Chatham. ■

## MAJOR-GENERAL JOHN B. AKEHURST CBE

*Commanding 4th Armoured Division, British Army of the Rhine*

*Contributed by The Hon. Ivor Lucas*

Invited to speak at the annual lunch of the Anglo-Omani Society, I dipped into *Pass the Port* for some suitable humour. I found nothing under 'Middle East' or related subjects, but discovered an ideal opening story contributed by **The Hon. Ivor Lucas**, who I knew to be a leading light at the Foreign Office Middle East desk. The story was a happy little joke about ancient Rome and after-dinner speaking.

Driving to the dinner I was held up by a massive traffic jam, in which I sat worrying about the time and mentally rehearsing my speech. Eventually I arrived only two minutes before everyone went into dinner; just in time, in fact, to be introduced to the other guest speaker (who was to speak first) – The Hon. Ivor Lucas!

**Pass the Port Again – 1980**

# OMAN'S MODERN NAVY

*By Cdr Bob Wilson RN*

## Part One – Reborn

Weekend was looming large and it was, or so I thought, going to be a quiet start to the day at the Admiral's Wednesday morning brief. "Bob...?", 'Sir?!', 'You are interested in naval history I believe.' 'Yesss' (Panic! Where's this leading?), 'Would you be interested in writing the official history of SON/RNO?' And so, some four years ago I had the honour of accepting **His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq Al Sa'id's** invitation to research and record the navy's history to complement that already done for the air force and was then being done so ably for the army by **Ian Buttenshaw**. Drawing on my research so far, this two-part article will review the navy's history from the Dhofar War to the present day; this first part covers the period until 1977. Any errors are mine alone. At the time I started the project I was almost two years into a three year loan appointment to Oman as Hydrographer RNO (2002-2005), my final appointment in naval service and probably my most rewarding.

The modern navy of Oman has a proud pedigree stretching back several centuries. In the nineteenth century it was acknowledged as the most powerful and efficient navy East of Suez, upholding the nation's vast maritime empire and with it its wealth and influence. In recent years it regained that status within the states of the Arabian Peninsula; this has been attained by the hard work, dedication and professionalism of Omanis and the many expatriates who have also played their full part in developing and sustaining the Sultan's navy. The Sultanate's internal conflicts opened up the modernisation of the Sultanate with the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), a professional counter-insurgency force forged in the intense heat of the Dhofar War, leading the way. Much has been written about land and air operations during this long struggle; little has been recorded of maritime operations, these being merely sidelined by some as having 'played a subsidiary role' or seen as 'an appendage to the army'. This view fails in its understanding of the unified nature of SAF, of Oman's extensive littoral that cannot be patrolled effectively by land or air forces, and indeed of the navy's actual contribution which grew with the Dhofar campaign as SAF began to understand the value of effective maritime forces in the struggle.

The maritime requirement after the Jebel Akhdar war was for a coast watch service whose roles were to prevent the smuggling of arms and insurgents into Oman and to obtain intelligence from isolated coastal communities. A layered approach was to be adopted made up of three elements; a coast watch organised through the local Wali, an offshore watch by Royal Navy patrol vessels, and in between, the Sultan's new maritime force, a maritime wing of the Oman Gendarmerie (OG). This maritime wing was not given the title of the Coastal Patrol (CP) until 1970, although it was commonly known by this name. The seed of a national maritime force, the first for over 120 years, had been sown.

The CP was formed in May 1960 from a small group of officers and men serving with the Muscat Garrison of OG; the maritime experience of the Omani crew was extensive with men drawn from fishing communities, local and ocean trading voyages. The first Commander CP was **Raa'id Jasper Coates**, a retired Royal Air Force Group Captain, previously in charge of the animal transport

section or 'Jasper's Horse' that played a key roll in the assault on Jebel Akhdar. This unlikely combination of officers and men manned a force which was meagre for the task, with initially just one armed dhow or boom, the 80 ton "*Nasr al Bahr*". Thus a naval force was in operation off Dhofar some five years before the war. Jasper Coates was relieved by **Major Grahame Vivian MC\*** OG in the mid 1960s and for a time was aided by **Captain Mike Tomlinson** OG who commanded the chartered boom "*Al Ta'if*". Royal Marine lieutenants **Bob Hudson** and **Robert Tucker**, on secondment from duty in Aden, commanded "*Nasr al Bahr*" in 1966/67 before the latter handed over to **Jeremy Raybould** in April 1967.



Jeremy Raybould at the wheel of *Nasr Al Bahr*.

For the operations that these unlikely naval vessels were to undertake so well and for so long they had one great advantage, they were barely distinguishable at long range from the myriad Arab trading vessels which ply their trade along the Arabian coast. Operations continued without pause throughout the war. The tedium of innumerable boardings was sometimes relieved by the unexpected, as during the search of one vessel, when a man seized the helm and tried to ram the boarding vessel whilst others dropped arms overboard. Another man trying to give information to the CP officer was thrown overboard by his fellow passengers.



Major Grahame Vivian with members of OG question dhow passengers.

## OMAN'S MODERN NAVY



Broadsides CP style! Target practice onboard a CP boom.

The boom's limited armament was initially side arms and rifles for boarding operations and medium machine guns to use against surface and shore targets, but operations against the *adoo's* superior weapon range required something more, and the mounting of a 106mm RCL onboard "*Nasr al Bahr*" went some way to redressing the balance.



*Nasr Al Bahr* with a 106mm RCL mounted in the bows.

Engagements with the *adoo* ashore could and did result in fatalities to CP personnel embarked in the booms. Visits by the booms to communities virtually inaccessible from inland provided the only direct show of influence by the Sultan; their 'hearts and minds' work is not quantifiable but should not be underestimated.

There is not room here to relate all of the day-to-day work of the CP and it should be clearly understood that most SAF operations were being conducted far inland away from any influence of the limited resources of the CP. However, it is quite clear from SAF records that the operations in which CP were able to take part were greatly assisted by the intelligent use of this limited maritime force in the prevention of sea-borne insurgency, in amphibious operations and in re-supply. The armed booms proved to be very cost effective units. It is without doubt the highly successful work of the Coastal Patrol during the early stages of the Dhofar campaign that demonstrated the need for a much larger permanent professional naval force.

In 1967, at the invitation of **Sultan Sa'id bin Taimur** a team of British defence planners visited the Sultanate to examine the role and requirements for a professional navy. Their report, presented to him in April 1968, was to be the foundation of Oman's modern navy. The report's key recommendations were for four fast patrol boats and a naval base at Makallah Cove, Muscat. The first modern

vessel, however, was to be the armed Royal Yacht *SNV Al Sa'id*; whilst only armed with one 40mm Bofors, the weapon was a great advance on anything carried by the booms. Built by Brooke Marine at Lowestoft, *Al Sa'id* was to be the first of ten vessels built by the yard for Oman. **Cdr D R Williams MBE RN**, although initially recruited to command *Al Sa'id*, was to greet the new ship on her arrival in Muscat in March 1971 as the first Commander, Sultan of Oman's Navy (CSON). The delivery voyage had been difficult, severe gales in the Bay of Biscay caused the loss of the Royal Barge, all of *Al Sa'id's* other boats and most of her upperdeck fittings. The ship was sent to Oman with a civilian delivery crew of mixed ability and little 'cohesion', **Lt Cdr Denis Connell** was one of the three Owner's Representatives onboard and became used to manning the bridge at sea when other options failed. Within a few months of arrival *Al Sa'id* was employed on a variety of tasks including patrols, shore bombardment, carrying stores to Dhofar, taking the Minister of the Interior on a visit to the Musandam, and ferrying 189 soldiers back from leave in Gwadar. As a Royal Yacht, *Al Sa'id's* tasks included almost anything not normally associated with such a role.



*Al Sa'id* and an Omani founder member of SON.

SON was formed by Royal Decree in 1970; its formation required a review of SAF's command structure. As with the CP it was considered that nearly all of SON's main roles would require it to work closely with the other two arms of SAF. The roles included the safe carriage of **His Majesty the Sultan**; co-ordinating patrols against illegal immigrants, gunrunners and smugglers; transport of men and stores; close fire support against coastal targets; amphibious operations. The roles required all three service arms to operate together with HQ SAF as the central control. A clear case for the merger of CP with SON presented itself for two main reasons; it was clearly inefficient in a relatively small national defence force to have two distinct naval forces operating in the same waters and not being under the same command. CP also lacked a headquarters facility through which it could be controlled and administered and HQ SON would provide this facility and the merger took place in June 1971.

