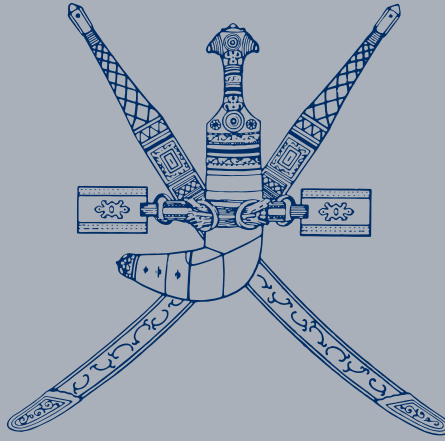
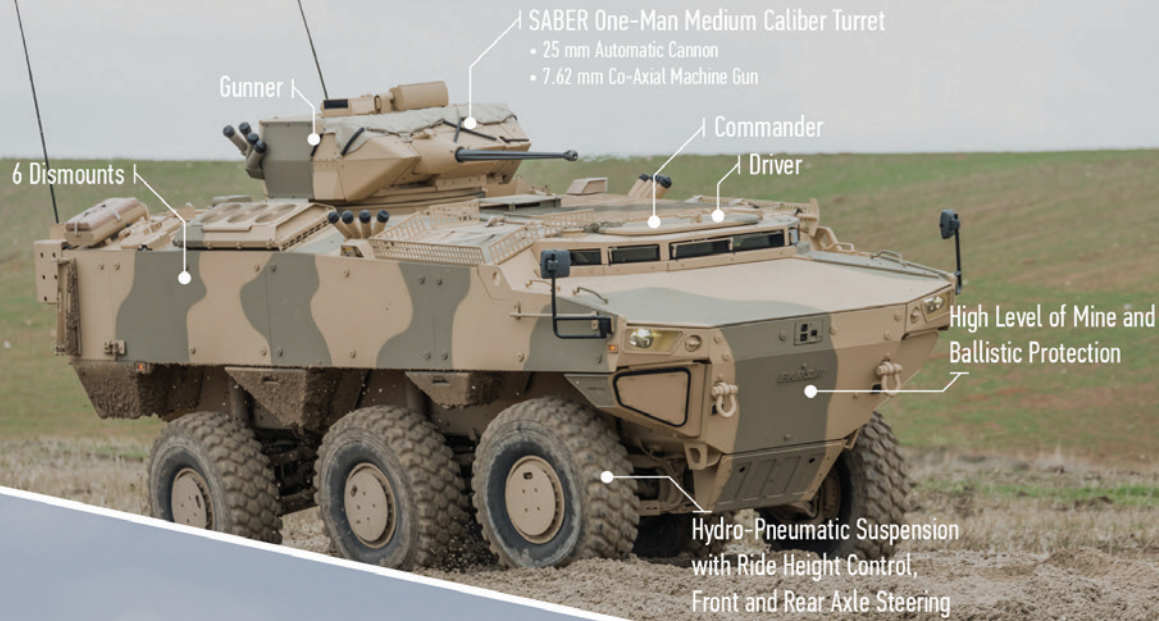


THE
JOURNAL
OF THE
SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES
ASSOCIATION



PARS 6X6 COMBAT

SPECIALIZED COMMAND



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SURVEILLANCE & RECONNAISSANCE



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THE JOURNAL

OF THE SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES ASSOCIATION



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The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Association reflects the bond that was formed between Omani and British military personnel who served together in Oman in the 1960s and '70s. Decades later, the Association still embodies that spirit of deep, mutual friendship and maintains contact with past veterans and the current generation of Servicemen and women of both nations.

The SAF Association's Journal is a prestigious annual publication that records and highlights the ongoing evolution of SAF under the auspice of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said.

It showcases the annual events of all three Services within Oman's Ministry of Defence – and also the annual members' reunions and events within the UK.

The Journal is edited and produced in the UK in co-ordination with the Office of the Chief of Staff, Sultan's Armed Forces in Muscat. It is widely distributed in Oman – from the Palace Office to Government Ministries – and to all Omani and British members of the Association.

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THE JOURNAL ONLINE THE JOURNAL ONLINE

Pass the link to
this year's issue on to
colleagues and friends.

www.oman.org.uk/journal

WELCOME TO YOUR 2024 JOURNAL



As the new editor of the Journal, I should like to begin by thanking my predecessor, **Tim Jones**, for his 4 years in the role – and for his helpful hand-over to me, in May last year.

This edition of the Journal has many interesting articles, features and reports – and for the first time will feature the Chairman's Notes and two articles in Arabic (as well as in

English) which I hope will be enjoyed by our Omani members.

A memorable occasion that we feature in this edition was the Memorial Event held in October at the Chapel of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst to remember fallen comrades, together with the placing of the Association's updated and newly-bound SAF Memorial Book in a permanent station in a display case in the South Transept of the chapel and, alongside it, the newly-commissioned plaque to commemorate the men of Airwork Services.

There is also an interesting account of **Mike and Penny Lobb's** travels to Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong in the early part of last year and their meetings with members of the Association now

living in that part of the world, whom many will know and remember from our times when we served in Oman together, but perhaps no longer see regularly.

Time is now, sadly, increasingly taking its toll of our long-serving membership, a large number of whom predominantly served during the Dhofar-era and the 1980s. This is reflected in our 'Remembering' report which inevitably gets longer each passing year. Past editions contain a wealth of our history and the record of our unique friendship with a nation we love – and are permanently available on the website – but there are now very few 'new' articles of our times together then.

Equally, as we try to attract (and we must) the current generation of serving military – Omani and British – so the editorial policy must develop to match that aspiration. To that end, the Committee has agreed that, if the Journal is to capture the imagination of the younger generation, future content will now include more about the current SAF and the future of Oman. Our aim is to make the Journal as relevant to the new, younger members – Omani and British – as it was when we were serving, in the genuine hope that it will spark their interest and be as relevant as possible.

Rest assured, there will be no change in the reporting of our events and other news and, as always, contributions will be welcome. I do hope you will continue to find your Journal an enjoyable read and I also hope to see many of you at some of the Association Events listed later in the edition.

John Paxman, Editor

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Front Cover: RAFO's Typhoons and F-16 (photo credit: *Morale Guidance, HQ SAF*)

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CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

by Gordon Allen



On the mid-February evening that I began to write this year's note, **HE Sayyid Badr Al Busaidi** had just delivered a landmark lecture at Oxford University. It framed a courageous, reasoned and perceptive message about the challenges of diplomacy and conflict resolution in a much-changed world.

It caused me to reflect on how truly fortunate the Association is to have its tradition and memories so deeply embedded within Oman's history and culture, and to be able still to treasure the privileged legacy of having served side by side with our Omani friends through the decades.

The year ahead, particularly our regional events programme, offers many opportunities to engage with Omanis serving in the UK – at RCDS, Shrivenham, as Officer Cadets and on reciprocal Loan Service. The committee can put members in touch, so please don't hesitate to let us know if you would like to become involved. Any excuse for a *fu'dl*!

Furthering our links with the currently serving generations, this note and two other articles are reproduced in Arabic within this edition; and we will soon have a presence on SAF's own website. The committee will continue to adapt the Association's communications to maintain currency with both British and Omani members.

In that respect, the Journal is a vitally important ambassador. I am indebted to **John Paxman** for his extraordinary patience and skill in compiling this edition – his first as Editor – and to Brunton, our publishers, for their cooperation and flexibility.

Finally, and as ever, I must thank all the committee members for their untiring commitment and energy, without which nothing could succeed, and the membership at large for your encouragement and support for all the Association's activities and endeavours. ■

كلمة رئيس الجمعية

حينما شرعت في صياغة هذه المقالة الافتتاحية السنوية في مساء منتصف شهر فبراير المنصرم، كان معالي السيد بدر بن حمد البوسعيدي، وزير الخارجية بسلطنة عُمان قد أتف جامعة أكسفورد بمحاضرة تاريخية، تناولت بشجاعة وعقلانية وبصيرة نافذة التحديات الراهنة التي تواجه مسارات الدبلوماسية وآليات حل النزاعات في عالمنا المتغير بسرعة فائقة. هذا الحدث البارز دفعني إلى التأمل العميق في النعمة العظيمة التي تحظى بها جمعيتنا، بكون ذكرياتها تعكس العلاقات التاريخية بين البلدين الصديقين المملكة المتحدة و سلطنة عُمان وأنا ما زلنا نحتفي بهذه العلاقة منذ عقود عديدة.

العام القادم يعد بفرص لا حصر لها، خصوصاً عبر برنامج الفعاليات المحلية للتواصل مع العمانيين الذين يدرسون أو يخدمون في المملكة المتحدة، سواء في كلية الدفاع الملكية بلندن أو أكاديمية الدفاع بشريفهام، أو كضباط مرشحين بساندهيرست، أو ضمن خدمة الضباط المعارين، حيث إن جمعيتنا مستعدة لتنسيق التواصل بين أعضاء الجمعية والضباط العمانيين الموجودين في المملكة المتحدة ضمن هذه البرامج، ولذا نحثكم جميعاً على عدم التردد في الإعلان عن رغبتكم بالمشاركة في هذه اللقاءات، فكل فرصة للتواصل تعد ساحة طيبة للفخر والتقدير بشركائنا.

في جمعية قوات السلطان المسلحة نسعى جاهدين لتعزيز وشائج التواصل مع الأجيال الحالية التي تخدم بأمانة وشرف، حيث تم إعادة صياغة هذه المقالة ومقالين آخرين باللغة العربية ضمن هذا الإصدار من مجلة جمعية قوات السلطان المسلحة، وسنتشرف قريباً بوجودنا على الموقع الإلكتروني الرسمي لوزارة الدفاع وقوات السلطان المسلحة، كما وتلتزم الجمعية بالتحديث الدائم لقنوات الاتصال لديها لتلبية احتياجات أعضائها، سواء كانوا بريطانيين أو عمانيين، مع الحفاظ على روح التقاليد التي تتمتع بها الجمعية.

بالنسبة لمجلتنا، يمثل هذه المنبر الحيوي سفيراً لقيمنا ومبادئنا، وأود أن أعبر هنا عن بالغ امتناني لـ (جون بكسمان) لدقته وصبره الاستثنائي في تحرير هذا العدد من المجلة، وهو الأول تحت إشرافه، وكذلك لناشرينا (برونتون) لتعاونهم المثمر والمميز. وفي الختام، يحق لي كما في كل مرة، أن أوجه الشكر العميق لجميع أعضاء مجلس إدارة الجمعية على جهودهم الدؤوبة وشغفهم الذي لا يفتر، والذي يعد العمود الفقري لنجاحاتنا، ولكم أنتم جميعاً يا أعضاءنا الكرام، لدعمكم الثابت وتشجيعكم المستمر لجميع مبادرات ومساعدات الجمعية.



53RD NATIONAL DAY

*On the 18 November, **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, presided over the military parade at the Adam Air Base in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah on the occasion of the 53rd Glorious National Day. The event saw the participation of units representing the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO), the Sultan's Special Force (SSF), the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and the Royal Court Affairs (RCA), in addition to the joint mounted military music bands.*



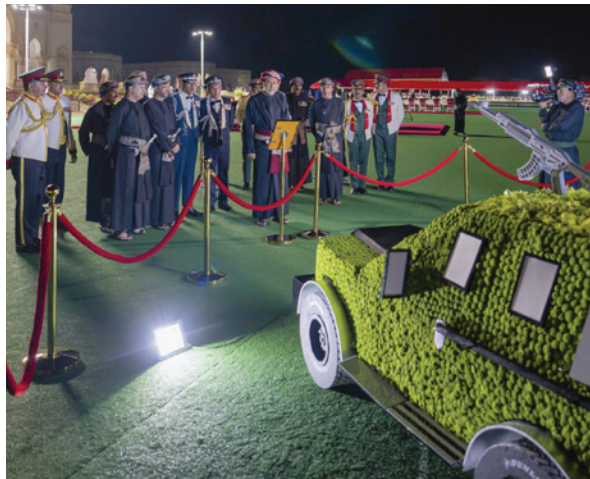


ARMED FORCES DAY

On 11 December, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, hosted a dinner at Al Barakah Palace on the occasion of Armed Forces Day.

The ceremony comes as a felicitation by His Majesty, the Supreme Commander, to all military formations and units of the Armed Forces on this glorious day. It symbolises his Royal recognition for their great dedication in performing the sacred duty to defend the homeland, protect its security and ensure its stability and safety. It is a manifestation of the Armed Forces' role in safeguarding the national achievements to boost Oman's renewed renaissance and retain its status as an oasis of peace and harmony under the inspiring leadership of His Majesty the Sultan. The ceremony was attended by some Royal Family members, Ministers, Commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces and Military and Civilian Officers.







ROYAL VISIT TO RAO



On 14 March, **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**, Supreme Commander, paid a Royal Visit to Sultan of Oman's Armoured Division, RAO. His Majesty the Sultan was accompanied by **HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said** and **HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham Al Said**.



ROYAL VISIT TO RAO



*On 15 March, The Sultan of Oman's Artillery, RAO, received a Royal Visit from **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**, Supreme Commander. His Majesty the Sultan was accompanied by **HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said**.*





ROYAL VISIT TO RAFO



On 12 March,
**His Majesty Sultan
Haitham bin Tarik**,
Supreme Commander,
visited the Royal Air Force
of Oman's Adam Air
Base. **His Highness
Sayyid Theyazin bin
Haitham Al Said**
accompanied His Majesty
the Sultan during the visit.





2023 ANNUAL DINNER

The Army & Navy Club

What a magnificent evening! Noisy, fun, endless chat, catching up with friends not seen for decades in some cases, and, *al hamdu lillah*, the RAG's culinary skills came to the fore: these were all the hallmarks of our flagship event on Friday 24 November in London. Some of our younger readers and Omani members may not know the Army and Navy Club is known as the 'RAG': a title acquired nearly 200 years ago and which still serves as a useful abbreviation!

COSSAF's very generous support, announced well in advance, was certainly a factor in the dining room being stretched to its limits. We were 99 on the night and the buzz during pre-dinner drinks set the tone for a thoroughly good party. Despite the significant diplomatic challenges posed by the international situation last autumn, it was a real pleasure, and a testament to the Association's deep-rooted, uncomplicated relationship with Oman, that the Dinner went ahead with a wealth of Omanis in attendance.

We were delighted to welcome once again **His Excellency Badr Mohammed Al Mantheri**, His Majesty the Sultan's Ambassador to the United Kingdom, now well settled in London and accompanied by his Deputy Head of Mission, **Hussein Mohammed Muqaibel**, and members of the Defence Staff. Appointed only last July, but previously COSSAF's MA and no stranger to London or the Association, the new Military Attaché **Ameed Rukn Abdunnasser Al Shekaili** led the London-based military contingent. With him were **Aqeed Rukn Said Shabibi** RNO, the Assistant Military Attaché, and **Major Hamad Al Jabri**, the Deputy Assistant Military Attaché.

Our President's presence in London and his decision to attend the Dinner, particularly at that time, meant a great deal, and it was a real pleasure to welcome back **Fareeq Abdullah**. He had attended

a Committee meeting earlier that day, which centred on a short presentation describing the Association's activities over the year. He clearly appreciated the effort that had facilitated all the regional events and the Memorial Service at Sandhurst, and commiserated with us as we called the roll: it had been a year in which we had lost a number of close friends and we were grateful that he had ensured Omani representation through the Attachés on so many occasions.

COSSAF's personal staff were pleased to be back in London and we welcomed the return of **Ameed Rukn Hassan Al Mujaini**, our representative within COSSAF's office in Muscat. COSSAF's MA and Flag Officer had both been newly appointed in the summer and it was good to have **Muqaddam Rukn Bahri Adil Al Naimi** RNO and **Raaid Bahri Nabil Al Amri** join us for the first time. It was also heartening to see that we remain strongly supported by the

Major General Gez Strickland, COSSAF, Gordon Allen and HE Badr Mohammed Al Mantheri



Left to right: Russ Peart, Iain Cummings, David Milne-Smith, The Lord Stirrup, Khalid Al Hosni, Steve Townsend, Bob Ruskell, Bob Mason, Tim Hewlett and ACM Sir Richard Johns



three senior Omani participants at RCDS: **Aqeed Rukn Bahri Ahmed Al Fazari** from the Navy, **Aqeed Rukn Tay Khalid Al Hosni** from the Air Force, and **Aqeed Rukn Hassan Al Saidi** from the Army.

Finally, attending again as a member in his own right, was **Ameed Rukn Ismail Al Balushi** – originally serving with NFR but equally well-connected with FF. Ismail had hosted the Association's visit to the NDC at Bayt Al Falaj in 2015 and it was good to see him again and in such great form!

It seems as if it were only yesterday that we were marking the handover of **Richard Stanford** to **Felix Gedney** as SBLSO in January 2021, but time has stolen a march on us all and Felix and Polly will have left Oman by the time the Journal goes to print. It was very fortunate that Felix's successor, **Major General Gez Strickland**, was able to retrieve his dinner jacket from the many packing boxes being assembled in Tidworth at the time and could come to the Dinner. It was a most timely and welcome opportunity for him to meet COSSAF and the Association in advance of deploying in January and we wish him and **Cathy** the very best of fortune during their time at Haramil.

To help raise awareness of the Association within SAF, COSSAF had also arranged for six serving officers to visit London to attend the Dinner. Their day programme was kindly hosted by **Tim Purdon** and **Jimmy Garnier** and we offered a very warm welcome to **Lieutenant Commanders Ali Al Azri** from HQ RNO and **Yousif Al Jahwari**, the commander of RNOV 'Al Nassir'. They are both Dartmouth graduates and knew exactly what they were letting themselves in for at the Navy table! The Army guests were **Lieutenant Colonel Ahmed Al Rahbi**, who was at Sandhurst in 1998, and **Major Abdullah al Shiadi** – both from the Jabal Akhdar Battle Training Centre. And from the Royal Air Force of Oman we were joined by Squadron Leaders **Nasser Ambo Saidi** from HQ RAFO and **Abdullah Al Fathi** from 5 Squadron in Salalah.



Left to Right: Nick Cooper, Jimmy Garnier, Mqm Ahmed Al Rahbi (Commander Jebel Akhdar Battle Training Centre), Allan Malcolm, Mort Burdick and Raaid Abdullah Al Shiadi (Deputy Commander Jebel Akhdar Battle Training Centre)

Notwithstanding COSSAF's generosity and the strong contingent from Oman, attendance was also significantly bolstered by two rather select (!) groups coming back to the fold – whose reputation with Mini Mokes and at Salalah film nights is as celebrated as it is unprintable: the Strikies and the Helis. They massed in squadron strength and we are immensely grateful to **Jock**, our Vice President, **David Milne-Smith** and **Tony Nicholson** for their efforts in rallying them. It was so very good for everybody to be able to catch up once again with some of SOAF's staunchest veterans – so many of whom were close friends when we were there and to whom we owe much. Let's hope this sets a trend for future Dinners.

The Chairman addressed much of this in his talk as well as other Association news. COSSAF's speech in response was typical of



Major Peter Isaacs with COSSAF, Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis Al Raisi

2023 ANNUAL DINNER

our President: generous, appreciative of all the Association does and the history it represents, and personal. That he spoke so openly – and clearly from the heart – says much for the trust he has in our relationship and our ethos. It was also deeply appreciated that he had arranged a personal present for every guest: we really are most fortunate.

As ever, our thanks go to **Neil Fawcett**, whose organisational prowess and last-minute (better make that last few seconds!) juggling

skills were as invaluable as ever. It was a superbly organised evening and greatly enjoyed by all who attended. With the bar set high (no – not that bar!) we look forward to an equally rousing event this year on Friday 29 November, *inshallah*. ■



A flight of Helis!



Ian Gardiner and Mike Austin



FF and assorted warriors



Clive Ward and Ameer Ismail Al Balushi



ASSOCIATION FUTURE EVENTS

PLEASE ALSO MONITOR THE WEBSITE

A forecast of Association events in 2024 is shown below. All of these events have now been confirmed. In addition to this list in the Journal, further details of these events are contained on the Association website.


If you wish to contact the organiser of an event and are encountering difficulties, please contact Kieron Shaw (members.saf@gmail.com) who will be pleased to point you in the right direction.

As usual, will event organisers please arrange for the best resolution photographs of the event to be taken and sent to the Editor, with a short report (including details of those depicted in photographs and also a list of attendees), for inclusion in the next Journal.



NOTES FOR YOUR DIARY!


MONDAY 25 MARCH • NORTHERN LUNCH • THE PRINCIPAL HOTEL, YORK
Contact: Geoff Hill • SAFANorth19@outlook.com



THURSDAY 16 MAY • SOUTH EAST REGIONAL CURRY LUNCH
ROYAL ENGINEER HQ MESS, BROMPTON BARRACKS, CHATHAM
Contact: Nick Larkin • nicklarkin1@aol.com




THURSDAY 16 MAY • SCOTTISH REGIONAL ASSOCIATION DINNER
DOUNESIDE HOUSE, TARLAND, AB34 4UL
Accommodation at Douneside House should be booked directly with manager@dounesidehouse.co.uk or by calling 01339 881230
Contact: Jonathan Forbes • forbesja8691@gmail.com




WEDNESDAY 12 JUNE • WEST COUNTRY SON/RNO REUNION LUNCH
EXETER GOLF CLUB, EXETER
Contact: Tom Hammon • tom@sailors.co.uk



THURSDAY 20 JUNE • SAF CURRY LUNCH • ARMY AND NAVY CLUB, PALL MALL, LONDON
Contact: Neil Fawcett • neil.fawcett@btinternet.com




THURSDAY 20 JUNE • JOINT EVENT WITH BRITISH OMANI SOCIETY • 5.30-7.00PM
34 SACKVILLE STREET, LONDON W1S 3ED
Register online: <https://www.britishomani.org/events/bos/dhofara-snapshotin-time>
or by emailing: neil.fawcett@btinternet.com




SUNDAY 28 JULY • THE WESSEX LUNCH • SHERBORNE GOLF CLUB, SHERBORNE
Contact: John Kirkham • johnkirkham@uwclub.net



SUNDAY 18 AUGUST • THE NEW FOREST REGIONAL LUNCHEON
SOUTH LAWN HOTEL, LYMINGTON, SO41 0RF
Contact: Mike Lobb • mikelobb@hotmail.co.uk



THURSDAY 5 SEPTEMBER • EAST ANGLIA REGIONAL LUNCH
THE GREYHOUND, LAVENHAM, SUDBURY CO10 9PZ
Contact: Tresham Gregg • treshamgregg@hotmail.com



TUESDAY 10 SEPTEMBER • OMAN GUNNER REUNION • HONOURABLE ARTILLERY COMPANY, EC1Y 2BQ
Contact: Jimmy Garnier • jimmygarnier@aol.com or 07785 717879



FRIDAY 29 NOVEMBER • SAF ANNUAL DINNER • ARMY AND NAVY CLUB, PALL MALL, LONDON
Contact: Neil Fawcett • neil.fawcett@btinternet.com

LOAN SERVICE FAMILY LIFE

AUG 1997-MAY 2000

Cmdr Phil Carroll, RAN (Retd)

Author in RNO uniform



Gulf Air, my kids' (**Jennifer, Alexandra, Nathaniel**, aged 9, 6, 3 respectively) first flight, was excellent. After a brief transit in Bahrain, we landed at Seeb about lunchtime, 14 August '97. Stepping from the aircraft, intense, dry heat struck. Sweating profusely, we clambered down the steps to the concrete runway, the heat reflected off its surface intensified under the sun's full glare. Nevertheless, my dream of living in Oman had come true!

My fascination with Oman began during my four-year Merchant Navy deck cadetship with Blue Star Ship Management (read my memoir *'Under a Big Blue Star'*, Amazon paperback/ebook). In 1982, in Muscat, Mandama discharged some of the 4500 tons of frozen chickens we'd loaded in Brest. Later, Mina Qaboos was a regular port on New Zealand Star's route: Arabian Gulf, Indian sub-continent, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Australia/NZ. But a container-ship's visits were short. I'd never been ashore.

After getting my 2nd Mate's 'ticket', I joined the RN in Apr '84. In 1985, my RN Fleet-Time in Exeter was on Armilla Patrol and included banyans in unspoilt Bandar Khayran and a short port visit to Muscat. I became a droggy (hydrographer) and, a decade later, Hecla deployed to the Indian Ocean. We spent happy, delightful days in Muscat and Salalah, exploring their environs in rented 4x4s. Mina Qaboos is the world's most breathtaking port... and I've seen a few! Oman was a beautiful country with lovely, courteous, cheerful people.

I knew a couple of droggies served in Oman. **Lt Cdr Ian Jolley**, an old shipmate, was due to return. I contacted my Appointer. The timing was right, so he pencilled me in as Ian's successor. Ian and I corresponded about his role and family life in Oman, particularly as I'd be accompanied by my wife and three children. It sounded brilliant.

MFO crates were delivered to our Plympton home. I packed everything we needed for Oman and, separately, our household stuff for storage. I was told not to bring RN uniform as Loan Service worked solely for the Sultan. I sold our car at the last minute. We trogged to Heathrow for a night in an airport hotel before our flight the next day.

After the initial heat-shock, it was a relief to take the shuttle-bus to the terminal to complete formalities. All went smoothly. The officials were incredibly polite, immaculate in pristine white dish-dashas, topped by colourfully patterned masars. Pushing a pair of fully-laden trolleys, we popped out of Arrivals. Ian spotted us and led us to his car. The world's scruffiest, noisiest, oldest Toyota Land Cruiser belonged to the Hydrographic Training Unit (HTU). Ian commandeered it for his final month because his 'company car' was being repaired.

The Toyota's engine grumbled, its A/C ineffective. The kids sweltered, pink-faced, tossed about on tatty rear bench-seats. Shortly, we arrived at our new home in Al-Hail North, on one of this old suburb's many dusty streets. Ian pulled in through the sheet metal gates and parked under the car-port. Relieved, we carried our bags into the house, old and shabby, carpeted throughout, poorly designed and built. Not very well tended. Luckily, the hall was filled with our MFO crates, which cheered the kids.

That week, Ian and I conducted our hand-over at Wudam. **Sue** and the kids settled in. We hired a car and familiarised ourselves with Muscat's geography.

Ian didn't do cooking so we had take-aways, usually from his favourite local restaurant, Dosteen, on the service road paralleling Seeb Street. We quickly got used to turning off 'black-top' onto dusty graded, lumpy streets. I was enthralled with this whole experience. Ian departed at week's end. We were on our own!

We had appointments at ROP Driving Licence Department, near Seeb Novotel. The five of us sat in a darkened room with a ROP officer. The eye-test board illuminated. In turn, Sue and I read the letters. Sue stumbled a bit, Alexandra called out the letters instead. I hushed her up, but the ROP officer smiled and waved away my telling-off. Naturally, Sue and I got our licences.

Sue, a teacher, researched British School Muscat and ABA. The latter offered more of what she felt the kids needed. We made an appointment to visit and tour the school. It was off the beaten track, nestled at the foot of sand-coloured hills. The campus was well-planned, the school well-equipped, excellent facilities, smaller class sizes than UK. The staff we met were friendly and welcoming. Importantly, the kids liked it. The following week, we went to the New Family and New Student Orientation Day. Sue was impressed, the kids loved it. The next day, Sue dropped them off for their first school day and that was that!

To open an Omani bank account, I had to be in-country. I'd been forewarned to expect a long wait. So, dressed in my swanky RNO uniform, I took Nathaniel with me to our nearest branch of OAB in Rusayl. My psychology worked. The bank staff were charmed by smartly dressed Nathaniel's short fair hair, bright blue eyes, rosy complexion. It took only an hour to set up my account.

The kids quickly made friends at ABA. Their classes were multi-national. Alexandra was the only native-English speaker in her class. She was teamed with a new Japanese girl to help with her non-existent English. But youngsters quickly pick up a foreign language. By half-term, the Japanese girl was almost fluent in English.

Fellow-Loan Service families in Muscat welcomed us into the fold. With our shiny new burgundy Hyundai Galloper (all the rage, then), we joined two or three other families for weekend camping trips into Oman's spectacular countryside: White Sand Beach, Yiti Beach, Tiwi, Bimmah Sinkhole, Wadi Shab, Bandar Khayran, Wahiba Sands, Wadi Khalid, Rustaq/Nakhl circuit, Nizwa goat market, Saiq Plateau. The latter required a permit from MAM. The steep, graded single track was challenging in both directions. Permission was needed for a weekend in Dubai, where we stayed in the ubiquitous Golden Sands apartments. Occasionally, Oman Today advertised cheap weekend rates for Omani residents at Al Bustan, a real treat.

We took a trip to Salalah, courtesy of an indulgence flight on a RAFO BAC-1-11. We rendezvoused with an Army family who'd driven from Muscat. Staying at the Holiday Inn apartments, we explored Dhofar, highlights being Tawi Atair Sinkhole, Mirbat and Mughsail blow-holes.

HTU's CPO (Chief Petty Officer) invited us to his family's home in Izki for Eid. We stayed in Nizwa but enjoyed the festivities in Izki, including digging up the family's ground-roasted camel, eating 'at home' and our kids, specially dressed in Omani costume, participating in traditional dancing with villagers. A unique experience for a trio of Western children.



Jennifer, Nathaniel and Alexandra dressed for Eid in Izki.

When we got home from our 'expeds', **Swarna** (our Sri Lankan housemaid) and her husband **Neville** greeted us and helped unload the car. Neville washed the Galloper's exterior, cleaned its interior and hosed down sand-encrusted beach gear.