Duplication of administration and logistics for the new service were also unnecessary and SON would rely on SAF for much of its administrative support. New recruits came through SAF Training Regiment; pay and terms and conditions of service were identical to other SAF personnel; supplies of common user items such as weapons, ammunition, and ordnance stores came from the Force Ordnance Services. For these and many other minor reasons SON was considered in exactly the same situation as SOAF which was under the command of HQ SAF except for certain matters such as budgeting, personnel administration and supply of specialist stores and ammunition.

Whilst on the one hand SON prevented personnel and stores reaching the insurgents by sea, it also held the key role of re-supplying SAF's fighting forces in Dhofar. Lines of communication between Dhofar and wider Oman during the war were poor; road and air transport had a limited capacity. Carriage of the vast quantities of stores needed by SAF forces in Dhofar could only be conducted economically and effectively by sea. This urgent need was recognised and "SNV *Dhofar*" was quickly acquired by purchase and brought into service in March 1971. "*Dhofar*" was built in Italy in 1958 as a general cargo vessel and was refitted for service in SON at Brooke Marine's yard.



SNV *Dhofar* at anchor off Muscat with *Nasr Al Bahr* on her port side and the new SNV *Sultana* on the starboard side.

Her first commanding officer was **Jeremy Raybould** who relinquished command of the CP to take up this appointment. The ship's primary role was the safe shipment of war stores in bulk from Muscat and foreign ports direct to Dhofar thus avoiding the perilous overland route and the expensive air bridge. "*Dhofar*" was only the navy's second modern vessel, and the first of only three vessels purchased second-hand for naval service; the other two were the Tropical Patrol Vessels "*Al Nasiri*" and "*Al Salihi*" acquired in 1975.

The navy's focus in its early years was to provide effective maritime forces in support of the struggle against the Dhofar insurgents. By nature of the escarpment, enemy forces were able to take refuge on the seaward slopes of the jebel, an area where SAF land forces had the greatest difficulty bringing concentrated fire to bear. Intelligence that the enemy routinely used this zone to lie up and rest came from their numerous campfires, and offshore patrols regularly sighted camel re-supply trains. Booms attacked these positions whenever possible, but the striking power and range of their weaponry severely limited the results and vessels were often

in danger of greater fire power from ashore. A close second in SON's task list remained the prevention of smuggling of war stores into Oman for three reasons. Firstly, they were smuggled into Dhofar as direct re-supply to the insurgents, secondly they were secretly stockpiled for future use by subversive organisations within Oman, and lastly illegal sales were made to the public for profit. The navy's highest priority was the prevention of smuggling directly into Dhofar since efforts of land forces to prevent re-supply by land would be largely nullified if re-supply by sea remained possible.

An interesting assessment of operations in Dhofar was sent to CSON by Commander Dhofar Brigade on the last day of 1972. This stated that the aim of maritime operations was twofold (a) To prevent the enemy landing arms, ammunition, food and other stores across the beaches of the Western Area, and (b) To deny to the enemy the use of coastal tracks which cannot be covered from the SIMBA position. The achievement of the aim was due to the two SON booms "*Nasr Al Bahr*", designated Charlie 1, and "*Al Muntasir*" (commissioned in 1967 and designated Charlie 2) with support from "*Al Sa'id*". It is worth quoting the assessment in full:

The aim has been achieved with considerable success and great credit is due to **Lieutenant Gillies** and his crew for their excellent work, especially in recent weeks when they have located, and together with SOAF destroyed or seriously damaged, three enemy camel trains. In addition they have engaged the enemy on the southern flank of SIMBA and along the coast to the East so that pressure has been maintained in areas which cannot at present be reached by ground forces. The series of four or five-day patrols undertaken by "*Nasr Al Bahr*", with considerable action at night as well as by day, has imposed a considerable strain on her crew and particularly her commander. I cannot speak too highly of the cheerfulness and willingness of all concerned. I have no doubt that boom ops are among the most cost-effective in Dhofar.

The Sultanate's first modern warships for over one hundred years, the Fast Patrol Boats (FPBs) "*Al Bushra*" (B1), "*Al Mansur*" (B2), and "*Al Nejah*" (B3), entered service in early 1973 with Lt Cdr Denis Connell in command of "*Al Bushra*" and as Senior Officer of the squadron.



"*Al Nejah*" (B3) arrives in Muscat from Brooke Marine.

HQSAF directed that by the end of the 1973 Khareef season, a force level of one, sometimes two FPBs and one boom was to be maintained in Dhofar waters, although this might be reduced dur-

## OMAN'S MODERN NAVY

ing the Khareef. Whilst carrying out similar tasks to the booms, the FPB's construction, power, increased range and above all superior communications, enabled them to operate far more effectively and independently.

Their two 40mm Bofors guns enabled them to put down effective ground fire in Dhofar whilst their high speed enabled them to catch and board almost any vessel in the Sultanate's waters. The introduction of the 40mm Bofors gun, first onboard "*Al Sa'id*" then in the FPBs greatly enhanced the ability to strike and eliminate targets whilst concurrently keeping vessels farther offshore out of range of retaliatory fire, thereby dramatically reversing the disadvantages previously faced by the naval forces. The new weapon terrified *adoo* hiding in seaward facing caves considered impenetrable to SAF fire.

Joint operations benefited from the FPB's superior capability as with 'Operation Black Jack'. The operation's aim was the interdiction of a supply track running below Simba from Hauf to the *adoo* areas west of Salalah. Starting at 1100 on 11 November 1973 and lasting four days, at least once in every ten minute period a missile of some sort, fired by SAF forces, including the FPBs, fell on the target. This operation delayed, if not stopped, enemy movements throughout the period.

The pattern of naval operations established during the Dhofar war along Oman's entire coast continued uninterrupted until war's end. Offensive operations against the *adoo*, fishery protection duties as with the arrest of eight Pakistani fishing vessels in March 1974, medical evacuation of civilians from the Halaniyaats, State duties of the Royal Yacht, logistical support to the ground forces in Dhofar and a host of other tasks were simply business as usual to SON by 1975. It is sometimes difficult to determine the direct effect of maritime operations in a primarily land campaign. However, it is clear that without Oman's small and hard worked naval forces the outcome in Dhofar might well have been quite different.



Joint operations, SOAF unloads equipment from *Al Sultana* for SAF land forces to build defensive lines in Dhofar.

Towards the end of the Dhofar war SON's capability was further enhanced by the arrival of two ex Dutch Navy minesweepers refitted and rearmed in Holland. Designated as Tropical Patrol Vessels, SNVs "*Al Nasiri*" (Lt Cdr Chris Binns) and "*Al Salih*" (Lt Mike Chase RN) were welcomed into the Fleet in the presence of His Majesty the Sultan at a Naval Review on 24 June 1975. The new build supply ship SNV "*Al Sultana*" (Lt Ralph Wood), also from Holland, arrived the following July to replace SNV "*Dhofar*", which became a harbour training ship in Muscat.



Omani sailors at gun drills onboard the TPVs in a cold and wet Holland.

The Dhofar War ended officially in late 1975 although sporadic problems were encountered for some months thereafter and the remainder of 1975 and most of 1976 were intensely busy times for SON in resupply and patrol duties. As the threat decreased in Dhofar and civil development grew, so SNV "*Al Sultana*'s" cargoes became more diverse: goats, fire engines, lawn mowers, tea-bags or Jabali donkey saddles – all were carried, often together. Tents and equipment for civil aid were shipped and valuable assistance was given with the carriage of vehicles and supplies for the completion and opening of Salalah's new hospital. Following the effective end of the war SON took on additional roles at the other end of the country in concentrating on anti-illegal immigrant patrols and giving assistance to the isolated communities in the Musandam peninsula. In 1976 over 1000 illegal immigrants were intercepted by SON and brought onboard SON vessels to Muscat for repatriation; SON prize crews often delivered seized vessels to Muscat for disposal.

On 1st April 1977 the Sultan's Armed Forces was reformed into three independent services with a central ministry overseeing their activities. In little more than seven years Oman's maritime force had developed from a small improvised coastal service with mixed manning to a purpose built fleet professionally manned providing vital coastal protection and logistical support to SAF and the nation. The increasing importance and stature of this new branch can be seen in the appointments of CSON. The first, **Commander Douglas Williams RN** was relieved in 1973 by **Capt Phillip Brooke-Popham RN** who in his turn was relieved by **Commodore Harry Mucklow RN** in April 1977 when the single services were established.



SON's base in Muscat now the home of the Royal Yacht Squadron.