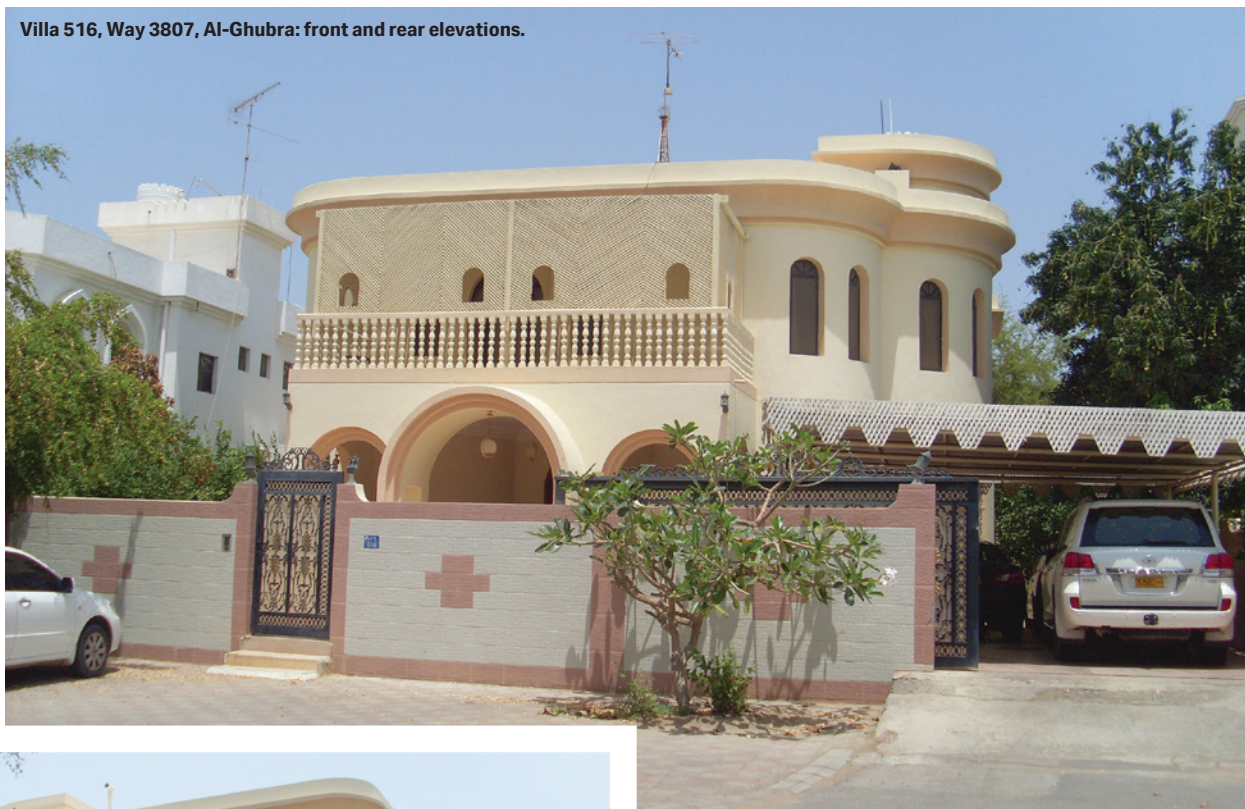
Swarna worked hard, always went that extra bit. I'd return from Wudam and she'd cheerily greet me with 'I've made Sir chicken biryani.' Cooking wasn't in her remit, but her biryani was excellent! Neville had lost his previous job as a gardener, so we employed him as gardener, car-washer and general factotum. He wasn't over-worked but an excellent chap. Employing and accommodating Swarna and Neville meant we had short notice baby-sitters. The kids loved them.

Other weekends were spent at SAF Beach Club, especially popular with Loan Service families. Ras al Hamra Street separated PDO villas from Ras al Hamra Golf Club, hooked left near PDO Club and RAHRC and, as it curved away from the cliffs, SAF Beach Club gates beckoned entry to the car park above the Club. This exclusive facility was fantastic. Our private golden beach was hemmed in by sheer sandstone cliffs, the clubhouse bar and restaurant nestled at the back. For boat-owners, a ramp was available. Just offshore, swimming to a tethered pontoon was popular, plus snorkelling in the clear, blue sea. Paradise!

Sadly, in our last year, the Club was sold and closed down, pending housing development. Members made sealed bids for the Club's unique bone china crockery. My OR70 bid won me a magnificent set of crockery which I treasure to this day.

After the sad demise of SAF Beach Club, we joined Capital Area Yacht Club. Although further from home, necessitating a drive along the Corniche, through Muscat, Sidab and Haramil, it was a delightful location but on a larger scale than our old club.

Villa 516, Way 3807, Al-Ghubra: front and rear elevations.



Throughout our time in Oman, we were members at the Inter-Con Hotel. It was looking rather tired, but had excellent facilities, pool, tennis courts, garden and beach access. On Mondays, I took the girls to swimming lessons at the Inter-Con. Whilst they took turns with their instructor, I jogged along Qurum beach to the British Embassy and back. By 1600, air temperature was warm, the sand less blistering, a pleasant breeze prevailed. In shorts, bare feet plodding in the sand, I slalomed around groups of Omani blokes playing 5-a-side football on the wide expanse of beach. Gulf of Oman to my right, Qurum's beautiful gleaming white villas on my left. Each week, the Grand Hyatt's construction progressed. At the corner of the British Embassy walls, I turned round and headed back. Crikey, what a lucky bloke I was!

About six months after our arrival, the house's lease expired. SBLSO's **Muqaddam Mike Wilson** advised that we could move if we wished, described the process and confirmed my rent allowance (OR550 per month). SBLSO's office covered removal expenses, so I only had to search for another house. We looked at several,

including swanky new-build marble palaces similar to those in which Loan Service folks lived. We settled on a large house in Al-Ghubrah, conveniently located off 40 Street, near Ghubrah roundabout junction with Sultan Qaboos Street. There were numerous shops on 40 Street including a chemist and Sultan Shopping, an Aladdin's cave supermarket within walking distance. For a 'big shop' we used Matrah Cold Stores at Madinat Sultan Qaboos which had many Tesco own-brand products and a 'pork room'.

Our high-ceilinged villa was palatial, fronted by a large porch. Behind a massive front door was a wide hall, a 'parlour' to the right, dining-room opposite, and opened onto a vast living area. Off to the left was another room. A spacious kitchen in the rear left corner. Our landlord, a happy, smiling ROP Naqeeb stationed at Hatta, approved the fitting of a stud-wall across the back of the house to provide accommodation for Swarna and Neville.

The right-hand side of the main living area contained a wide curving staircase to the first floor. The girls had a large bedroom each, with shared bathroom and balcony. Nathaniel's huge bedroom had an en suite. Our master bedroom and bathroom occupied a third of the first floor's area, across the front of the house. The French windows opened onto a balcony overlooking the front paved garden and two-vehicle car-port. A modest staircase opened onto the flat, bulwarked roof. It was like GCHQ as there were three large TV satellite dishes. The panoramic roof-top views took in surrounding villas, office blocks, a sea-view, inland to Bowshar Heights jebel. During our tenure, we witnessed the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque gradually emerge from the sand.

Eventually, our time in Oman ended. As a family, we'd enjoyed a fantastic and unique experience in a relatively unknown, beautiful country populated by amazing people. The sights and sounds live with us forever, indelible images and memories impressed forever on my children's minds. ■



Brigadier Ahmed Ambu Saidi, Martin and Jenny Robb, and Patrick Brook

SAF CURRY LUNCH – LONDON

Thursday 15 June 2023

The weather was more Muscat than Mayfair as 43 SAF Association members and guests met for the annual London curry lunch at the Army and Navy Club on Thursday the 15th June on what was a blissfully warm London summer day. Old friendships were renewed, and new acquaintances made as the chatter of conversation built during pre-lunch drinks and greetings were exchanged with friends, old and new, from all points of the compass.

We were all welcomed by **Gordon Allen** who started proceedings with a few introductory words and warm thanks to **Neil Fawcett** for organising the lunch as well as welcoming our guests that had joined us for the occasion. We also remembered all those who were not able to be with us. This also included a few who had been waylaid during the journey up to London.

With impeccable Gunner timing the speech ended as the food appeared. Soon we were all tucking into our fare as we were looked



Patrick and Rosie Brook flank a cheerful Journal editor.

after with customary excellence by the Army and Navy Club staff and enjoyed a splendid assortment of curries and accompaniments.

We were delighted to be joined by **Brigadier Ahmed Ambu Saidi** and **Captain Said Al Shabibi** from the Omani Defence team at the Embassy in London. In addition, **Robin Traill**, Secretary of the British Omani Society, together with **Neil Coxon**, the Director of the British Omani Society, were also in attendance ahead of welcoming those of us who would also be attending the joint British Omani Society and SAF Association talk at Sackville Street later that evening. If **Martin Robb** had any pre-talk nerves, he managed to keep them firmly in check before his excellent evening lecture.

Inevitably some had to make a sharp exit to meet train times and other engagements whilst others were able to linger just a little longer and continue the reminiscing and friendship. Eventually, as ever, we all stepped out from the warmth of our collective Omani memories into an afternoon to remind us of our days under an Omani sun. We took our leave and bid farewell until we would all have the chance to meet again.

Next year's London curry lunch will take place on 20 June 2024. We hope we will see you there. ■



Alix Chandler, Andrew Roseveare and Marcia Vivian

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE



On 21 November, The Sultanate of Oman hosted the 12th meeting of the GCC Joint Defence Council under the Chairmanship of **HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik Al Said**, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs. The meeting saw the participation of Ministers of Defence, heads of delegations to the GCC Joint Defence Council and the GCC Secretary General. The meeting, which was held at Al Bustan Palace Hotel in Muscat, discussed defence matters of common interest to the GCC nations and ways of enhancing co-operation and military action.



His Majesty confers medals to Officers of the Sultan's Armed Forces and Royal Guard of Oman

On 10 December, **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**, the Supreme Commander, conferred medals of Excellent Service and Royal Commendation on a number of Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and Personnel of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and other departments of the Ministry of Defence and the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO). The ceremony was held under the auspices of **HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said**, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, at Al Murtafa'a Camp.

HH Sayyid Shihab pinned the Medals of Excellent Service and the Medals of Royal Commendation on the honoured Officers, NCOs, Military and Civil Personnel of the SAF and the RGO, in appreciation of their dedication and sincerity in serving the homeland and performing their sacred national duty.





On 1 August, **His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimur Al Said**, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafa'a, **Dr. Liane Saunders**, the British Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. HH Sayyid Shihab wished the ambassador success in carrying out their duties in Oman. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and discussed several matters of mutual interest.



On 22 June, **His Excellency Dr. Mohammed bin Nasser Al Za'abi**, Secretary General at the Ministry of Defence, received **Air Marshal Martin Sampson**, UK Defence Senior Advisor to the Middle East and North Africa, and his delegation at Al Murtafa'a Camp. During the interview, His Excellency welcomed the visiting guest, and discussed a number of matters of common interest.



On 9 January, an additional annex for the joint defence agreement between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom was signed at the Ministry of Defence in Muscat. Signing the annex came within the framework of Omani military relations with different countries in various military fields, particularly training areas. The additional annex was signed from the Omani side by **His Excellency Dr. Mohammed bin Nasser Al Za'abi**, Secretary General at the Ministry of Defence whilst it was signed from the British side by **James Goldman**, Chargé d'Affaires of UK Embassy in Muscat.



On 22 May, **Dr. Mohammed bin Nasser Al Za'abi**, Secretary General at the Ministry of Defence, received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Camp a delegation led by **Air Vice-Marshal (Ret'd) Philip Lester** from the Royal College of Defence Studies in the UK. The two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest during the visit.

From 13-15 September, **His Excellency Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi**, Secretary General at the Ministry of Defence of Oman, and his accompanying delegation attended the opening ceremony of the Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) exhibition 2023 which was held in the United Kingdom.

The Secretary General and his accompanying delegation toured the exhibition halls and were briefed on defence and strategic industries and various modern technologies.



On 13 March, The Arizona Department of Emergency and Military Affairs, Arizona National Guard, and the Sultanate of Oman's Ministry of Defence signed a State Partnership Programme agreement, becoming partners in the Department of Defence National Guard Bureau programme. The signing ceremony, held in Muscat, signifies the forging of an enduring partnership that will bolster capabilities, to improve inter-operational ability, and enhance principles of responsible governance.



ROYAL OFFICE



On 22 June, **General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani**, Minister of the Royal Office, received **Air Marshal Martin Sampson**, UK Defence Senior Advisor to the Middle East and Africa, and his accompanying delegation. The visit comes within the framework of discussions around current regional and international issues. The meeting reviewed the progress of the historical relations binding the two countries. Conversation also touched on issues of joint interest.



On 23 July, **General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani**, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office, **Dr. Liane Saunders**, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the Sultanate of Oman. The Minister of the Royal Office wished the Ambassador success in carrying out their duties in Oman. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed relations between Oman and the UK. They also reviewed areas of co-operation and means of promoting them, to serve the mutual interests of both nations.



On 29 August, **General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani**, Minister of the Royal Office, received **General Sir Patrick Sanders**, Chief of the General Staff of the British Army and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the progress of the historic relations binding the two countries and discussed a series of military topics of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by the Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) and the British Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman.



OFFICE OF COSSAF

*In notes of the meetings that **Vice-Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis Al Raisi** (Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces) has held with visiting dignitaries, to save repetition he is shown as COSSAF.*



From 6-7 February, **COSSAF** and the accompanying military delegation participated in the Dragon Group meeting, which was held in the United Kingdom.



On 2 March, **COSSAF** received **General Sir James Hockenhull**, Commander of United Kingdom Strategic Command, at Al Murtafa'a Camp. Various military matters of mutual interest were discussed between the two sides with the attendance of **Brigadier Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah Al Mandhari**, Assistant Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces for Operations and Planning and several Senior Officers.



On 21 June, **COSSAF** met with **Air Marshal Martin Sampson**, UK Defence Senior Advisor to the Middle East and North Africa, and his accompanying delegation. **Brigadier Hamid bin Abdullah Al Balushi**, Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning, several Senior Officers from the Sultan's Armed Forces and the Defence Attaché at the British Embassy in Muscat also attended the meeting.



On 3 August, **COSSAF** received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Camp, **Paul Lincoln**, the Second Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom. The two sides discussed several topics and reviewed matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by **Dr. Liane Saunders**, the British Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, **Commodore Issa bin Salim Al Owaisi**, SAF Assistant Chief of Staff for Administration and Logistics and the British Defence Attaché in Muscat.



On 3 August, **COSSAF** received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Camp, **General Sir Patrick Sanders**, Chief of the General Staff of the British Army and his accompanying delegation. The two sides reviewed areas of military cooperation between both countries. The meeting was attended by **Major General Matar bin Salim Al Balushi**, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), a number of senior COSSAF Officers and the Defence Attaché at the British Embassy at Muscat.



On 12 November, The Sultanate of Oman hosted a regular meeting of the Supreme Military Committee of Chiefs of Staff of GCC Armed Forces. The meeting was chaired by **COSSAF** and attended by the Chiefs of Staff of the GCC Armed Forces, **Lieutenant General Eid bin Awad Al Shalawi**, the Commander of the GCC Unified Military Command and **Major General (Tay) Issa Rashid Al Mohannadi**, the Assistant Secretary for Military Affairs of the GCC Secretariat



At Al Murtafa'a Camp **COSSAF** organised the cybersecurity exercise (Challenge 2) in cooperation with the British forces, with the participation of a number of units of the Ministry of Defence, Sultan's Armed Forces, and security bodies. The exercise aims to gain more skills to protect systems and hacking techniques, raise awareness of the mechanisms and procedures used in this regard, and exchange technical and practical experiences with friendly countries to build highly efficient cyber capabilities. Cybersecurity is concerned with the security of information, electronic applications, and network security, and works to protect systems and data from being hacked or accessed through specialised programmes and high precision systems to reduce various cyber risks.

HANDOVER OF SENIOR BRITISH LOAN SERVICE OFFICER (SBLSO) OMAN

24 January 2024

On 24 January, **Major General Felix Gedney** OBE WO completed his handover as SBLSO to **Major General Gez Strickland** DSO MBE.

After three years, Felix and **Polly** will settle – at least for now – in Norfolk and focus on life not just after Oman but after a distinguished and successful Army career. Felix enjoyed senior appointments both in the UK and with the US Army in the USA and the Middle East before taking up his final role as SBLSO Oman in early 2020.

Before his departure, Felix was awarded the Order of Oman by **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik** in recognition of his contribution to SAF and the bilateral relationship. The decoration was presented by **HH Sayyid Shihab**, the Deputy Prime Minister for Defence.

Commissioned into the Gurkhas in 1989, Gez has also enjoyed a broad, international career. He commanded 1st Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles, in Afghanistan and served in key one-star roles in the UK, including command of 4th Infantry Brigade (The Black Rats).

Latterly, after a tour as Deputy Commander III US Corps in Fort Hood and Iraq, he was appointed GOC 6th (UK) Division in Tidworth. He has also been Colonel of the Royal Gurkha Rifles since 2016, a role he holds dearly. Gez is joined in Muscat by **Cathy**, a Pilates teacher, who is currently putting herself through her paces learning Arabic. Their two boys are working in the UK.

In saying goodbye to Felix – and expressing our deepest appreciation for his support to the Association as SBLSO – we wish Gez and Cathy the best of fortune for their time in Oman in what we hope will be the posting of a lifetime with SAF.

If only we could do it all over again ...! ■



CIVIL AID – THE KEY TO PEACE

The joint Sultan's Armed Forces Association/British Omani Society event in June went very well indeed, with the highest attendance since before the COVID years – more than 70 present in Sackville Street, plus more than 50 watching on Zoom, including members in Oman, Australia and the United States.

Martin Robb was commissioned into the Brigade of Gurkhas and saw service in the Far East before joining SAF in 1970, in the Muscat Regiment. In 1974 he was appointed to head the civil aid and development programme personally by HM Sultan Qaboos, and became a member of the original Dhofar Development Department.

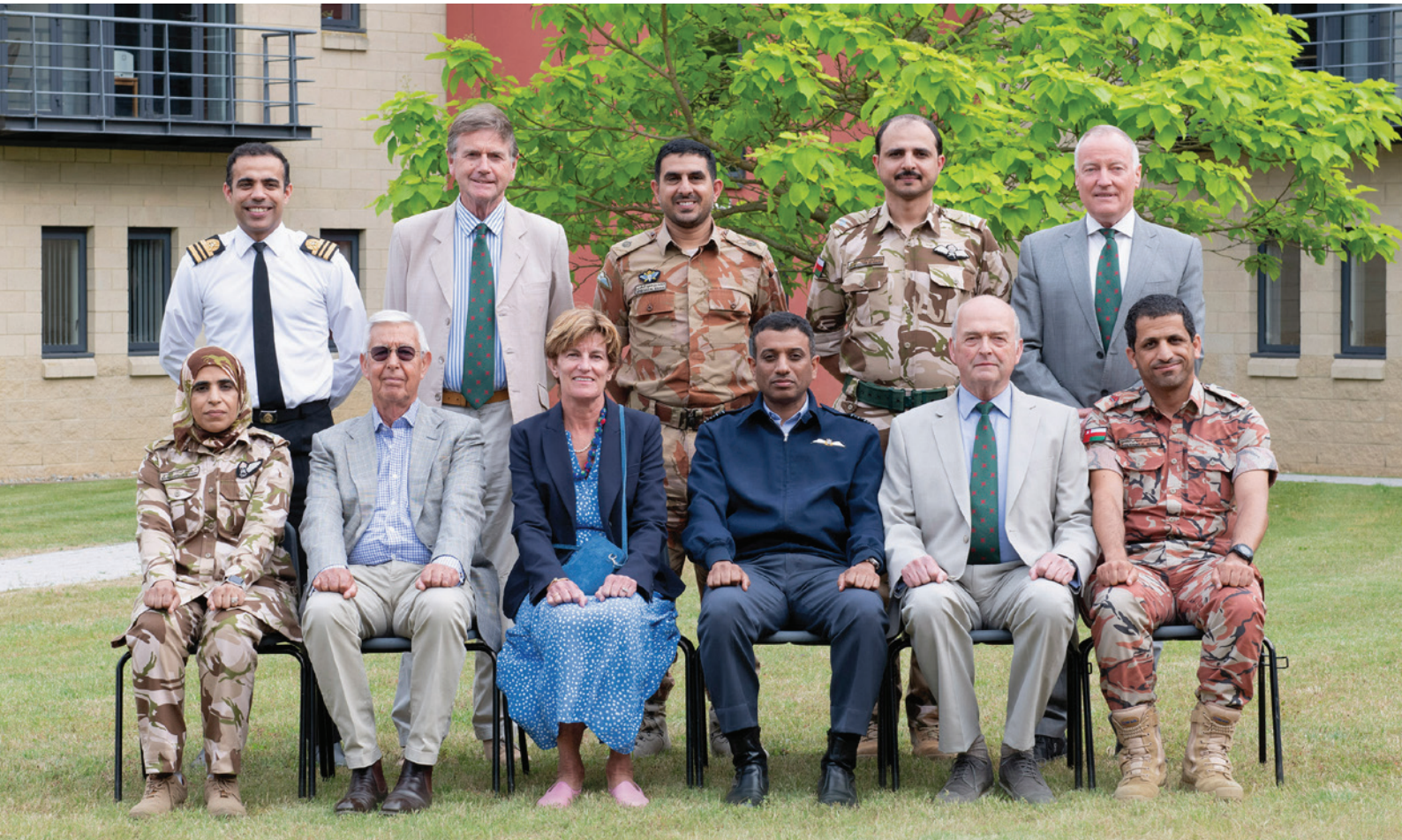
He remained in Dhofar until 1984, and has retained strong links. He and his wife Jenny now live in Perthshire, Scotland, where they run a traditional hill farm. As a good citizen, Martin has spent time in the political world, has been chairman of a variety of charities and continues his lay ministry within the Episcopal Church of Scotland.

Martin Robb with John McKeown and Gordon Allen



The audience settling down for Martin Robb's talk.

SAF ASSOCIATION AT THE UK DEFENCE ACADEMY SHRIVENHAM



SAF Association Veterans with Omani Students at the UK Defence Academy. Standing: Lt Cdr Azzan Al Shaidi, Angus Ramsay, Major Mohammed Al Mughairi, Sqn Ldr Salim Al Hajri and Ian Gordon. Seated: Sqn Ldr Maryam Al Rashdi, Roger Brown, Grania Howard, Gp Capt Salim Al Sidairi, Gordon Allen and Maj Ishaq Al Mamari.

Despite changes to the programme and content, our members were still in familiar waters with this year's theme, Exercise 'Command Destiny'. It was an opportunity to discuss the challenges of operational command and the realities of warfighting with students from around the world. Many of the nations represented had experience of conflict and anti-piracy operations and the syndicate sessions were as lively and thought-provoking as ever.

The selection process of veterans to join the students differed from previous years. Initially, course members themselves were given the opportunity to invite whomever they wished from the veteran community at large. However, anticipating that there might be some shortfalls, we offered a list of Association veterans to the Defence Academy as a contingency very early in the process.

This was well-received by **Cdr Tracy MacSephney** VR RN, the lead Directing Staff, and six were invited to share their experiences. They were **Ian Gordon** (MR, SAFTR, FQ and FF), **Angus Ramsay** (NFR), **Peter Williams** (FF) (*not in photo*), **Grania Howard** (FMS), **Roger Brown** (MR, SAFTR, FF, SOLF) and **Gordon Allen** (OA).

Additionally, it was very good to see that one of our Honorary Members, **Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Johns**, had also been invited to address one of the syndicates by a RAF course member.

Within the new, condensed programme there was only one central presentation in Cormorant Hall before the syndicate discussions. **Major General Julian Thompson** took the stage with a hard-hitting talk that focused on the harshness of conflict and the robustness demanded of, and evident in, those who fought in both World Wars and subsequent campaigns.

The syndicate sessions took place during the last half of the morning and we departed after lunch. Fortunately, most veterans had arrived the previous evening and our hosts had arranged 'ice-breaker' events in local hostels – which worked admirably! And despite Eid Al Adha being declared on the main day of the exercise, we were able to arrange the traditional photograph with the Omani DS and students on the preceding evening.

Although taking place slightly earlier than usual on 27 and 28 June last year, dates for 2024 have reverted to early July. ■

MEMORIAL EVENT AT SANDHURST

24 October 2023



Memories of the glory and reverence of the first Dhofar Memorial Service in the Royal Memorial Chapel at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst in September 1977 still stir the soul of many of our members. Almost 47 years hence, the presentation and initial dedication of our Memorial Book – our Roll of Honour – retains the deepest meaning for us all.

In 1996 a re-dedication service was held as 15 more names had been added to the original 20. However, it was perhaps inevitable that the events of history and better record-keeping would, in time, require further amendments: and the Book's condition, subject to the climate and the ancient heating system with which Sandhurst is blessed, would deteriorate.

And so it was. In the intervening years three more names were added in the early 2000s and in 2023 the Committee agreed the addition of a further four names. The Book's condition *had* suffered and it was in need of a thorough overhaul.

Through the expert services of **Ann Bowen**, a Reigate-based calligrapher, and **Rosie Gray** of the Black Cat Bindery in Shepton Mallett, the new entries and some corrections were completed and the Book refurbished and provided with a special support frame to allow it to lie open within its display case without damaging the spine.

As all this work was going ahead, we became aware that the names of the five Airwork Services men who died at Khor Rawri on 1 June 1978 were not recorded together in a memorial anywhere. In Oman they joined as civilians, but in many nations' armed forces they would have been in uniform. Despite basic and challenging working conditions, they maintained our aircraft to the highest standards, and many members have very good reason to be deeply grateful to them.

Thus it was decided that, with seven servicemen and five civilians to honour since the 1996 event, and the Book properly refurbished, a further service should be held at RMAS to mark the occasion.

The support and encouragement of the Academy Chaplain, **Monsignor Robert Corrigan**, and the Assistant Chaplain, the **Revd Luiz Marques**, during the year preparing for the event was invaluable. It was their suggestion that, in addition to re-dedicating the Book, a separate engraved brass plaque commemorating the Airwork Services men should be commissioned and blessed, and could stand next to the Book in its display case.



While researching the facts around the Airwork services incident, it became clear that the families of those who died had largely mourned alone and with scant information available. Such was the nature of individual contracts and secondments, the same was true for the families of the Servicemen. It was quickly evident that, in addition to giving the Association an occasion to come together again *'in memoriam'*, it would be a wonderful opportunity also to honour the families of those we were remembering.

MEMORIAL EVENT AT SANDHURST



The service itself was led by Monsignor Robert Corrigan and saw the Book and the plaque proudly displayed centre stage at the crossing.

Tracking down relatives after nearly 50 years was not a simple task – and much detective work ensued! Tuesday 24 October dawned bright and sunny – unusually warm and perfect for gathering at Old College Square before the service. It was a scene of new acquaintances being made, old friends reuniting, and civilian relatives discovering for the very first time what it had meant to serve with SAF and in Dhofar. It was as humbling as it was memorable, and any tears were joyous.

The Order of Service had been designed most thoughtfully by **John McKeown**. The service itself was led by Monsignor Robert Corrigan and saw the Book and the plaque proudly displayed centre stage at the crossing. Following the rededication and blessing, Musician Clements from the British Army Band Sandhurst treated the congregation to a faultless Last Post and Reveille that resounded around the Chapel from the rear gallery.

The Address was given by the Chairman, **Gordon Allen**, who paid tribute to the inspiration he had found in **Fiona Stanford's** book "Don't Say Goodbye". Fiona had set out to write the stories of the families of the casualties suffered by 1st Battalion Welsh Guards during their 2009 tour in Afghanistan. She had recorded in the most personal terms the grief, courage and humanity of the families and friends of those who had died. Fiona's focus on those left behind was the inspiration behind our efforts to contact as many families of our casualties as possible to ensure that, albeit many years later, they would know that their men were not forgotten and would be forever recorded with honour.

Of the seven newly-recorded SAF names, although the families of **Martin Ward-Harrison** and **Tony Fleming** were unable to attend, we were very pleased to be joined by family members of **Geoff Mawle**, **Mike Offord**, **Adrian Winterbon**, **Stan Stanford** and **Don Nairn**. Of the 90 in the congregation, there were 30 Airwork Services family members – which somehow made all the research and preparation so thoroughly worthwhile. Although it had not been possible to trace the next of kin of three of the men – **Tom Hothersall**, **Alan Pullen** and **John Street** – the families of **Tom Leavey** and **Terry Waite** were very well represented. We were also joined by **Martin Fowler** who survived the incident, and by the family of **Chris Filmer** who also survived but died in 2002.

The Service was concluded with the transfer of the Book and the plaque to their permanent station in the display case in the south transept, carried with due ceremony by **Ian Gordon** and **Tony Nicholson**. Thereafter, all the visitors had the opportunity to look at them in detail and take photographs.

In addition to members and families, **Aqeed Rukn Said Shabibi** RNO, the Assistant Military Attaché in London, represented COSSAF; and Airwork Services (now part of Babcock International Group) were represented by the Airwork Services Director in Oman, **Mr Keith Eytle**. Babcock's Regional Director in Oman, **John Twine**, had additionally arranged a generous contribution towards the costs of the event which was greatly appreciated.

Following the Service, a reception and lunch organised by **Neil Fawcett** were held at The Ely Hotel in nearby Blackwater. The curry was superb and the room buzzed as families met each other – many for the very first time – and told their stories. We talked far into the afternoon. Countless memories surfaced; many names and addresses were exchanged; and even a few ghosts, at last, were laid to rest. It was a very special day. ■



NAVIGATING THE SEAS OF KNOWLEDGE:

FROM FOST TRAINING TO THE GRAND CELEBRATION OF OMAN'S 53RD NATIONAL DAY

by Raaid Bahri Waleed Al Sadi RNO

Embarking on a transformative journey at Fleet Operational Standards and Training (FOST) was truly invaluable. The Royal Navy of Oman chose me for a second secondment, aiming to draw knowledge from this prestigious organisation and apply it in our naval operations.