Omanis had always formed the greater part of the manpower for the modern force and as the 1970s progressed so the seeds of full Omanisation were sown and nurtured by SON's expatriate officers. Whilst British Contract and Loan Service officers provided the heart of the officer corps, officers from the Indian Navy and then the Pakistan Navy played significant roles in the early days both ashore and afloat. The officers seconded to Oman were of quality; "*Al Mansur*" (B3) was commissioned by **Lt O.P. Bansal** with **Lt Yashwant Prasad** as his Executive officer; the former retired as Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Navy in 2005 whilst Yashwant

Prasad rose to Vice Admiral and retired having been the Vice Chief of the Indian Naval Staff. Indian and shortly afterwards Pakistan Navy sailors gave the navy the experience it needed to operate the new fleet as Omani sailors steadily gained in training and experience.

The second part of this article "Oman's Modern Navy – Maturity", will review the development of SON, now the Royal Navy of Oman, into the modern force that maintains the nation's sovereignty at sea and polices one of the world's most important maritime highways. ■

## DURU TRIBE

**John Ryan** writes:

"I served with the NFR from 1958 to 1960 and spent a couple of months with a company of the NFR at Ibri. During my time there I heard a rumour that the Duru tribe were gathering and set out to find them. When I found them it was the most remarkable sight. There must have been some two hundred men mounted on their camels performing what appeared to be a ceremonial 'ride past'.

This was followed by some impromptu camel races and ceremonial dancing. The Duru women watched the proceedings but took no part. The whole event was presided over by the paramount sheikh **Ali Bin Hilal** who owned the most beautiful white camel. This was the same Ali bin Hilal who some 10 years earlier had given **Wilfred Thesiger** permission to travel through Duru country." ■



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### CHANGES OF ADDRESS

Please ensure that you let us know of change of address. Neil Fawcett is the membership secretary. Contact details on page 3.

# SHABAB OMAN AND THE TALL SHIPS RACES 2008

by Mqm Chris Biggins

It has been a remarkably successful year for RNOV *Shabab Oman* as she participated in four major Tall Ships races in Europe, visiting en route 24 ports in 13 countries in a 29 week deployment spanning 16,800 miles.

This ninth major voyage of the ship began on 7th May from Said Bin Sultan Naval Base as she slipped to the strains of, 'We are sailing' played by the RNO Band and she was seen off by a large crowd and the guests of honour were the **French Ambassador** and **CRNO, Liwaa Abdullah Bin Khamis Al Raisi**. The ship stopped first at Port Salalah and then transited the Red Sea stopping overnight in Jeddah, before passing through the Suez Canal on 29th May.

The first port of call in Europe was the beautiful town of Nafplion, Greece where the ship was warmly welcomed back to a town she has visited on four previous occasions. During the visit, the ship's 24 trainees, which represent all branches of the Sultan's Armed Forces, Royal Oman Police and Royal Guard, had a guided tour of Athens and Mycanae and the ship hosted a reception for the Regional Governor.

From Nafplion, the ship passed through the spectacular Corinth Canal en route through the Messina Strait passing the active volcano Stromboli, to Civitavecchia for an official visit to Italy. The ship remained there for four days and cultural tours were organised to Rome and Pisa. Continuing through the Mediterranean the ship called next at Almeria in Spain and thence to the Atlantic to Aveiro in Portugal arriving on 27th June. The ship then crossed the Bay of Biscay with a high Atlantic swell for company to arrive off the French port of Le Havre on 4th July. Here she embarked the pilot for the 69 mile passage of the River Seine to Rouen; where the 'Armada 2008' regatta was about to begin.

The sailing festival in Rouen is hosted every five years and is a huge attraction in France, and during this event 34 major sailing vessels from 28 countries attended. During the ship's eight day visit, the port of Rouen was 'en fete' and one million people visited the port area on each day of the gathering to view the spectacle, with the ship receiving 40,000 visitors onboard. The ship hosted an official reception which was attended by the French Navy's Commander-in-Chief, **Admiral Fossier**, and tours were arranged for all the crews to visit Paris. The ship's sporting teams took part in the many inter-fleet events, displaying their prowess and winning the football competition's gold medal. At the conclusion of the event the President of Rouen Armada 2008 presented the ship with the event's 'Entente Cordiale' prize. The ships departed in a parade of sail down the Seine to Le Havre on 14th July, Bastille Day in a spectacle watched by an estimated 3 million people who manned every vantage point along the river banks in glorious summer weather.

The next port of call was Liverpool, European capital of culture and the start of the Tall Ship event 2008. Securing the gather-



Images by Mqm Chris Biggins

Passing through the Corinth Canal.

## SHABAB OMAN AND THE TALL SHIP RACES 2008

ing had been an important event in the city's calendar and the fleet of participating vessels now expanded to 64 and ranged in size from the Russian ship 'Mir' at 95 metres to the 17 metres 'Spaniel' from Latvia. **Princess Anne** and **Prince Andrew** both visited the ships in harbour and while the event was well publicised, unseasonably cold, wet and windy weather kept visitor numbers rather lower than had been expected.

The first race commenced off Northern Ireland on 23rd July, Oman's Renaissance Day, and the 700 mile course took the ships through the Minches, off the Hebrides, then north of the Shetlands and across the North Sea to the finish line off Maloy in Norway. The weather was mixed with some good sailing when speeds of over

10 knots were achieved, interspaced with long periods of calm. The average speed for this seven day race was 4.3 knots, and The Minches were a particularly difficult area to navigate, several ships finding themselves trapped in this area. The ship's final position in this race was 13th out of 35.

The tiny fishing port of Maloy was the smallest town ever to host the Tall Ships and the population of just 4,000 doubled while the ships were in harbour. The town made a huge effort to welcome the fleet and the five day visit passed all too quickly. From Maloy the ships exchanged groups of crew members in a week long cultural exchange and joining *Shabab Oman* were seven foreign cadets, two from Russia, one from Britain, three from Mexico and one from France.

The fleet left Maloy on 4th August in a grand parade of sail and then proceeded to visit different ports in Norway, through the magnificent fjords, in the phase called the cruise-in company. *Shabab Oman* visited Askvoll, Balestrand, Mariehamn and finally arrived in Bergen the main port of the event on 8th August. In Bergen the ship hosted its now famous traditional Omani breakfast, where guests were invited to sit on the deck and sample the delights of Oman, using their right hand and eating from a fuddle tray. These proved enormously popular and were supplemented by more formal curry luncheons served on the quarterdeck. In all of the larger ports a crew parade took place with each ship landing a marching



Prince Andrew meets ship's officers in Liverpool.



The start of the cruise in Bergen.



The picturesque Norwegian town of Maloy.

detail, these were a great attraction drawing, cheering and applauding crowds of over 100,000 spectators.

The fleet sailed from Bergen in a parade of sail and the race to Den Helder commenced during the late afternoon of 12th August. The course included a waypoint off Aberdeen making a total length of 820 miles. The winds were often adverse and in this race some hard tacking was required particularly off the Scottish coast when over one 24 hour period the ship sailed 119 miles and yet had made just 32 miles towards the finish line. After six days of hard racing it soon became apparent that retirement was the only option as a full gale approached and headway was required. The gale unleashed

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squalls of 50 knots of wind and mountainous seas causing the ship to roll 45 degrees, but by then Den Helder was close at hand and the ship entered the sheltered harbour on 19th August; a very welcome respite from the raging elements out in the North Sea and with no injuries to her gallant crew.

In the final port of the year's main event, a busy programme was arranged of sporting competitions, tours, visitors, parades and the ship was made very welcome in the premier naval base of Holland. At the final prize-giving the most coveted award is always the Friendship Trophy, which is awarded on the vote of all the participating ships, to the vessel that has done the most for international friendship and understanding. In Den Helder the award was made to *Shabab Oman* by the Queen's Commissioner, making the fifth time the ship has received this prestigious trophy.

From Holland the ship moved to Bremerhaven for the major 'Small Sail Festival' from 26th – 31st August and this was a well attended event with almost 100 vessels participating. The ship again proved extremely popular and 15,000 visitors were received onboard.

From Germany the ship crossed the North Sea to visit the English port of Hull to carry out a crew change and the first leg trainees, who had done extremely well during their four months on board, were repatriated and a new group flew out. On 7th September the ship sailed down the North Sea and English Channel to berth in Falmouth on 10th September.

The final Tall Ship event of the year was designated the Funchal 500 Regatta celebrating the 500th anniversary of the bestowing of city status on the Madeiran capital. The regatta consisted of a race to Aveiro in Portugal and then a final race to Funchal. In this gathering there were 10 Class A vessels and 10 smaller ships making a fleet of 20, representing 10 nations from as far afield as Mexico and Uruguay.