During my FOST tenure, I delivered training to the Royal Navy (RN), Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA), and international ships. Notably, I participated in training sessions on *HMS FORTH* in Gibraltar as part of the FOST team, an extraordinary experience involving ten nights of sailing to Cape Verde. These moments enhanced my professional skills and created lasting connections with fellow naval professionals.

FOST's commitment to high standards was evident in training sessions. Conducting drills onboard diverse vessels, I observed meticulous attention to detail. Interactions with RN, RFA, and international crews provided unique perspectives, fostering a rich exchange of knowledge. A defining moment was delivering training on *HMS FORTH* during an extended sail to Cape Verde. Beyond practical exercises, camaraderie built during those ten nights at sea was unparalleled, reinforcing bonds of professionalism and friendship.

Despite intense FOST responsibilities, I seized a unique opportunity to explore the UK's cultural tapestry. Immersing myself in Britain's customs and traditions from vibrant cities to serene





In conclusion, my journey from FOST training to orchestrating Oman's National Day exemplifies seamless integration of professional development and cultural exchange. Experiences elevated naval expertise and enriched understanding of global maritime practices and diverse cultures, standing as a testament to enduring bonds forged at sea and shared celebration of heritage and progress. ■

countryside, each exploration added cultural understanding, complementing professional growth.

Beyond maritime focus, cultural exploration allowed witnessing the UK's historical and natural wonders. Museums, landmarks, and scenic landscapes provided a holistic view, creating a harmonious balance between professional commitment and personal enrichment.

As my time at FOST concluded, experiences culminated in the 53rd Oman National Day celebration. The vision to share Oman's rich heritage materialised into a grand event, showcasing Oman's beauty and diversity. The programme unfolded with a warm welcome, highlighting Oman's significance and celebrating Oman National Day. The Omani National Anthem echoed pride and unity. A crafted video showcased Oman's facets, emphasising the allure of the new vision for 2040. Welcoming guests with Omani hospitality, the event featured traditional delights and symbolic gifts, fostering a deeper connection between Omani and British communities. As gratitude, a small Navy shield and a book detailing Shabab Oman II's construction were presented, symbolising enduring ties between our nations.





مع انتهاء فترة تواجدي في المنظمة، جاءت فكرة تنظيم الاحتفال بالعيد الوطني العُماني الـ ٥٣ المجيد بقاعدة (HMS DRAKE) لتكون مسك الختام. كان مصدرها الإيمان بما تتمتع سلطنة عُمان بين الجبال الراسيات والنخل الباسقات والهضاب والتلال، وحيث الشواطئ الرملية والشلالات الصخرية ومجرى سيول الأودية رسمت من خلالها حدوداً مشكلة لوحة فنية من التنوع وعبق التراث والتاريخ. كشفت الفعالية عن استقبال دافئ مع رائحة العود واللبان العُماني، سلطت الضوء على أهمية عُمان واحتفانها بالعيد الوطني العُماني. عزف بعد ذلك النشيد الوطني العُماني ومشاعر العزة والمفخرة بداخلي لا يمكن وصفها. عرض لاحقاً فيديو مصمم عن عنان الجمال في عُمان، مؤكداً جاذبية الرؤية الجديدة لعام ٢٠٤٠م تحت الرعاية السامية من لدن حضرة صاحب الجلالة السلطان هيثم بن طارق المعظم - القائد الأعلى حفظه الله ورعاه.

ومع انتهاء الحفل تم دعوة الضيوف للضيافة العُمانية، تضمنت مزيجاً من التمور المتنوعة والحلوى الفاخرة مع احتساء القهوة العُمانية الممزوجة برائحة الهيل والزعفران، كما تم تقديم مختلفاً من الهدايا الرمزية والتي لها صلوات متنوعة بتاريخ عُمان وحضارتها العريقة. وكمظهر شكر للقاعدة، تم تقديم درع يمثل شعار البحرية السلطانية العُمانية وكتاب يوثق بناء سفينة شباب عُمان الثانية ليكون رمزا للروابط الدائمة بين بلدينا.

في الختام، تجسدت رحلتي من التدريب تحت مظلة منظمة التدريب البحري (FOST) إلى تنظيم فعالية العيد الوطني العُماني الـ ٥٣ المجيد كتكامل سلس بين التنمية المهنية والتبادل الثقافي عززت التجارب المختلفة آفاق الخيرات على المستوى المهني وزادت فهماً عميقاً للممارسات البحرية العالمية والثقافات المتنوعة، مكملت بذلك الشهادة على الروابط الدائمة التي تم تشكيلها في عمق البحار والاحتفال المشترك بالتراث والتقدم على مختلف القطاعات.



إبحار في محيط المعرفة: من التدريب بمنظمة التدريب البحري في البحرية الملكية البريطانية (FOST) إلى الاحتفال بالعيد الوطني العُماني الـ 53 المجيد

بواسطة الرائد بحري/ وليد السعدي



بدأت رحلتي المعرفية في منظمة التدريب البحري في البحرية الملكية البريطانية (FOST) في نهاية شهر مايو من العام المنصرم وكانت حقاً لا تقدر بثمن. رشحتني البحرية السلطانية العُمانيّة للفترة الثانية من إسناد الضباط المعارين للانخراط بهذه المؤسسة العريقة.

أثناء فترة عملي بالبحرية الملكية، تلقيت مختلف طرق التدريب على متن السفن التابعة للبحرية الملكية البريطانية (RN) والأسطول الملكي المساعد (RFA) إلى جانب السفن التابعة للدول الصديقة والشقيقة للمملكة المتحدة. وجاءت مشاركتي في فترات التدريب على متن إحدى سفن الأسطول الملكي في منطقة جبل طارق كجزء من فريق التدريب البحري الملكي (FOST) كأحد التجارب الاستثنائية التي من غير الممكن محوها من شريط الذكريات، حيث تضمنت الإبحار لمدة عشر ليالٍ قاطعة بها المحيط الأطلسي و متجهة إلى إحدى جزر جمهورية الرأس الأخضر. اللحظات التي تعاشتها مع المنظمة وطواقم السفن عززت مهاراتي المهنية والمعرفية على حدٍ سواء وخلقت اتصالات دائمة مع زملائي في المهنة البحرية.

إن التزام منظمة التدريب البحري الملكي (FOST) بالمعايير العالية بجودة التدريب كان جلياً في جلسات التأهيل والتطوير مع أطقم السفن البحرية. حيث لاحظت انتباهاً دقيقاً للتفاصيل خلال تنفيذ مختلف التمارين المتنوعة في مختلف القطاعات. كما أن الانخراط مع طواقم سفن البحرية الملكية، الأسطول الملكي المساعد والدولية كان له نتائجاً مبهراً نحو آفاقاً فريدة وتعزيزاً للإثراء المعرفي المتبادل بين مختلف الشعوب والحضارات.

على الرغم من المسؤوليات في المنظمة، كانت هناك فرص ثمينة لاستكشاف نسيج من الثقافات البريطانية. غمرت نفسي في معرفة مختلف العادات والتقاليد في شتى أرجاء المملكة، من المدن النابضة بالحياة إلى الأرياف الهادئة، حيث أضافت كل هذه الاستكشافات فهماً ثقافياً مكماً للنمو المهني.

ما وراء التركيز البحري ومتطلبات العمل، سمحت المغامرة الثقافية في أرجاء بريطانيا برؤية عجائب طبيعتها الخلابة وتاريخها الممتد منذ عدة قرون. قدمت المتاحف والمعالم السياحية والمناظر الطبيعية بمختلف فصول السنة رؤية شاملة، خلقت من خلالها توازناً متناعماً بين الالتزام المهني والتنوير الشخصي.

SCOTTISH REUNION DINNER

Thursday 11 May 2023



Left to right: Robin and Seonaid Hastie Smith, Neil and Margaret Lamb, Martin and Jenny Robb, Sandy and Diana Blackett, Ian and Helen Gordon, Jonathan and Nicky Forbes and their dog 'Monty'.

Twenty-four members, partners and guests were present at Douneside House. We were delighted to have included in our number **Jackie**, a daughter of **Keith** (SOAF) and **Fiona Warton**, through whose initiative our Association Scottish Regional Branch reunions date back to the 1980s. **Martin Robb** gave a brief and

entertaining account of the SAF Association visit to Oman in December 2022. He highlighted how welcome all were made by Omanis whom they met and how grateful all Omanis were for the contributions made by those of us who had served in SAF, and elsewhere in Oman, during and after the Dhofar campaign. ■



Jackie Warton-Norris is seen here planting a tree in memory of her mother, the founder/instigator of the Scottish SAF Association dinner, Fiona Warton.

Despite the distance from the south of England and our reunion being during the week, we had hoped an Omani or two would be with us this year. It nearly happened – next reunion and thereafter, inshallah!

Fifty years on from 1973, our reunion included six who had served in the Muscat Regiment during all or part of that year – **Sandy Blackett, Jonathan Forbes, Ian Gordon, Robin Hastie Smith, Neil Lamb** and **Martin Robb**. Another example of friendships made many moons ago and cemented through the SAF Association. Our thoughts were with other contemporaries unable, or no longer able, to be with us.

Those who dined at Douneside House and were able to toast Their Majesties **King Charles** and **Sultan Haitham** were: **Sandy & Diana Blackett, Jim & Mhairi Blythe, Nicol & Vi Cameron, Neil & Majorie Fawcett, Olive Forrest, Jonathan & Nicky Forbes, Ian & Helen Gordon, Robin & Seonaid Hastie Smith, Neil & Margaret Lamb, Martin & Jenny Robb, Valerie Robinson, Euan & Mollie Scroggie, Jackie Warton-Norris** and **Jim Dunn**. ■



Sandy Blackett and Jim Blythe

**2024 SAF Reunion
Douneside House
Thursday 16 May 2024**



Left to right: Margaret Lamb, Ian Gordon and Vi Cameron.

SON/RNO REUNION LUNCH

Sunday 9 July 2023



Mike Lobb, Penny Lobb, Tom Hammon, Jane Gunning, Katie Lytle, Mike Ridley-Martin and Captain Said Al Shabibi.

This is the third time since 2018 we have held our Reunion at the Princess Royal Gallery at the Royal Naval Museum in Portsmouth and once again the venue and the catering didn't disappoint. We were honoured by the presence of the Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman's Representative **Ameed Awadh al Marmari**. His talk was much appreciated and stressed the strong bonds between the RNO and the many RN officers who have previously served and some still serving in Oman.



Dr. Jane Hanley, David Walker, David Bell and David Bates



CRNO Representative, **Ameed Awadh al Marmari**.

Proceedings were opened by **Robin Gainsford** the Event Organiser who invited guests to stand for a minutes silence in recognition of three veterans who have crossed the bar since the last meeting **Rear Admiral John Gunning, Richard Lowther and Jolyon Hunt. Captain Richard Moss**, RN Senior British Loan Service Officer in Oman, gave an excellent briefing with slides of the present state

of the RNO and the role of loan service officers in its development. Our Chairman **Colonel Gordon Allen** then updated the audience with the Association's affairs in particular the recent very enjoyable and successful trip back to Oman.



Captain Richard Moss presenting.



Left: Colonel Gordon Allen, Chairman SAF Association; Ameer Awadh al Marmari, CRNO Representative and Robin Gainsford, Event Organiser.

Thirty-five veterans attended and enjoyed a delicious three course lunch after an initial sparkling wine reception. There was a lot of chatting and swinging of the lamp as people reminisced about their adventures and happy times in the Sultanate going back to the '60s/70s. There was a lovely buzz to the whole proceedings.

Moss, David Bates, Phil & Lynne Carroll, Mike Pilley, Robin & Kate Gainsford, Steve & Annie Bennett, Mike & Penny Lobb, Brian & Margaret Tyekiff, Gordon Allen, David Walker, Tom Hammon, David & Sally Smale, Jane Gunning & daughter, Katie Lytle, John & Carol Knapp and Ian McLaren.

The following were present: **Dr. Jane Hanley, Mike Ridley-Martin, Chris & Suzanne Spencer, Neil Fawcett, David Bell, Hugh Whitaker & Jenny Litton, Richard & Barbara Osborn, Richard**

Guests

CRNO Representative **Ameer Awadh al Marmari**
Assistant Military Attaché **Captain Said Al Shabibi**

EAST ANGLIA LUNCHEON

Thursday 7 September 2023



Our venue – The Greyhound public house in Lavenham Suffolk.

Our second East Anglia Lunch nearly did not get off the ground, as the take-up was too low for the Hintlesham Golf Club to run with it. Not to be thwarted, the venue was changed to a traditional pub “The Greyhound” in Lavenham and a select few assembled on 7th September for a particularly enjoyable lunch. All the SAF Association members present had attended the Inaugural event the previous year and the stories continued...



Bill Prince contemplating whether or not to share his ‘moules mariniere’ with Peter Haldane!”.



Marian de Bass, Andrew Prince and Chris Rodgers – notice the Oman Gendarmerie tie.

This year, our members came from Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. The oldest on parade, at least in terms of SAF service was **Bill Prince** (NFR 66-68) accompanied by his son **Andrew** as his guest – and chauffeur! **Bill** (FST 72) and **Marian de Bass, Tresham Gregg** (NFR 71-73), **Peter Haldane** (NFR 74-76) and **Chris** (OG 77-79, MOD 82-86) and **Mary Rodgers**. Chris reassumed his position as chief photographer, and, as you will no doubt have noticed, the Northern Frontier Regiment was well to the fore, as usual!

The venue, in the centre of Lavenham, enabled those amongst us who had not yet seen it, to spend time either side of lunch wandering round, probably, the most attractive and well preserved medieval “Wool” town in the country.



The Swan, originally an old coaching inn



It was the firm consensus among us, that the format for this year's Lunch in Lavenham should be repeated for next year, when, hopefully, we will see an increase in numbers. Please bring a guest, as I have every confidence they will enjoy the occasion. ■

One of a number of wonky houses.



THE EAST ANGLIA REGIONAL LUNCH 2024

The 2024 East Anglia Regional Lunch will be held at The Greyhound in Lavenham (97, High Street, Lavenham, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 9PZ), from 1200 hrs onwards on Thursday 5 September. Those wishing to attend should contact Tresham Gregg (treshamgregg@hotmail.com). This year's price worked out at about £27 per head which was paid on the day. The Association website www.oman.org.uk and The SAF Association Journal will have the details. Tresham will also send a reminder email in June, to all those Association members in the East Anglia area, and he would like to go firm on numbers by mid-August. Please indicate if you have any special dietary requirements at that stage.



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NEW FOREST CURRY LUNCHEON

The fifth New Forest Curry Luncheon was held at the South Lawn Hotel, Milford on Sea on Sunday 24 September 2023.



Woke up to a blustery unsmiling world. Been here before, no way can I walk to the hotel, rain threatening, wind blowing. 11.30 a.m. arrived at South Lawn at the same time as the sun. Let joy be unconfined! Dining room is now somewhat contained so we were able to wander outside blessed by the early Autumn offering. We were sad at the absence of some members **John Paxman** (MR) had thoughtfully tested himself and was positive – no Covid would be lurking through our luncheon. **Peter Isaacs** (FF) was unable to attend and **David & Pauline McAllister** (FTR) did not feel fit enough to make the journey. We sent our best wishes to them all. Their absence however did make way for the arrival of **Hugh Colley** (SOA).

One of the delights of this luncheon is that for the most part people do not discuss the brilliance of the grandchildren! It is a time for catching up on 'What have you been doing?' Which post-Covid seems to have been quite a lot and very exciting by the level of noise coming out of the garden and in the dining room. However, as guests **Dick Johns** RAF Regiment & **Elizabeth**, said to me, "As they get older they shout more because their hearing



Mike Ridley-Martin and Grania Howard



Dick Johns

NEW FOREST CURRY LUNCHEON



THE NEW FOREST REGIONAL LUNCHEON 2024

The sixth New Forest Regional Curry Luncheon will be held at the South Lawn Hotel, Lymington Road, Milford on Sea, Lymington SO41 0RF. www.southlawnhotel.com from 1130hrs on Sunday 18 August 2024.

Those wishing to attend should contact Mike Lobb (mikelobb@hotmail.co.uk). The price will be £33 for members and £37 for guests, which includes an introductory glass of house white as well as wine with the two course meal followed by coffee. Other beverages may be purchased from the bar. Please see the Association website www.oman.org.uk for any changes nearer the date.

Bookings should be made to Mike Lobb at (mikelobb@hotmail.co.uk). If you wish to pay by BACS (preferred) the sort code is 40-20-30, a personal a/c in the name of M C Lobb Esq, 72695820. Please indicate if you have any special dietary requirements or require a table for easy access. If you are going to stay at South Lawn, please mention that you are attending the event for a modest discount bringing it to £140 per room per night with breakfast (minimum stay two nights).



deteriorates," this, of course, is particularly true of the Gunners who, as usual, were delightfully present: **Mort & Mary Burdick** (SOA), **Hugh Colley**, **George & Venice Correa** (Southern Oman Brigade), **Mike Halliwell**, **Janet Hughes** (SOA), **Mike Lobb** (FQ) (worse than most), **Miles & Jean Thomson** (JMIS).

It was particularly gratifying to see that yet again FMS was the best represented unit. Doubtless all present felt much safer in the presence of **Bobby Foxtton**, **Jane Hanley**, **Grania Howard** and **Angela Lovegrove**. FMS was also represented by **Penny Lobb** in charge of ephemera, lists and camera, ably assisted by guests **Pauline Chatterley** (MOD) and **Brian Woolly** (MOD).

It would appear to an impartial observer that the key to return bookings, of whom the following must be acknowledged, **Nick Alister Jones** (MR), **Ken & Doe Brown** (HQ SAF), **Roger Brown** (various), **Peter & Anne Calliss** (RNO), **Mike & Rose Farquharson** (OG), **Colin Lovegrove** (SOA), **Mike Ridley-Martin** (RNO), **Mike & Nikki Watson** (SAFTR) and **John Wooldridge** (DR), is the totally delicious whiskey sticky toffee pudding and I cannot wait for more.

Please pencil in the new date for 2024 – Sunday 18 August. ■



Back Row (L to R): Jimmy Garnier, David McFadden, John Dean, Graham Smith, Mort Burdick, George Correa and Mike Goodfellow.
Front Row (L to R): Ian Ventham, Tom Bremridge, Mike Hardy, Miles Thomson and Patrick Dunn.

OMAN GUNNER LUNCH 2023

Tuesday 12 September 2023

Twelve doughty gunners met for our annual lunch, held in the Honourable Artillery Company in London on Tuesday 12 September 2023 to catch up and share shaggy dog tales. **Ian Ventham** and **Mike Goodfellow** gave us a quick overview of their visit to Oman in December 2023, extolling the kindness and generosity of all their Omani hosts and the excellent organisation that made the visit truly memorable.

Sadly, we lost **Will Cook** in February and **Hugh Colley** is now

confined in his nursing home unable to travel. **Mike Lobb**, **Gordon Allen**, **Ashley Loxton**, **Jerry Yeomans**, **John Lewis**, **Chris Long-Price**, **Rod Baker**, **Norrie Wallace**, **Richard Morley**, **Saoud Al-Habsi**, **Tony Smith**, **Julian Paxton**, **Nick Holbrook**, **Dougie Maclaime**, **Johnny Kirkham** and our 'honorary gunner' **Allan Howard** were unable to join us due to other commitments, or off the road, but we hope to see some of them next year. ■

OMAN GUNNER LUNCH 2024

**1200 for 1300 on Tuesday 10 September 2024
at the Honourable Artillery Company, London EC1Y 2BQ.**

JEBEL REGIMENT REUNION DINNER



Back Row: Michael Ball, Robert Aplin, Howard Gill, John Porter, Keith Ryde, Alan Deed, Peter Booker, Peter Morgan, Gerald Davies and Steve Lewis. Front Row Sitting: Patrick Shervington, Jason Carley-Smith, Robert O'Dwyer and Tim Burls.

In 2016 five former members of the Jebel Regiment dined together in London's Special Forces Club to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the regiment's tour spent on Sarfait in 1976. They resolved to do it again five years later, but with as many JR officers as they could find.

The pandemic thwarted that plan in 2021, but it was resurrected on 6th October this year when fourteen gathered for dinner, again in the SF Club. All were delighted to welcome Keith Ryde who attended representing the SAF Association. Keith had given valuable assistance in tracking down some elusive names. Many more wished to attend, but were prevented from doing so by circumstances, distance, or Mick Lynch's overtime ban. But they were with us in spirit and we toasted their health.

It was a great occasion. A chance to see friends not seen for decades and reminisce about days long past and a world gone forever. ■



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SOUTH EAST REGION AND MAJOR PAUL WRIGHT MEMORIAL LUNCH

Chatham – Thursday 4 May 2023



Top Row left to right: Penny Lobb, Lissie Larkin, Keith Day, Richard Moore, Keith Ryde. Second Row: Sammy Supple, Nick Larkin, Edwina Moore, Russ Peart, Dave Allen. Front Row: John McKeown, Bill de Bass. Missing! Ian Foulkes & Andrew Roseveare. Mike Lobb was also in attendance.

The South East Regional Lunch was held in Chatham at the Royal Engineer Headquarter Mess on 4 May 2023. As in previous years we took the opportunity to remember **Major Paul Wright WSh WB RE** who was Killed in Action in Dhofar 50 years ago. **John McKeown**, who served with him, talked about Paul; and **Russ Peart**, a Strikemaster pilot who provided close air support (CAS) that fateful day, also gave a telling account.

Fifteen members, spouses and friends met up once again at the RE Museum for coffee and to enjoy the world class exhibits there before convoying round to the Mess for drinks and curry lunch. The event had been postponed from October 2022 when we were hit by "late Covid" and a drop in numbers that made that event unviable. Inevitably the revised date clashed in many members' diaries but it was comforting to receive so many sincere apologies and heartening that so many members continue to lead such extraordinarily busy lives.

The Chatham gathering is one of a number of regional lunches instigated by the Association's then Chairman **Mike Lobb**, and that remains its main purpose. It was never meant to be a "Sapper"

gathering and continues to attract members from across SAF. That said, it would have been remiss of the RE not to have commemorated the life of one of its bravest soldiers, Major Paul "Tiger" Wright WSh WB RE who served in the SAS and JR. Brig John McKeown had served with Paul as young officers together. He spoke of his strength, determination and courage and it was perhaps inevitable that he would have been drawn to service in the SAS and the excitement provided subsequently on Loan Service in Oman that cost him his life. John drew on a contemporary account of events provided by **Tim Jones** who was a fellow company commander of Paul's in JR. Paul's life was also commemorated at his graveside on the actual anniversary of his death on 6th February 2023 at Knutsford, Cheshire and Tim has written an account of that elsewhere in the Journal. A fuller account of Paul Wright's life and the operations and battles that led to his death and posthumous award of the Sultan's Gallantry Medal, Oman's highest award for bravery, has been written by **Lt Col RJD (Nobby) Reid** and John McKeown and published in the Royal Engineer Journal. E-copies are available on request from nicklarkin1@aol.com

SOUTH EAST REGIONAL AND MAJ PAUL WRIGHT MEMORIAL LUNCH



The Top Table, Headquarter Mess Royal Engineers.

In closing, John thanked Mike Lobb for his past chairmanship of the Association and to all those responsible for organising the SE Regional Lunch.

We were also treated to an extraordinary account of the air war by Russ Peart who served as a Strikemaster pilot and who provided CAS to Maj Wright's No 1 Coy JR during that operation, *Operation Dragon*. What was telling in Russ's quiet account was that the reality of conducting CAS was a world away from that which many associate with the "air battle". He spoke of the enormous difficulty in acquiring targets at speed in the largely featureless (from the air) terrain. Russ was full of praise for those such as Paul Wright and his 2ic **Mike Austin** who provided the forward air control and without whom he could not have provided the closest of close support and the telling effect on the battle that was achieved. Russ equally praised the bravery of

the helicopter pilots who landed and evacuated the wounded under fire. However, it was quite clear to the audience that providing CAS placed extraordinary demands on the fighter pilot – who needed to be as courageous and determined as those on the ground: and without the intervention of the Strikemasters and their crews, JR casualties would have been immensely higher.

We are grateful to all those at Chatham who supported us – both the RE Museum's Director, **Rebecca Nash** and her staff, and the Royal School of Military Engineering – and for providing such a sumptuous curry and interesting setting. Our thanks go particularly to **Lt Col Guy Cheesman**, CO 1 RSME Regt, **Graham Galloway**, the Station Staff Officer as well as **Maj Simon Kerly**, Mess Secretary, **Lauren Gingell**, the Mess Manager and all the Mess staff for their kindness and hospitality. ■



OLD AND NEW

A panoramic of the Royal Engineers Museum, previously the Electrical School of the Royal School of Military Engineering at Brompton Barracks, Chatham, in Kent. In this photograph, the building is framed by the outside exhibits. On the right is the "Trojan" Armoured Engineer Vehicle (AEV) – a multi-purpose engineering tank designed mainly to clear battlefield obstacles that saw service in Afghanistan. On the left is the "Titan" Armoured Vehicle Launcher Bridge (AVLB) carrying a bridge designed specifically for crossing obstacles: reportedly, it can launch a 26 metre bridge in two minutes. Photo credits: Lt Col Nick Larkin RE (SAFE 1980-82)

WESSEX LUNCH 2023

The 2023 Wessex Lunch was held at our, now, usual venue of the Sherborne Golf Club in Dorset on Saturday 15 July 2023.

This departure from our normal 'formula' of Last Sunday in July (LSIJ) was necessary due to planned staff leave at the Club. However, we are very pleased to confirm that the 2024 event has reverted to LSIJ.

Thirty-nine members with wives or partners turned up – several traveling a considerable distance, some overcoming nasty traffic incidents to get there.

Guests were offered a glass of prosecco on arrival and were then able to order drinks from the bar, with wine provided at the dining tables.

The club provided their customary choice of four wonderful curries-with-all-the-trimmings plus an array of delicious desserts.

During the course of the meal a free raffle was held; the prize being a copy of the second edition of **Stewart Wilson's** excellent book 'Dhofar Voices'. This was won by **John Tulloch**.

Toasts were drunk to **His Majesty The King** and to **His Majesty The Sultan**.

It was a most enjoyable occasion; the food, atmosphere and service were all as we have come to expect and there were no complaints or fisticuffs!



Mary Holbrook, Ginnie Sincock, Chris Tomlinson and Nick Holbrook



Nell Nicholson, Tony Nicholson, Peter Sincock, Julian Paxton and Nick Holbrook's back.

WESSEX LUNCH 2023

Those attending were:

Gordon Allen, April Browell, Jackie & Andrew Christie-Collins, George & Venice Correa, Patrick Dunn, Neil Fawcett, Mike Goodfellow, Chris Griffiths, Steve Gruner, 'Squish' Harris, Nick & Mary Holbrook, Johnnie Kirkham, Nick & Penny Knollys, Colin & Angela Lovegrove, Eyre Maunsell, Tom & Colyn Moore, Tony & Nell Nicholson, Julian Paxton, Peter & Ginnie Sincock, Kevin & Carol Smith, Chris & Suzanne Spencer, George & Margaret-Anne Streatfield, Mo & Anne Tancock, Chris Tomlinson, John & Victoria Tulloch and Peggy Woodiwiss. ■



Angela and Colin Lovegrove, Neil Fawcett and Venice Correa



George Correa and Mike Goodfellow



Tom and Colyn Moore and Gordon Allen

**The 2024 Lunch will take place on Sunday 28 July.
Book early to avoid disappointment!**



Victoria Tulloch and George Streatfield



April Browell and Angela Lovegrove



Suzanne Spencer and Jacqui Christie-Collins



Neil Fawcett



Kevin Smith, Peggy Woodiwiss, Carol Smith, Chris Griffiths and Patrick Dunn



2023 NORTHERN GATHERING

The Gathering was held at the Principal Hotel, York on 27 March 2023

There had been much 'Greatcoats on, Greatcoats off' for previous gatherings and it was a relief this year to cope with road closures and Pennine Express only. However, transport issues were eased as the hotel is sited at York Railway station.

The hotel staff provided an excellent lunch with good service in very pleasant surroundings. Twenty-one members and their guests attended. Most served in Dhofar in the 1970s and several lamps were swung with much animated conversation and general bonhomie between old friends/comrades meeting again. Varying perspectives of incidents were discussed and clarified! Gordon



Charles Hepworth (with back to camera), Hugh Willoughby, John Knopp, Jane Hepworth, Bob Woolsey and Mike Parrish.



Left to right (from the bread roll on the table): Alan Deed, Josie Salusbury-Trewlawney, Michael Loyd, Jonathon Salusbury-Trewlawney, Bob Birrell, Andrew Hudson, and Donal Douglas (with back to camera).

Allen gave an excellent update on the state of the association and possibilities for the future which offers hope that these functions can continue with attendance by later generations.