Falmouth was an enjoyable visit and the ship was fortunate to have **Cdr Tom Hammon WKHM(G) (ex-RNO)** as its Senior Liaison Officer. There were the usual ingredients to a visit; an opening ceremony, Captain's Gala Dinner, sports competitions which included dragon boat racing, a crew party, a street parade and a parade of sail on departure. The fleet departed Falmouth on 13th September on a glorious afternoon and over 130,000 people gathered along the coastline to witness the spectacle. As the vessels lined up for the start of the race, *Shabab Oman* was judged to have been seven seconds over the line at the start and was therefore awarded the option of a

standard time penalty of 3 hours to be added to the elapsed time or to perform a 360 degree turn. The ship elected to carry out the manoeuvre and this was accomplished in 14 minutes, thereby saving valuable time and eliciting praise for the speed of the manoeuvre.

Very light winds dogged the start of the race to Aveiro/Ilhavo and it took three days to clear the Channel. Better progress was made across the Bay of Biscay and the race ended at sea on the sixth day and the ship arrived in Aveiro on 19th September, having sailed 650 miles from Falmouth. In this race the ship was placed 9th out of 10 in class and 13th overall out of 20.

The visit to Aveiro went well and the ship averaged 2,000 visitors per day. The new trainees settled in quickly, adjusting to an unfamiliar environment with surprising ease and in the sporting competition they again won the football and volleyball prizes. The parade of sail on departure had to be cancelled because of dense fog and later the race too had to be postponed due to a complete lack of wind. These conditions lasted for three days with daily reviews made by the Race Committee of the extraordinary calms that persisted over the southern half of Portugal at that time. Eventually the final race commenced at sea on 26th September and all 20 vessels made a clean start. Initially wind conditions were light but a 'soldier's wind' came up from the north west and steadily strengthened and so the race was on! Speeds quickly rose to an exhilarating 11 knots and for 24 hours the ship recorded 198 miles for a day's run, one of the best on record. Some squalls were experienced which recorded winds of 35 knots, but a well practised drill of quickly shortening sail, prevented any damage or excessive heeling.



Very light winds dogged the start of the race to Aveiro/Ilhavo and it took three days to clear the Channel.

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The finishing line to the east of Madeira Island was crossed at a speed of 9.5 knots and the ship hauled down her sails, with some reluctance and berthed in the pretty harbour on 29th September, 630 miles from Aveiro. The ship opened to the public in Funchal and took part in all the organised events. The now ever popular breakfasts and lunches were hosted and the ship's musicians, bagpipes

and traditional drums, held visitors enthralled. The crew parade on 3rd October was well attended by the townsfolk and the crowning moment came at the prize-giving in the city square with the award of the Friendship Trophy for the second time in a year. There was great rejoicing at the announcement and the second group of trainees had proved they could charm and impress the other ships with their genuine warmth, sincerity, friendliness and hospitality.

The ships departed Funchal on 5th October, taking part in a final parade of sail and then with some regret, breaking off to pursue their respective, homeward courses. The association of the last four months was finally broken and many friendships had been made.

The next port of call was Casablanca in Morocco and the ship settled into a standard routine port visit, which was quite different from that to which we had become accustomed. The ship hosted the Governor to lunch and later to an evening reception with the

Photo Rqb Bas m Rr FO



Sultanate's ambassador and embassy staff. The Royal Moroccan Navy were generous hosts and tours were arranged to Rabat and Marrakesh. The ship bid farewell on 12th October and on the 13th called briefly in at Gibraltar to take on fuel. The short time available was put to good use and a tour of the Rock was arranged while the ship refuelled.

The ship arrived in her next port of call, Tunis on 18th October and spent three days seeing the sites of Carthage

and being entertained by the Sultanate's embassy staff and the Tunisian Navy. From Tunis the ship completed her run across the Mediterranean and passed through Suez on 28th/29th October and then spent 3 days in Jeddah from 1st – 4th November. On reaching Bab Al Mandeb on 8th November, at the base of the Red Sea, the ship was escorted through the piracy-prone waters of the Gulf of Aden by *RNOV Al Mansoor* to arrive back in Salalah on the 12th, almost six months later. After a short stay in Salalah the ship sailed on the 14th for the final 660 mile leg to Wudam. The ship returned home to a rapturous welcome on 19th November with the Dutch ambassador as the guest of honour. The ship and her intrepid crew had again prominently shown the flag, proudly rekindling the ancient seafaring traditions and returned home to their well deserved rest. ■

## VISIT TO MUSCAT BY HMS NORFOLK – 1949

**EXTRACT FROM THE JOURNAL OF MIDSHIPMAN D.J.H. ROBINSON**  
*(Robbie was SO1 Training in HQ SON 77-83)*

*Contributed by Mrs Valerie Robinson*

### **Monday 31st January 1949**

Muscat light appeared at 0517, considerably earlier than was expected, so speed was reduced and the ship lay off, as it were, until we entered the anchorage and at 0830, let go. The salute we fired just before was returned by the town's muzzle-loading battery. Having fallen out from the foc'sle, I took over my forenoon watch. All possible ceremonial occurred with the Political Agent and the Sultan coming on board, and the Commander-in-Chief landing to call on the Sultan between these calls.

For such a rocky town landing facilities are surprisingly inadequate, for though the cliffs are steep with a narrow ledge at the high water mark, the landing places are gently shelving, and passengers have to be landed and embarked from the Political Agent's Steps by whaler, acting as a ferry to the motor boat. The pinnace used a jetty where the dhows secure.

All fourteen Europeans were involved in a social whirl with the ship, both ashore and on board.

Since H.H. the Sultan suggested that we should paint "*Norfolk*"'s name on the rocks, the Gunnery Officer took me

ashore as rock-climbing consultant to help choose a suitable site. After scrambling amongst the other names occupying every possible space *HMS Teazer* 1870, *HMS Renown*, *Falmouth*, *Wild Goose*, *Lock Quoich*, *Wren* etc etc for two hours, we decided on a small face, less than twenty feet, where a ten foot ladder would suffice for painting the name and the flag.

### **Tuesday, 1st February**

**Lieut (S) Vincent** gave a lecture on "Entry and Advancement" in the forenoon, which fortunately finished at 1130, giving me time to organise the ladders, rope, paint and accessories for the painting of Norfolk's name which task had been delegated to the Gunroom.