Those attending were **Gordon Allen, Bob Birrell, Alan Deed, Donal Douglas, Charles and Jane Hepworth, Geoff Hill, Andrew Hudson, John Knopp, Michael Loyd, John and Jane McKeown, Michael and Penny Parrish, Frank and Paula Riley, Jonathon and Josie Salusbury-Trelawny, Kieron Shaw, Hugh Willoughby and Bob Woolsey.** FF were well represented again, but can we expect KJ next time? ■

We have booked the Principal Hotel for lunch on Monday 25 March 2024 and all members are welcome irrespective of home locations. Provisional or firm bids should be made to Geoff Hill on 01482 629445 or e-mail at SAFANorth19@outlook.com



ROYAL ARMY OF OMAN



*On 21 December, The Royal Army of Oman celebrated the graduation of the candidate officers course from the Sultan Qaboos Military College under the auspices of **HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said**, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, at the military parade ground in Al Murtafa'a Garrison.*



ROYAL ARMY OF OMAN



During 1-21 August, the band of the Royal Army of Oman succeeded in achieving advanced results in the World Music Competition, with the participation of more than 180 musical groups from different countries of the world. The RAO's Music Band's achievements at the World Music Competition, which was held in Scotland, were testament to the skills, discipline and artistry that the band takes to the international stage.



On 29 August, **Major General Matar bin Salim Al Balushi**, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Camp, **General Sir Patrick Sanders**, Chief of the General Staff of the British Army and his accompanying delegation. Upon his arrival at RAO HQ, a Guard of Honour performed the military salute to the Chief of General Staff of the British Army. The two sides exchanged views on several military matters of mutual interest.



On 5 September, **Major General Matar bin Salim al Balushi**, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, honoured the catering team for winning the first place in the 'tough field conditions class' with participation of 26 teams from different countries of the world. RAO's catering team participation came within the UK catering competition 'Army Sustainer', which was held between 19-25 June. The Commander of the Royal Army of Oman congratulated the team and praised their achievements and wished them continued success for future events.

On 29 August, **General Sir Patrick Sanders**, Chief of the General Staff of the British Army, and his accompanying delegation visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). The guest was accompanied by **Major General Matar Salim Al Balushi**, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman. Upon their arrival, the guest and his accompanying delegation were greeted by **Commodore Adil bin Hamoud Al Busaidi**, Head of the MSC, and were briefed on the tactical roles and tasks carried out by the centre in respect of the safety of the maritime environment. The guests also toured the centre's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies used in carrying out its national duties.



The Royal Army of Oman, represented by the Catering Directorate, took part in the British annual rationing exercise 'Army Sustainer', along with a number of armed forces catering crews from different countries. The exercise was held during the period of 19-24 June in the Prince William of Gloucester Camp in Grantham, in the United Kingdom. RAO participation in the British exercise was aimed at enhancing the efficiency of army catering crews and benefitting from the experience and expertise in logistical and administrative fields demonstrated by participating armies. The overall objective was to achieve maximum efficiency in food rationing, besides developing skills to coexist under harsh conditions during military operations. The closing ceremony was attended by **Brigadier Ahmed Bin Ibrahim Ambusaidi**, the Military Attaché at the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in London.



The Sultan's Armed Forces 'Target Sprint' shooting competition 2023 was held between 8-11 January at the shooting ranges of the Royal Army of Oman at Ghala. It saw the participation of a number of units from the Sultan's Armed Forces and other security organisations and was held under the auspices of **Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah Al Shidi**, Commandant of the National Defence College.



On 13 February, **Major General Matar bin Salim Al Balushi**, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Camp, **Major General TJ Bateman**, General Officer Commanding 1st (UK) Division during exercise 'Khanjar Oman'. The two sides exchanged views on several military matters of mutual interest.



On 12 March, **Major General Matar bin Salim Al Balushi**, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, received **Major General Chris Barry**, Director Land Warfare of the British Army. He was visiting the Sultanate of Oman to participate in a demonstration of the joint Omani-British military exercise 'Jabal Storm 2023', which was conducted on the Royal Army training grounds in the Wilayat of Jabal Al Akhdar in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah. As part of the visit, views were exchanged and a number of military topics were discussed that would assist in the training process between the two sides.



Exercise 'Khanjar Oman 2023', a joint Omani-British military exercise, ran between 4-13 February. The Royal Army of Oman, represented by the Coastal Security Force and units of the British Army carried out a practical demonstration under the auspices of **Major General Matar bin Salim Al Balushi**, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman and in the presence of **Major General TJ Bateman**, General Officer Commanding 1st (UK) Division. The patron of the occasion and the attendees listened to a briefing that reviewed the various stages of the exercise, the practical demonstration, and the training objectives expected from the exercise.

Exercise 'Mountain Storm 2023' was conducted between the Royal Army of Oman and the British Forces during the period 28 January to 12 March. On 12 March, the practical demonstration of the exercise was conducted under the patronage of **Major General Matar bin Salim Al Balushi**, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, in the presence of **Major General Chris Barry**, Director Land Warfare of the British Army. During the briefing, the audience was informed of the objectives of the exercise, its various phases, and the practical demonstration. It was the combat training unit of the Royal Army of Oman that conducted the practical demonstration of the joint exercise in the mountainous areas of Jabal Al Akhdar. The exercise plan ensured that both Omani and British participating forces achieved the desired training objectives.





ROYAL AIR FORCE OF OMAN



*On 6 December, the Royal Air Force of Oman celebrated the graduation of a new intake of Pilot Officers, Basic Candidate Officers, Limited Service Officers and University Officers. The ceremony took place at the military parade grounds of Ghala Airbase and the Sultan Qaboos Air Academy under the patronage of **His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik Al Said**, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs.*





On 15 February, **Air Vice-Marshal Khamis bin Hammad Al Ghafri**, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman, received at his office, in HQ Thamrait Air Base, **Air Marshal Harvey Smyth**, Deputy Commander Operations of the British Royal Air Force during the joint Omani-British exercise 'Magic Carpet 2023'. They exchanged views on various military matters of mutual interest.



Following the initial meeting, which was attended by several Senior RAFO and UK officers, **Air Vice-Marshal Khamis bin Hammad Al Ghafri** and **Air Marshal Harvey Smyth** were briefed on the joint military exercise that included plans for implementing joint training, mobilisation operations and field skills.



During the period 12-23 February, the Royal Air Force of Oman and the British Royal Air Force, with support from the Royal Navy of Oman and the Sultan's Special Force, carried out exercise 'Magic Carpet' in the training area in Dhofar Governorate. Activities included the implementation of joint air operations training within the framework of joint co-operation and exchange of experiences between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom in the military fields and in accordance with the training programme pursued by HQ RAFO with brotherly and friendly countries.



Pilot Officer Qais bin Ahmed Al Subhi from the Royal Air Force of Oman received the International Sword of Honour from the Royal Air Force College Cranwell, in the United Kingdom. This award is given to the officer who excels in leadership performance and officer-like attributes among all the College's international officers. The ceremony was attended by **Air Commodore Abdunasir bin Hamid Al Shukaili**, the Military Attache' at the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in London and a number of officers from the Royal Air Force College.



The achievements of RAFO's Band at the World Music Competition will be added to the other records achieved by the Sultan's Armed Forces in international competitions.



ROYAL NAVY OF OMAN

*On 5 November, The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) celebrated its Annual Day, under the patronage of **His Highness Sayyid Taimur bin Asaad Al Said**, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman. The occasion, which was held at the Said bin Sultan Naval Base, included the graduation of an intake of new recruits.*





On 5 February, **Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser Al Rahbi**, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman, received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Camp, **Commodore Ben Aldous**, Commander of Coalition Task Force (CTF) Sentinel in UK and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on general naval matters. They also reviewed aspects of cooperation in various fields and means of promoting them.



On 5 July, **Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser Al Rahbi**, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman, received at Al Murtafa'a Camp, **Commodore Philip Dennis**, Commander of the United Kingdom (UK) Maritime Component and Deputy Commander of the Combined Maritime Forces. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views and discussed several matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by **Commodore Jassim bin Mohammed Al Balushi**, Director of Operations and Plans at the RNO's HQ, and the Defence Attaché at the British Embassy in Muscat.

It has been a great honour for the Sultan's Armed Forces Shooting Team to win first place in a variety of shooting competitions at the International Military Shooting Championship, where several teams from different parts of the world participated during the period from 24-29 of June on the shooting ranges of Bisley Camp in the United Kingdom.

Several of these cups were won by the Sultan's Armed Forces Shooting Team, the most valuable of which was the cup bearing the name of our Sultan, **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**, the Supreme Commander. It was awarded to the international shooter who wins the combined two rifle-shooting competitions at varying distances. This year's recipient is Navy Lieutenant **Mohammed bin Khalifa Al Saadi**, who achieved 426 marks out of 450.

At the individual level, the team won a number of cups at various international shooting championship competitions, including the shooting competition cup, the recumbent shooting cup (500 metres), and the recumbent shooting cup (300 metres). The Rapid Aggregate Competition Cup and the Queen Mary's Prize were awarded to Navy Lieutenant **Mohammed bin Khalifa Al Saadi**. Flight Sergeant **Azzan bin Saif Al Dhahli** won the Bisley Bolt Competition Cup, the Standing Cup, the Defence Match Cup, and the Whitehead Challenge Cup. Warrant Officer **Rashid bin Khalifa Al Nasiri** won the running cup for 500-300 metres.

During the Sultan's Armed Forces shooting team's training at Pirbright Camp in the United Kingdom on 9th of June, **Brigadier Ahmed bin Ibrahim Ambusaidi**, the Military Attaché at the Oman Embassy in London, visited the team.

During the Federation and British Army Shooting Championships, the Military Attaché was briefed on the team's training and competitions. In addition, the Military Attaché congratulated the team for its preparations and readiness for the competitions, and urged them to continue to perform at this high level.





THE SULTAN'S SPECIAL FORCE

*On 15 March, The Sultan's Special Force celebrated its Annual Day and a new intake of soldiers graduated at the military parade field at the Sultan's Special Forces Camp in Zeak, Dhofar Governorate. The celebration was under the patronage of **General Sultan bin Mohammed Al-Numani**, Minister of the Royal Office.*





ROYAL GUARD OF OMAN

*On 1 November, The Royal Guard of Oman (RGO) celebrated its Annual Day under the patronage of **Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi**, Minister of Interior. The ceremony, which was held at the parade ground of the RGO Command, included the passing out of new recruits.*



ACADEMY OF STRATEGIC AND DEFENCE STUDIES



On 22 May, a delegation from the Royal College of Defence Studies, led by **Air Vice-Marshal (Ret'd) Philip Lester**, visited the National Defence College at the Academy of Strategic and Defence Studies at Bayt Al Falaj camp. The visiting delegation was welcomed by **Rear Admiral Ali Abdullah Al Shidi**, Commandant of the National Defence College. A number of topics of common interest were discussed, particularly those relating to academics and training. During the briefing, the delegation learned about the National Defence College, its facilities and equipment, as well as the various departments of the College.



From 2-13 July, the National Defence College conducted the annual strategic exercise 'Decision Making – 10'. The exercise was carried out by the NDC's tenth course attendees who came from a variety of military and security units and civil organisations and were required to draw on the cognitive and intellectual skills gained during the course. The exercise aimed to enhance the participants' decision-making at a strategic level, analysing the main strategic topics within simulated national, regional and international events.



From 4-12 July, the Joint Command and Staff College conducted the annual military exercise 'Al Hazm' which was implemented by the 36th course at the College, in Bayt Al Falaj Camp. The aim of the exercise, which was held in parallel with the annual strategic exercise 'Decision Making – 10' implemented by the National Defence College, was to hone the skills of officers from SAF and various other military and security units. 'Al Hazm' is a key element in the framework of exercises within the syllabus designed to meet the College's objectives.



On 19 July, The Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies celebrated the inauguration of the 36th course of the Joint Command and Staff College. The ceremony was held under the auspices of **Her Excellency Dr. Rahma bint Ibrahim Al Mahrooqi**, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and attended by **Major General Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon**, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies.



On 26 July, the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies celebrated the graduation of the 10th course of the National Defence College, where distinguished Senior Officers from the Sultan's Armed Forces, military and security agencies, government officials, and representatives from civil institutions participated. The graduation was held under the auspices of **Her Excellency Dr. Laila bint Ahmed Al Najjar**, Minister of Social Development, and attended by **Rear Admiral Ali Abdullah Al Shidi**, Commandant of the National Defence College.

كما نالت الدراسة استحسان الجميع وقبلت بشكل جيد جداً من جميع المشاركين - الذين كانوا يتتبعون في رتبهم من رائد إلى عقيد - وكنا محظوظين للغاية بوجود أفراد أذكى وأصحاب كفاءة عالية معنا بحثوا في أعماق التاريخ وأعطوا دروساً ستكون ذات فائدة كبيرة في هذا الوقت وفي المستقبل. وغادرنا ونحن على قدر عالٍ من الإدراك والوعي التاريخي، وتعلمنا جميعاً عن سلطنة عمان وذلك الجزء الخاص من التاريخ الساحر للبلاد. بعد عودتنا إلى مسقط، تم إعداد تقرير شامل للقيادة العليا يحتوي على ملخص للأنشطة والعديد من التوصيات.

وبينما أكتب هذا المقال، يسعدني الإعلان أننا نبدأ الآن التخطيط لدراسة تاريخية أخرى، حيث نتوقع أن نأخذ فريقاً بحجم مماثل لدراسة الحملة العسكرية في الجبل الأخضر وذلك خلال شهر إبريل أو مايو ٢٠٢٤م.



الصورة: الفريق المشكل في نادي الضباط بصرفيت.

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الكاتب: المقدم وليام ليك

ركن ١ / خطط تدريب وتمارين مشتركة برئاسة أركان قوات السلطان المسلحة

في مايو ٢٠٢٣م، انطلقت مجموعة مؤلفة من (٢٢) ضابطاً عمانياً وضباطاً معارين بقوات السلطان المسلحة، تم اختيارهم من الأسلحة الثلاثة لإجراء دراسة حول حرب ظفار. حيث استغرقت هذه الدراسة عدة أشهر في التخطيط وكانت الفكرة من كل من اللواء فيليكس جيديني كبير الضباط البريطانيين المعارين، وعميد الركن طيار مساعد رئيس أركان قوات السلطان المسلحة للتدريب والتمارين المشتركة.

كان الهدف هو دراسة الحملة العسكرية في ظفار ١٩٦٥م - ١٩٧٥م، لتحسين التعليم العسكري المهني وإسناد العملية التطويرية لقوات السلطان المسلحة. كانت هذه الدراسة عبارة عن جولة ميدانية، قادها ببراعة المقدم (متقاعد) إيان باتنشو، كبير أعضاء جمعية قوات السلطان المسلحة ومقيم في مسقط.

بدأنا الدراسة بثمانية مواضيع رئيسية: الاستراتيجية والتخطيط، والتحالفات والعمليات المشتركة، واستخدام دعم النيران والمبادرة، واللوجستيات والتنمية المدنية. كل موضوع كان يحتوي على أسئلة محددة لتحفيز التفكير وتم تخصيصه لفرق دراسية كانت تتشارك المركبات خلال فترة مكوثهم في ظفار.

لقد تلقينا دعماً رائعاً من سلاح الجو السلطاني العماني ولواء المشاة ١١ بالجيش السلطاني العماني طوال تلك الفترة. وقد قدموا مستويات يحتذى بها من الدعم والإدارة، بالإضافة إلى الكثير من الطعام! لحسن الحظ، كنا نقوم بالكثير من التفكير (والمشي) لحرق جميع السرعات الحرارية!