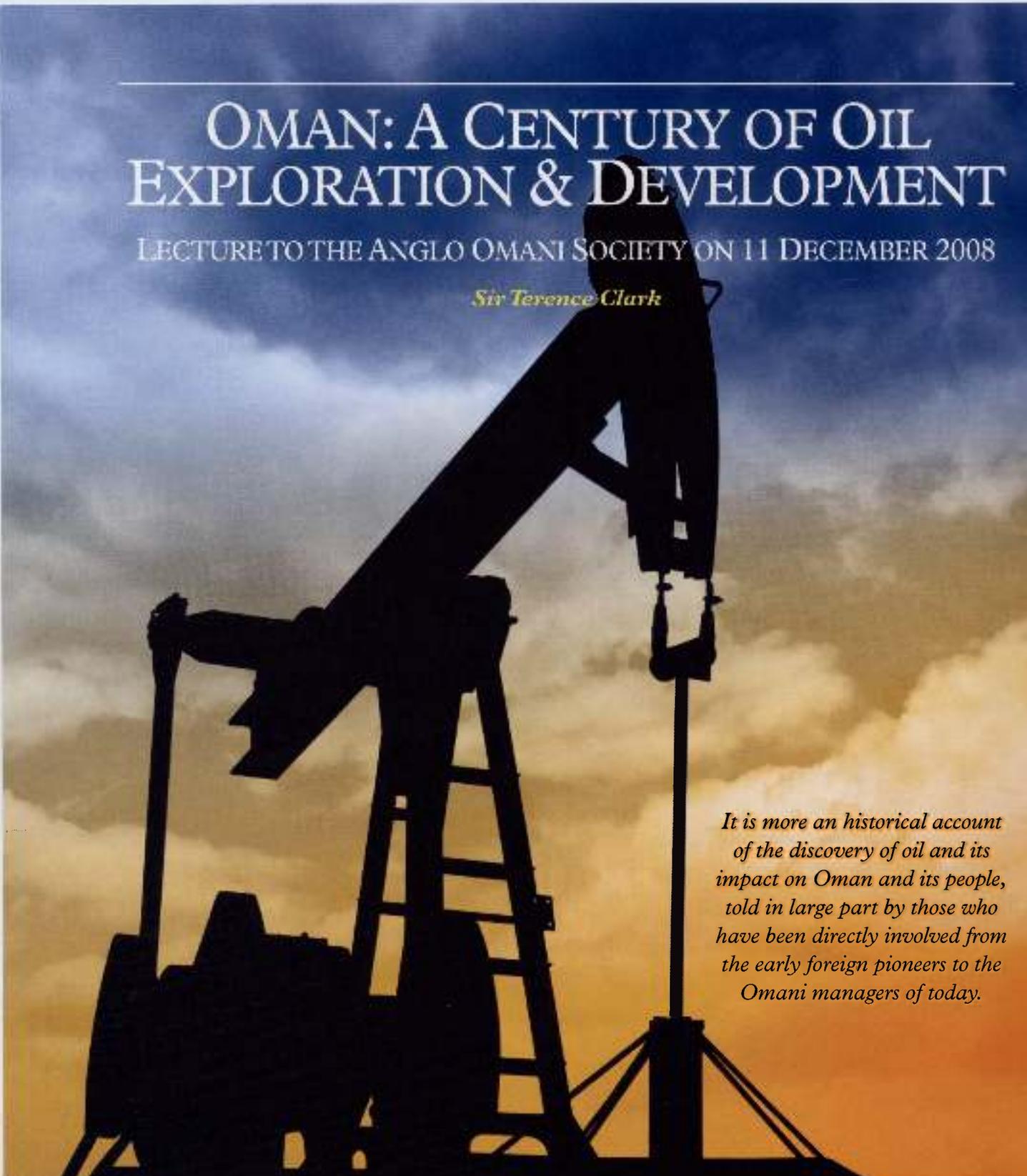
After lunch we were delayed by the failure of electric power when jelly-fish choked the turbo generators circulators, but eventually the skiff was lowered and armed as above, with entrenching tools and swimming gear added we continued inshore and commenced operations. Our task completed under the careful supervision of the Gunnery Officer (Make the "F" a little higher. Carry it on to the left!!"); we changed into bathing trunks and began fishing. ■

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# OMAN: A CENTURY OF OIL EXPLORATION & DEVELOPMENT

LECTURE TO THE ANGLO OMANI SOCIETY ON 11 DECEMBER 2008

*Sir Terence Clark*



*It is more an historical account  
of the discovery of oil and its  
impact on Oman and its people,  
told in large part by those who  
have been directly involved from  
the early foreign pioneers to the  
Omani managers of today.*

The title of my talk might come as a surprise to most people, who would probably connect oil in Oman with the 1960s. I thought the same until I began research for a book that I wrote a year or so ago called 'Underground to Overseas: the story of Petroleum Development Oman'. I have often been asked since how I, as a former diplomat, came to write a book about the oil business. I would certainly agree with the scepticism implicit in the question that it would not be a subject for amateurs, if the book were about extracting barrels of oil from the ground in Oman, but, you will be relieved to hear, it is not. It is more an historical account of the discovery of oil and its impact on Oman and its people, told in large part by those who have been directly involved from the early foreign pioneers to the Omani managers of today.

The prospects for oil in Oman about a century ago were not encouraging. The British Government of India had already sent a geologist from the Geological Survey of India to look at the geology of the Gulf, including Oman between November 1904 and January 1905. In Oman he was hampered by the unsettled tribal situation and had to keep largely to the Muscat area. He produced a geological map of the region and a regional stratigraphy and concluded inaccurately, as things turned out, that the prospects for valuable deposits were better in Persia than on the Arab side of the Gulf, though he admitted that much of the latter remained unknown.

However he appeared to be justified when after many setbacks the **William Knox D'Arcy** syndicate first found oil in commercial quantities in Iran at Masjid-i-Sulaiman in 1908. The D'Arcy

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Exploration Company Limited that was formed for exploration in territories outside Persia succeeded in 1925 in signing with **Sultan Taimur bin Faisal** an agreement whereby the Sultan granted to the Company a licence to explore in Oman for two years with an option on a further two years in return for a payment of Rs.10, 000 in consideration of the assistance and protection to be afforded to its employees, though, as we shall see, the protection did not add up to much!

Sultan Taimur had inherited from his father a country that was troubled with debt and threatened with political instability. The difficulties for international trade resulting from the First World War only compounded his parlous financial situation. Sultan Taimur was also beset by a severe conflict with the tribes of the Interior that was resolved only after lengthy negotiations with their Imam and the signature in 1920 of an accord brokered by the British Political Agent called the Treaty of Seeb. Seeing the benefits flowing from the discovery of oil elsewhere in the region, Sultan Taimur welcomed prospecting for oil on his territory as a means to overcoming all these difficulties, but his lack of effective control over much of the most promising areas proved to be a severe hindrance to exploration.

The first attempt was by **George Lees**, a remarkable self-taught Irish geologist working on behalf of the D'Arcy Exploration Company. In the winter of 1925-26 he led an expedition to survey 'Oman and the south-eastern Arabian coast as far as the province of Dhofar', with **K Washington Gray**, also a geologist, **Joseph Fernandez**, an Indian botanist and collector, and **Hajji Abdallah Williamson**, as their "political agent". Williamson was another remarkable man who had gone to sea in his teens, turned Muslim in Aden, and lived for many years among the Bedouin of Iraq as a horse dealer and pearl merchant before joining the Anglo-Persian Oil Company as inspector of their Gulf agencies. I am indebted to the RSAA library for these historic photos of the expedition. After exploring Musandam, they returned to Muscat, where they were joined on part of their journey by **Captain Eccles** of the Indian Army, commanding the Muscat State Levies, **Bertram Thomas**, Minister of Finance to the Sultan, and the Wali of Khaburah. The expedition was only a qualified success. As Lees reported to the Royal Geographical Society in London in January 1928: 'Systematic exploration of the interior of Arabia, or indeed its fringes, is greatly hampered by formidable natural barriers and by still more serious obstacles caused by the independent spirit of its inhabitants... I was unsuccessful in penetrating into the heart of the Oman ranges, the great Jabal al Akhdar (or the Green Mountain), but I traversed a considerable extent of hitherto unex-

plored country farther to the north, crossing the mountain ranges six times in all.'

Lees and Gray continued their survey by boat south down the coast from Muscat, noting the geological features of the landscape all the way to Mirbat in Dhofar. They went ashore at Surair near Duqm, which features later as the base of the next geological survey. However Lees' report gave an indication then of the sort of problems that would face the successor geologists: 'The natives of this delectable coastline are so jealous of their independence, and so fearful of the possibility of our peaceful penetration, that no amount of persuasion or argument could elicit any information whatsoever from them regarding the natural features of the country, or even place names. Mr Thomas had previously made arrangements for our landing here, and we were met on arrival by **Shaikh Mansur** and about 150 wild and gaunt Jannabah tribesmen. Our welcome could not be described as cordial, nor were any regrets expressed on our departure.'

Although the Sultan and the British Government were keen that exploration should continue, it seems the Company decided that the difficulties were too great and allowed the agreement to lapse. **Sir Arnold Wilson**, who had been appointed chairman of D'Arcy Exploration Company early in 1926, expressed the pessimistic view 'that Arabia appeared to be devoid of all prospects'.

In 1932, because of ill health, Sultan Taimur abdicated in favour of his eighteen-year-old son, **Said**, and retired to live in Bombay until his death in 1965. Like his father, Sultan Said also

felt obliged to pursue a very tight fiscal policy and ordained that the state must pay off its outstanding debts and live within its means.

In 1929 the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), in which Anglo-Persian, Shell, Compagnie Française des Pétroles and Near East Development Company each had 23.75% and Gulbenkian had 5%, had formed a subsidiary called Petroleum Concessions Limited to seek concessions outside Iraq and in June 1937 a Company representative visited Oman. He easily reached agreement on options for a 75-year term (until 2012) for Oman and separately for Dhofar with Sultan Said, who was glad of the prospect of having his financial straits eased by the Company's down payment and rental of some Rs.100, 000. These options were subsequently assigned to Petroleum Development (Oman and Dhofar) to operate the concession. As in the case of the previous licence of 1925, the new agreement explicitly admitted the difficulties of working in the tribal areas of the Interior by stating: 'The Company recognises that certain parts of the Sultan's territory are not at present safe for its oper-



**Eccles, who joined Lees' expedition, is seen here in Arab dress. (By permission of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs.)**

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*The discovery of oil on the Trucial Coast has roused the cupidity and suspicion of the nearby tribes and has made them increasingly jealous of their rights.*

ations. The Sultan undertakes on his part to use his good offices with a view to making it possible for representatives of the Company to enter such parts and will inform the Company as soon as such parts become safe.'

During the winter of 1937-38 IPC geologists carried out initial surveys along the coast of Oman from their base in Dubai. They planned a more extensive programme for the Interior during the winter of 1938-39 but in attempting to put it into effect they once again ran into difficulties with the tribes. Two geologists started on the Batinah and made their way up the Wadi Hawasinah towards Ibri but they came under fire and had to make a detour to Buraimi. The expedition had little opportunity to study or evaluate properly the geology along their route and if anything it served rather to entrench the rapacious attitude of the tribes towards the oil company. The discovery of oil in Bahrain in 1932 and in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in 1938 had raised expectations among the tribes, as **Wilfred Thesiger** noted in a similar context when travelling between Ibri and Buraimi a decade later: 'The discovery of oil on the Trucial Coast has roused the cupidity and suspicion of the nearby tribes and has made them increasingly jealous of their rights. Involved in intrigues to preserve or increase their territorial claims, they are at present agreed only in the policy of excluding all Europeans from their land.' Then the Second World War intervened and all fieldwork came to a halt.

However when the end of the conflict was in sight the Company thought it prudent to exclude the possibility of any rival company entering the scene by signing with the Sultan a full concession agreement in 1944. In the aftermath of the War IPC were more interested in other ventures elsewhere but the Sultan was keen on a resumption of exploration, especially in Dhofar. Indeed he brought in **Sir Cyril Fox**, the recently retired Director of the Geological Survey of India, who advised in his report of 1947 'there are potentialities of oil in Dhofar, notwithstanding the disappointing evidence so far obtained from surface exposures'. The Company

felt bound to do something but were concerned about the security situation in the Interior. The British government advised them to keep to Dhofar.

In February 1948 two IPC geologists, **Rene Wetzel** and **Mike Morton**, arrived in Salalah. Their mission was to evaluate the local oil prospects and to form a broader view of the conditions in the wider region. Over the next six weeks the two geologists and their tribal escorts made a gruelling journey by camel over 600 kilometres across Dhofar. The results of their survey were not encouraging. They reported: 'Dhofar can be rejected as a possible oilfield.' The Company acted on this advice and on 20 December 1950 wrote to the Sultan giving formal notice of its intention to terminate the concession in Dhofar in six months' time. According to **Dr Wendell Phillips**, the American archaeologist and oilman who

knew the Sultan well, the Sultan told him he had replied to the Company immediately and briefly to the effect that he was delighted. In the same discussion the Sultan went on to explain to Phillips that while he was glad of the annual payments for the concession, he needed oil. He was disappointed that the Company had drilled no test wells or even located well sites in four-



**Wilfred Thesiger and some of his original guides in Muscat in 1931**

teen years. In fact the Sultan appeared eager to make a change and offered him the concession for Dhofar on the spot. The Sultan wanted to waste no time and he and Phillips quickly thrashed out the terms of a concession. Phillips assigned the concession to a series of American oil companies, which over the succeeding years found a few traces of oil but never enough to exploit.

Meanwhile it had been agreed to change the name of the Company to Petroleum Development (Oman) Ltd – PD(O) – for the north, where the Sultan thought that exploration might now proceed; and in the winter of 1947-48 the Company sent a representative to negotiate entry to the Interior. His arrival in Ibri in a Chevrolet pickup caused quite a stir. He reported: 'The car aroused great interest amongst the local inhabitants, some 500 of whom spent the entire night watching it to see whether it breathed, slept, partook of nourishment or even took to the air since they thought it was the same species of the animal kingdom which occasionally flew over their heads and whose eyes were of different colours one being red and the other green!' He took it upon himself to start negotiating with individual shaikhs as the only way of making progress in an area that was remote from the Sultan's control and riven with local rivalries and feuds but the Sultan was furious and ruled that all negotiations had to be conducted through him.

PD(O) were so keen now to concentrate on northern Oman, as their appetite had been whetted in March 1948 when on a flight from Sharjah to Masirah the IPC's deputy chief geologist had spotted what he described as 'a beautiful anticline', which was called by the Bedouin 'Jabal Fuhud' [the mountain of leopards].

In 1949 Company representatives made another attempt to

## OMAN: A CENTURY OF OIL EXPLORATION & DEVELOPMENT

The Fahud and North fields. (By permission of Petroleum Development Oman.)



enter the Interior but were shot at on the way to Buraimi, where they found the local shaikhs were very truculent, refusing to recognise the Sultan's authority to deal with the Company on their behalf and demanding payment to themselves. However the Sultan agreed that the Company could try to make contact with the Duru' whose tribal area included Jabal Fahud, but this was easier said than done.

The Company was also faced with other political difficulties that ruled out any further attempt at exploration in the Buraimi area, ownership of which at that time was disputed by the Saudis. The British Government banned the Company from going into the disputed area and advised the Company to concentrate its activities elsewhere in Oman.

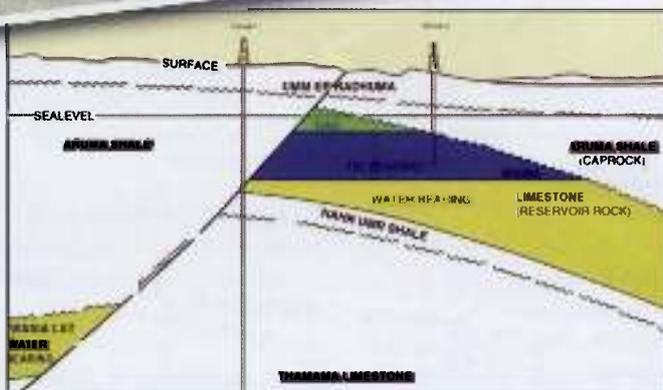
The Company turned its attention to an expedition to the south-east coast of Oman, where there was only a sparse local population and where it was thought exploration could be conducted without tribal or political problems and formally sought the Sultan's permission. The Sultan at first wavered but later agreed that the Company could land on the south coast but to penetrate no more than fifty kilometres inland. Encouraged by the British government, the Company began negotiations with the Sultan to raise a military force, to be called the Muscat and Oman Field Force (MOFF), to protect their operations. It was agreed that the Sultan would be responsible for it, that the Company would foot the bill and that the British government would arm and train it.

After lengthy preparations, towards the middle of February 1954 Company representatives, geologists and surveyors with three officers of the MOFF and a hundred or so soldiers and assorted vehicles on board the Company's landing craft *Jamila* and *Jesoura* set sail from Muscat bound first for Sur, where they collected the para-

mount shaikh of the Janabah tribe. Two more geologists arrived from Aden on a third landing craft, the *Jawada*. They landed without incident near Duqm and, accompanied by their military escorts, the geologists were able to get on with their work of examining the rock formations a short distance inland.

A few weeks later the Sultan arrived at Duqm on board a British Navy frigate, together with **Major Chauncy**, the British consul-general in Muscat. The Sultan proceeded to inspect the troops and was clearly disappointed at seeing the MOFF for the first time and at the total absence of heavy machinery. Back on board after the meeting the Sultan made it clear that until the MOFF was at full strength at the beach-head, the Company geologists should explore no further than the immediate area.

What happened next proved to be a vital moment not only in the history of the oil industry but also in Oman itself. In May 1954, the Imam died and in his place the religious and temporal leaders had chosen a young man, who unlike his ultra-conservative predecessor wanted to bring the Imamate out of its previous isolation and to achieve international recognition. The modus vivendi that had existed since the signing of the treaty of Seeb between



The near miss at Fahud 1. (By permission of Petroleum Development Oman.)

the Sultan in Muscat and the tribes of the Interior in 1920 began to disintegrate. The new Imamate applied to join the Arab League, looking to Egypt and Saudi Arabia for support, and declared the Company's concession invalid.

However not all the tribes had supported the old Imam and within a few days of his death the Sultan changed his policy about the Company entering the territory of the Duru' tribe, where Jabal Fahud was situated. In August 1954 some of the Duru' shaikhs arrived in Muscat. The Sultan was away in Dhofar, but the Minister of the Interior, **Sayyid Ahmed bin Ibrahim** and **Edward Henderson** of IPC, persuaded the shaikhs to sign a pledge of allegiance to the Sultan, provided that he would come to their assistance if the forces of the Imam attacked them. Meanwhile the Imam's forces had advanced on Ibri, near Tan'am where the Duru' owned many palm trees and they also relied on Ibri as a market for their camels, salt and charcoal. With the threat to Ibri, the Duru' shaikhs fled to Sharjah via Buraimi, leaving Ibri open to the Imam's forces who occupied it in force. When Henderson flew into Sharjah he was met by the excited shaikhs, who wanted Ibri recaptured at once! He persuaded seven of them to fly with him to Duqm in order to accompany the expedition to Fahud accompanied by a strong force. When they arrived at Duqm, the shaikhs demanded an escort to Tan'am from **Col. Coriat**, commander of the MOFF, who had established his camp nearby. There was no time to waste as the field work had to begin before the hot season came round

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again with its severe sandstorms that prevented aircraft from landing and also before the monsoon in May that would make unloading on the beach at Duqm impossible for the following three months. Coriat had however specific orders from the Sultan permitting PD(O) to prospect for minerals in the area of Fahud, provided they were accompanied by the MOFF and the Duru' Shaikhs, but not to enter villages or encampments en route, unless at the invitation of the local Shaikh. The Sultan later directed that the troops might not enter Tan'am. Coriat could not disobey such an order but said he would bend his instructions and advance to Fahud if the Duru' agreed. **Shaikh Ali bin Hilal**, who had now become the spokesman for the Duru' shaikhs reluctantly agreed, realising that there was no alternative to the compromise, whereby the Company agreed to transport the shaikhs to Tan'am.

In the early hours of 19 October, the advance party set off for Fahud and by driving straight across the desert by compass came in sight of Fahud 3 days later. **Don Sheridan**, one of the geologists wrote in his book 'Fahud – the Leopard Mountain': 'Climbing out of one minor wadi, the Jebel came suddenly and unexpectedly into view. It was breathtaking. The object of our professional desires since the landings in February now lay before us like a huge, smooth, arch-backed whale, overpowering in its immensity. There was not much to say. We were looking at a creation of God that few humans had ever seen'. They took enough rock samples and measurements of thickness to enable a reliable appreciation of the surface stratigraphy to be made.

Meanwhile the Duru' were becoming impatient and wanted the party to press on to Tan'am, where they believed that their date palms were under threat from the Imam's forces. Coriat had received further instructions from the Sultan permitting a move to Tan'am if invited by the shaikhs but with minimum disturbance. The Sultan feared the advance might provoke a showdown with the Imam for which he was not ready. On the following morning the Company representatives and the Duru' shaikhs drove into Tan'am, while the MOFF remained outside in support. They received a very friendly welcome and there was no sign of an enemy. They were told that although the Imam's forces had taken Ibri and were still in the fort, they had not bothered to attack Tan'am. The main force under the Imam had then withdrawn to Nizwa.

The problem of Ibri remained and Edward Henderson, who played the key role, decided on a plan with Coriat to bluff the Imam's forces into thinking the MOFF were ready to attack with overwhelming force by driving their few vehicles around with a lot of noise and dust. The ruse worked and Ibri was taken without a shot fired, though it was some while before the Sultan reluctantly accepted the success.

In fact the consequences of this expedition were far reaching not only for the government in Muscat but also for the Company. Whatever his reservations, the Sultan was seen to have taken action, which enhanced his prestige among the tribes. He then embarked on a series of measures to consolidate his control over the country. In early 1955 he arrived in Muscat after an absence of

two years and summoned the tribal leaders to meet him. As for the Company, the way was now clearer for the geologists to get on with surveying and mapping the area's full prospective oil potential.

At the end of October 1955 the British Government considered the Saudis had breached the Standstill Agreement on Buraimi and organised a force from the Trucial Oman Levies with a troop from the Muscat infantry to expel



Members of the Muscat & Oman Field Force on board the LCT Jesoura at Duqm in 1954.  
(By permission of the Iraq Petroleum Company.)

them. Edward Henderson again played an important role, though not for the IPC but as the political adviser, representing the British political resident in Bahrain. Shortly afterwards the Sultan's forces took peacefully Nizwa and other strongholds of the Imam, who abdicated his position: the country was for the moment united under the Sultan, who decided to make an epic journey from Salalah to the north of his country. **James (later Jan) Morris** was invited to join this tour and later wrote a book entitled appropriately, "Sultan in Oman", giving a detailed account of the expedition, which called at Fahud, where the Company had started drilling their first test well in January 1956.

Morris described Fahud: 'It was certainly remarkable to find, plumb in the middle of an almost unexplored territory, in a spot where (as it happened) there was no drinking water at all, a settlement so comfortably and even luxuriously appointed. The huts of Fahud were raised on blocks above the sandy gravel, I forget why, so that my first impression was of an unusually well appointed bathing beach. Living in one of these huts, however was more like living in a long-range air-liner. Each was divided into four rooms (bedside lamps, rugs, white sheets), so neat and cosy that you almost expected the stewardess to bring you the morning paper.'

The Company benefited from this consolidation of the Sultan's rule by being allowed to explore in some areas that hitherto had been placed off limits, but it was not without frustration where the Jabal al-Akhdar was concerned and danger more generally. Elsewhere the Company pressed ahead with a base and an airport on the coast and drove a road through the Samail gap in the mountains to link up with Fahud.

Fahud -1, the Company's first exploration well in Oman, had been 'spudded in' in January 1956 and was drilled to 3000 metres before being abandoned as a dry hole in May 1957. It turned out that although the well had been sited on what appeared to be a perfect oil-bearing anticline, the structure was in fact cut by an under-

ground fault. The well crossed the fault and penetrated only a few metres into the oil-bearing limestone formation, which at the time was not recognised. They did not know how close they were to hitting the reservoir, just over two hundred metres away from today's producing wells, which shows how fine the margin was between success and failure. Fahud -1 has been described as the unluckiest and most ill-fated wildcat well in the history of Middle East oil.

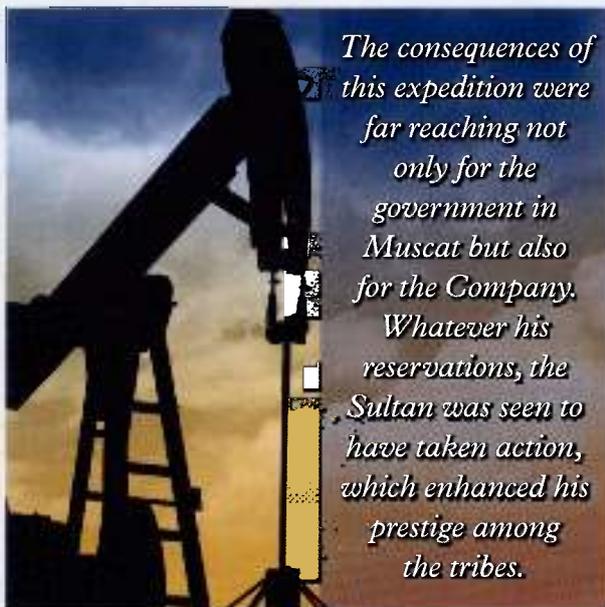
The unification of Oman and what appeared to be the end of tribal problems in the Interior meant that the Company could now operate more widely than before; but in the rest of the country things were far from quiet below the surface and intrigues were going on between the former Imam and his followers. In the summer of 1957 they returned to Oman and began waging a guerrilla war. Nizwa was abandoned and the army fell back on Fahud; the situation was extremely tense throughout the Interior and PD(O) were on the point of evacuation. The situation was saved by the British Government's decision to send in troops to support the Sultan's forces. By the end of August, the situation was restored and the British troops went home. The Samail Gap was re-opened but the rebels continued to resort to guerrilla tactics, particularly mine laying, which posed a serious threat not only to army but also to Company vehicles. The task of restoring peace had only been partly accomplished and it was clear that further military action would be needed to bring the Interior under control. At the end of 1958 and in early 1959, British troops were again brought in to launch an operation on the Jabal al-Akhdhar. However the rebel leaders were not captured and dissident activity was stepped up.

The politically disturbed situation and increased operating costs, coupled with the lack of exploration success after an expenditure of around £12 million led the IPC shareholders to reconsider the desirability of continuing in Oman. All the international oil companies were under pressure to cut back expenditure and give up seemingly unprofitable ventures in other parts of Arabia. The supply of crude oil at the time far exceeded demand and consequently prices were low, a situation that was to change with the formation of OPEC in 1960. The outcome was that during the last months of 1959 and the beginning of 1960, some of the shareholders, including BP withdrew from the Oman venture, while Shell and Partex decided to stay on a strictly limited basis and on 1 October 1960. Shell took over the management of the Company.

After a series of dry holes and other setbacks, such as blowouts, PD(O) finally struck oil in the Natih field in 1963 and with the geological information gained there they revisited the Fahud anticline, drilled a second well and discovered what was to be the mainstay of Oman's oil production for many years. This led in 1966 to the construction of the first oil pipeline to the coast, from where in July 1967 oil was exported for the first time. It was hardly an auspicious

occasion. The war in Biafra and the closure of the Suez Canal during the Arab/Israel 6-day war had led Shell to bring forward its plans for exports by 6 months and the necessary facilities were not quite ready. It took a great deal of local engineering ingenuity, including an amazing device powered by a simple Black & Decker electric hand drill to open and close the valves on the feeder hoses, and heroic efforts at Fahud in the face of a freak storm to produce the oil for the first tanker, the *Mosprince*. Even then it was nearly an ecological disaster, as the tanker arriving at an uncharted terminal struck the single-buoy mooring violently and it was feared, as the oil pressure in the feeder hoses suddenly dropped, that there was a serious leak. In the event there was none but it was an anxious moment on the brink of a new era.

PD(O) rapidly became the single most important source of revenue and employment for Oman. This might have been seen as a blessing to such an impecunious ruler as Sultan Said but he was reluctant to use his new wealth on improving the miserable lot of his people at a pace that was commensurate with their eager aspirations for health and education programmes and an easing of the many petty restrictions on daily life. His own son **Qaboos** resolved the situation on 23 July 1970 by ousting his father and embarking immediately on Oman's renaissance. Oil provided therefore the propellant for the abrupt emergence of Oman from the darkness of the Middle



*The consequences of this expedition were far reaching not only for the government in Muscat but also for the Company. Whatever his reservations, the Sultan was seen to have taken action, which enhanced his prestige among the tribes.*

Ages into the light of the 20th century.

PD(O) had to adjust quickly to a new situation where suddenly many new opportunities opened up, especially regarding higher education overseas for its Omani employees and the local purchase of goods and services to boost the economy, all of which had previously been subject to the personal control of Sultan Said. Over the succeeding years PDO has gradually changed from an essentially expatriate company enjoying a privileged existence in a 'golden cage' to the present largely Omani enterprise with a highly developed social and environmental conscience. It has also had to face up to the competition of other oil companies that have come in to exploit areas it has surrendered.

Oman's complex geological structure has always made its oil – and more recently gas – more difficult to find and more expensive to extract than in some of the neighbouring countries. This requires PDO to work at the cutting edge of petroleum and gas technology if it is to maintain anything like today's levels of production. At present it seems that the prospects of sufficient investment and an agreeable lifestyle continues to attract high-calibre expatriate staff and the educational systems put in place by the Company and the government are providing a flow of young Omanis capable of rising to the challenges ahead. Oman's oil industry has come a long way from those pioneering attempts a century ago and seems set to continue for a good many years yet. ■

# ON A WING AND A 2 STROKE

by *Patrick Brook*

In 2007 I wrote about Kota Mama VI the expedition to Bolivia with the great explorer **John Blashford Snell**. We took two paramotors with us which were intended to be used for reconnaissance and for communications. A paramotor aircraft is a wing with the pilot suspended beneath with a powerful engine on his back. The senior pilot **Dean Eldridge** had to fly alone as the other aircraft had been damaged after an engine failure. Dean was limited to his maximum range of fifty kilometres over dense and impenetrable jungle with little or no hope of survival if he had crashed. These aircraft clearly had great potential for expedition work and I made up my mind that if I was ever to partake in another it would not be on the ground. The wing is like a large parachute and weighs only a few kilos – the engine which is strapped to the pilots back is a two stroke producing over 50kg of thrust through the propeller. The paramotor is launched by dragging the wing from the ground up above your head – once the wing is overhead the pilot applies full throttle to the engine and starts running. If all goes well the thrust of the motor will enable the pilot to run faster and reach take off speed when he becomes airborne. This all sounds easy but for the novice there is a lot of training and practice to be done before one is sufficiently competent to fly. I have always been very interested in flying and had been very fortunate to have learnt the basic skills with **Wing Commander Alan Bridges** who commanded SOAF in 1968/9. We used to fly in the early morning in a Piston Provost across the Wahiba Sands and to parts of Oman that were inaccessible by land. The great advantage of a paramotor is that you do not need an airfield and that apart from the initial expense it is an extremely cheap sport. This article recounts my experiences of the learning process which I hope will be of interest to others who have similar aspirations.

In April of this year I met up with **Alex Ledger** who runs Sky School, an organisation that primarily runs paramotor training courses in Spain, but with facilities for training at Mere in Dorset when Alex is in England.

It seemed to me that the best course of action was to arrange to join one of the basic courses in Spain and I duly arrived in early May. Sky School has simple but comfortable accommodation in a very attractive old Spanish farmhouse, which is situated a few hundred yards from a grass aerodrome. The whole operation is centred on the "Cafe" where we lived, ate and drank for most of the week. The initial emphasis is on ground handling which is learning to launch the wing. This can be done by either surging forward with the wing laid out on the ground behind you when there is little or no wind, or by pulling the wing up with stronger wind conditions when facing it and then turning into the wind. The control of the wing is complicated and requires a sensitive touch and a degree of strength for the initial power needed to pull the wing from the ground. Unfortunately the rain arrived on day 5 of our course and remained with us for the rest of the week and we were unable to leave the ground.

In England I contacted **Simon Westmore** who runs a training school at Lambourn in Wiltshire under the auspices of the Paramotor Club. Simon is assisted by **Colin Borland** who apparently learnt to fly without any instruction – he purchased a wing and a paramotor on E-Bay and then took off. His first landing was described as being similar to landing a Phantom on an aircraft carrier. If the weather permits it is possible to join Simon on any day that suits you both, and your training is adjusted according to your

experience. Ground handling can be practised in most conditions but winds in excess of 15mph make controlling the wing impossible. Flying is limited in a similar fashion and the summer of 2008 was the worst possible introduction. By September I had prepared myself for the great lift off on two separate occasions but every time the wind was too strong and morale sank lower and lower. I then had a call from Alex Ledger in Spain to ask me if I would help him out as a GD Wallah (cook and general duties) in October. I agreed to go on the understanding that the quid pro quo would be the completion of my training. It proved to be virtually impossible, as there were six large and very hungry male student pilots and four staff to be fed three times a day. I found that there was little time to do anything but feed the "Gannets" and as the days went by I achieved very little flying training. As the course drew to a close most of the students had made their initial solo flight but I was still a bridesmaid and it looked as if yet again I would fail to get off the ground. We spent the final morning on the airfield with engines ready and wings laid out but the wind was too strong. It is difficult to describe one's feelings, but the best analogy that I can think of would be waiting for the firing squad and each time you are blindfolded in preparation for departure from this earth you are reprieved for an unspecified time. At 3pm, as I was preparing to leave to catch my plane home, Alex said we would give it a go and we prepared yet again. After four very moderate practise launches I expected to be told that I was unfit to fly. However I was given the green light – I strapped in and struggled to stand up with nearly 40 kilos of machinery on my back – I launched the wing and then the moment of truth arrived. Can you squeeze the throttle hard enough to power forward and keep running? I staggered forward and unbelievably found myself airborne looking down on the airfield and listening to the instructor on the radio telling me to keep the power on and keep climbing. Once you realise that you are the master of your fate the brain starts working overtime and you realise that the aircraft is stable and manoeuvrable and that you have time to enjoy yourself before you think about landing. I flew for nearly an hour – I was literally in heaven although I was not entirely certain that I would ever survive to tell anyone what it was like. The sensation of flying suspended beneath a "large handkerchief" powered by a chain saw engine is extraordinary – the world lies beneath you but there is always the requirement to return to the ground.

The landing was reasonable after a difficult final approach – the engine is switched off at about 50 feet above the ground on the final glide. I found that the glider pitched and rolled and I was trying to correct this by "bell ringing" according to Alex – however I managed to stabilise things and completed the final "flare" which stalls the wing and remained on my feet which is expected on a good landing. It is difficult to describe the relief and ecstasy of completing this first solo flight. For me it had been a very long road and I am certain that Alex and the instructors were probably more relieved than I was. It is to their eternal credit that they were prepared to give me this final chance for me to cross my Rubicon.

I cannot recommend Alex Ledger and Simon Westmore highly enough, so if you are interested in learning to fly paramotors you should contact: Sky School Alex Ledger Tel 07747 097527. Paramotor Club Simon Westmore Tel 07983 428453. ■