الصورة: إيان باتنشو يقدم إيجازاً في طاقة.



الصورة: نأكل الطعام بالقرب من مدينة الحق

الجغرافيا الواسعة في ظفار صعبت متابعة الأحداث بالترتيب الزمني المتسلسل. ومع ذلك، مع بعض التخطيط الحكيم والرغبة للقيادة لمسافات طويلة على الطرق الجبلية المتعرجة، قمنا بتغطية معظم أهم الجوانب الرئيسية للحملة العسكرية مع توقف ليلاً في كلية السلطان قابوس العسكرية بعيدم. كما قمنا بزيارة منطقة عازار (إيفرست) وخط (دامافاند) لمناقشة العمليات (لانس، سعيد، هدف، هجوم). وكنا محظوظين للغاية بزيارة صرفيت ووادي عشوق لدراسة العمليتين (كهوف وحمار)، قبل العودة شرقاً والانتقال إلى جيجات ومدينة الحق للتركيز على التنمية المدنية وعمليات (ديانا وجاكوار) على وجه الخصوص.

أمضينا اليوم الأخير في طاقة ووادي دربات قبل العودة من صلاة إلى مسقط عبر رحلة جوية لإحدى طائرات سلاح الجو السلطاني العماني.

DHOFAR HISTORIC STUDY

by Lt Col William Leek, SO1 Joint Training Exercise Plans HQ COSSAF

In May 2023, a group of 22 Omani and Loan Service SAF Officers drawn from all three Services set off to conduct a study of the Dhofar campaign. The study had been many months in the planning and was the brainchild of the SBLSO, **Major General Felix Gedney** and Assistant COSSAF Joint Training and Exercises, **Ameed Rukn (Tay) Nasser Said Saleh Al Saadi**.

The aim was to study the campaign in Dhofar between 1965 and 1975, identifying insights relevant to contemporary military operations to improve Professional Military Education and aid SAF development. It was a guided tour, brilliantly supported by the inimitable Mqm (Retired) **Ian Buttenshaw** WKHM, the SAF Association's senior Committee Member and a Muscat resident.

We started the Study with eight themes: Strategy and Planning, Alliances and Joint Operations, Use of Fire Support and Initiative, and Logistics and Civil Development. Each theme had focused questions to stimulate the grey cells and had been allocated to Study Groups who shared vehicles for the duration of the time in Dhofar.

We were brilliantly supported by RAFO and 11 Brigade of the RAO throughout. They provided exemplary levels of support and administration – and endless *fuddles!* Luckily, we were doing plenty of thinking (and walking) to burn off all the calories!

The vast geography of Dhofar made it impossible to follow events in a strictly chronological order. However, with some judicious planning and a healthy appetite for long distance driving on twisty mountain roads, we covered most of the key aspects of the campaign with an overnight stop at KSQA in Aydem to facilitate the plan. We visited the area of Azar (Everest) and the Damavand Line to discuss Operations SAID, LANCE, DHARAB and HADAF. We were extremely fortunate to visit Sarfait and Wadi Ashoq to study Operations KHAHOOF and HIMMAR before returning East and moving to Jibjat and Madinat Al Haq to focus on Civil Development and Operations DIANA and JAGUAR in particular.

Our final day was spent in Taqah and Wadi Darbat before returning to Muscat courtesy of the RAFO Trooping flight from Salalah.



Ilan Buttenshaw delivering the ground brief at Taqah

The Study was very well received by all participants – who ranged from Raa'id to Aqeed – and we were incredibly lucky to have had with us some very thoughtful and competent individuals who really dug into the history and identified lessons that will be of great use now and in the future. Even the most voraciously well-read amongst us left better-informed, and we all learnt a great deal more about Oman and that particular chapter in the fascinating history of the country. After we returned to Muscat a comprehensive report was produced for the senior leadership with a summary of the activity and multiple recommendations.

As I write this I'm delighted to announce that we are just commencing planning for another Historic Study, where we expect to take a similar sized team to study the Jebel Akhdar campaign in April or May of 2024. ■



'Fuddling' near Madinat Al Haq

The assembled team at the Officers' Mess on Sarfait



OMANI NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION HMS DRAKE WARDROOM

CMDR Phil Carroll, RAN (RETD)

On Wednesday evening 22 November, my wife, **Lynne**, and I attended the Omani National Day celebration organised by **Raa'id Waleed al Sadi**.

Waleed is one of the first RNO officers on exchange with the RN, filling a staff logistics post in FOST (in my day, Flag Officer Sea Training, but since 2020 Fleet Operational Sea Training). Originally Portland-based, FOST moved to Devonport in 1995 so Waleed's celebration was held in the Wardroom, HMS Drake.

A convoy of guests' cars was escorted from Camel's Head Gate, now the prime entrance to Drake and Dockyard. I got nostalgic as we passed the artificial football pitch where, in 1995, I was brutally tackled by the opposition when playing for Hecla and broke my collar-bone. Team-mates rushed to my aid and berated the offender. Above the road was the Royal Naval Hydrographic School where I completed my Basic H and Long H courses in 1986 and 1993 respectively. Fond memories, where survey ships usually berthed in 3 Basin in North Yard or at Slip Jetty in South Yard.

The car park was adjacent to the old Drill Shed. Built in 1879-86 of limestone ashlar, doubled in size in 1907, the tatty building I recalled now looked very smart as the Senior Rates Mess. We walked to the Wardroom. An impressive limestone edifice constructed in 1898-1902, it and the Drill Shed are two of several substantial Grade II* listed buildings within Drake. Up the stone steps to the double front doors, into the fine central entrance hall divided by marble columns, a large open stairwell with moulded balusters.



Author and Tom Hammon

In Jago's Bar, one of the decorated mess rooms, Waleed welcomed us before ushering us into the dining room with its panelled walls, large fireplaces with painted panels and models of man-o'-war suspended from the deckhead. Wonderful.

We dined with other, mainly Navy, ex-Loan Service blokes, from across the decades: 1970s to 2023. Dinner was a most pleasant occasion and improved with the conversation. We returned to Jago's, filled with about 40 assorted Naval officers, curious about Oman. Waleed gave a sound welcome and we stood for the Omani national anthem. An informative video about modern-day Oman followed, highlighting the significant progress being made in business, science, technology, IT and management. It showed also that the richness of Omani heritage and culture remains as important as ever. The audience was captivated.

After another few words of thanks from Waleed to his hosts and colleagues in FOST and the wider Drake populace, we enjoyed Omani coffee, drunk from traditional finjan, with dates and halwa. The non-Loan Service audience were quite taken with these offerings, halwa an intriguing delicacy.

The celebration ended a bit later. We trundled back to our cars and exited the Dockyard. It was a very pleasant evening, great to chat with other ex-Loan Service personnel, and meet Waleed who's plainly enjoyed his time in Blighty but I doubt he'll miss Plymouth's generally miserable wet weather. ■



Waleed with his spread of Omani coffee and sweets.

Waleed's presentation



REMEMBERING...

Lieutenant Colonel Anthony (Tony) Box, Intelligence Corps

After a sudden and short illness, **Anthony (Tony) Box** died on the 26 of August 2021 of heart complications. He leaves behind a loving wife, **Carole**, who was a great support to him throughout his military career.



After commissioning into the Intelligence Corps, Tony was sent to Northern Ireland in the early days of the 'Troubles' to 39 Brigade (Belfast) where he was in command of the Intelligence Section. Much of the work he did was in support of the successful *Operation Motorman*, the occupation of the so-called 'No Go' areas and the biggest British military operation since the Suez crisis of 1956.

Shortly after his tour in Northern Ireland, he was posted to the Staff College at the Royal Military College of Science, Shrivenham to complete his BSc degree in Physics.

After completing a course in Arabic, he was posted on secondment to the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) as GSO3 Intelligence in Dhofar, where his life-long love of the Arab people and the culture of the Middle East began.

He spent several years in London as Officer Commanding the Special Counter-Intelligence Team (SCIT) at the Ministry of Defence.

Tony was then posted as Military Attaché to the British Embassy in Beirut. He travelled extensively throughout Lebanon and Syria paying regular visits to the Embassy in Damascus.

Promoted to Major, Tony Box was SO2 J2 at HQ British Forces Falkland Islands (BFFI) from November 1982 until April 1983.

He was then posted as the Second in Command of the Intelligence and Security Group (Germany) at Rheindahlen.

Tony was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in 1986 and was the Commanding Officer of the Intelligence Corps Depot at Ashford.

In 1989 Tony served in The Gulf War at the Force HQ as the Intelligence Officer to the General, **Sir Peter De la Billiere**.

In retirement, Tony continued to travel with his wife to Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey, and took several holidays in Germany.

They settled in Devon where Tony pursued his love of sailing and liked nothing better than to sail miles out to sea with Carole, enjoying each other's company and life on the ocean waves, perhaps taking with him a book on Middle Eastern Archaeology or a novel written in French or German.

Rear Admiral John Gunning Commander Royal Navy of Oman 1980-1985 5 October 1933 – 6 March 2023

John Gunning, naval officer who was captain to **Prince Charles** and later commanded the Omani Navy. He was a good decision-maker and listener and was adept at building an esprit de corps.



Rear Admiral John Gunning, who has died aged 89, was Prince Charles's captain in HMS Jupiter; he was later Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman at a time of tension in the Gulf, and also became known as a maker of heliochronometers.

Gunning took command of the Royal Navy of Oman in 1980, shortly after the 10th anniversary of the accession of **His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said** and following the start of the Iran-Iraq War.

The Omani Navy was a mixed collection of small vessels responsible, inter alia, for policing the traffic separation zone in the Gulf of Oman, along which flowed some 40 per cent of the world's trade in oil. He was given the rank of Commodore, soon promoted to Admiral, and over the next five years set about modernising the force.

Omani sailors had previously been trained in India or Pakistan, and the officers at the School of Navigation at Warsash in Hampshire. Basic training was repatriated to Oman, and Gunning recruited loan service officers from the UK, introduced a cadre of British Chief Petty Officers to professionalise local training, and sent young Omani officers to Dartmouth.

Keen to ensure that there were plenty of commands in which junior officers could gain experience, he also oversaw the purchase of landing craft and of small, fast, heavily armed patrol boats – initially from Brooke Marine in Lowestoft, plus others from France, from Vosper Thornycroft, and from Singapore. He also introduced a sail training ship, *Shabab Oman*, into the newly energised navy.

Gunning showed himself to be a good decision-maker and listener, with an interest in young people; he struck up a rapport with His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and, with a growing budget, he was honest and shrewd. He made the Omani navy into a small but effective and highly organised force, and today it boasts missile-armed corvettes, offshore patrol vessels and amphibious ships which keep good order in Omani waters.

The esprit de corps built by Gunning during his five years in command endured, manifesting itself at frequent reunions, sometimes in his garden in Petersfield and, in August 2022, during the visit of a new, three-masted sailing ship, *Shabab Oman II*, in Portsmouth.

Vice-Admiral Abdullah Al Raisi, who was then one of Gunning's young protégés and is now Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces, wrote of Gunning: "He was part of an historic and vital period in Oman during which he played a crucial role, who left a strong and lasting imprint through his accomplishments and achievements, and whose perseverance and fortitude will always be cherished."



John Peirce Gunning was born above the Ulster Bank in Dún Laoghaire on October 5 1933 and educated at Aravon prep school in Co Wicklow; he joined Dartmouth as a 13-year-old cadet.

After service at sea, in 1957 Gunning qualified as an observer (navalese for air navigator) and for the next 10 years he flew in helicopters in many Fleet Air Arm squadrons, specialising in anti-submarine operations. Twice his aircraft crashed and twice he walked away, but on a third occasion, on October 17 1962, his aircraft crashed, capsized and quickly sank off Portland Bill.



As the aircraft hit the water his seat broke free, his harness burst and he was thrown about the cabin. But remembering his drill, he held his breath and groped in the dark, swirling water for an escape window and wriggled through. After a few minutes he and the aircrew were plucked from the water by the minesweeper HMS

Chailey. It was typical of Gunning's inventiveness that he emerged from the near-disaster with a proposal for an automatically illuminating, instantly acting light to be attached to the *Mae West* lifejacket.



Gunning had already commanded the minesweeper *Damerham* in Hong Kong in 1961, and in 1964 he returned to Dartmouth to teach astronavigation. In 1967-68 he commanded 814 Naval Air Squadron, introducing with his usual dynamism the Navy's first radar-equipped helicopter, the *Wessex III*.

Promoted to Commander, in 1969-70 he commanded the minesweeper *Wiston* and the 9th Mine Countermeasures Squadron based in Bahrain.

Gunning always showed originality in any undertaking, and when he decided to lift morale by holding a squadron ball, and his officers remonstrated that there were no lady guests, he advertised in *The Daily Telegraph* for any young ladies who might find themselves in Bahrain. The advertisement brought a rebuke from his Commander-in-Chief, but a sufficient number of air hostesses attended the ball.

In a typical spirit of adventure, the Gunnings returned from the Gulf overland in a Renault 16 on a two-month odyssey through Iran (where he was briefly arrested), Turkey, Greece and Europe. His wife Jane was pregnant, while the car needed running repairs, which included a pair of tights to replace a broken fan belt.

He commanded the frigate *Jupiter* (1973-74) on her circumnavigation with the then Prince of Wales as Communications officer and Flight Deck officer. Gunning was judged to have carried out his task – which included an escort to the Royal Yacht with the Queen embarked at the Commonwealth Games in New Zealand, and a number of high-profile visits in the US – with aplomb, showing just the right zestful leadership and easy, confident manner.

After appointments in the MoD, Gunning was promoted to Captain in 1975 and returned to sea to command the destroyer *Kent*: once more, his ship's company revelled in their Captain's interest in them as individuals and his attention to their concerns and development.

Next, Gunning learnt Arabic at the Defence School of Languages in Beaconsfield before going to command the Royal Navy of Oman. One of the sources of his success there was his love of the people

REMEMBERING...

and of using his language skills, and the pleasure he took in "wadi-bashing" (driving in the desert), climbing remote jebels (hills or mountains), and watersports.

He retired from military service in 1985 – when many thought that he ought to have been allowed to retain the honorary rank of Rear Admiral in the Royal Navy – to work for Tideland Signal, which makes navigational aids.

Gunning loved his naval life, but the sketches in his journals show that he could have been equally successful as an architect or engineer. When he retired overall in 1997, he focused on Gunning Sundials. His interest had begun in the 1980s after he had seen a heliochronometer (essentially a mechanised sundial) in the Khyber Rifles mess in Pakistan. His first design began on the back of an envelope, and he progressed to detailed specifications for a precision instrument. He made more than 200 of these, individually numbered, and they were sold at the Chelsea Flower Show.

The Gunnings loved all mountains, and an apartment in Saint-Gervais-les-Bains near Mont Blanc was the base for many family holidays. He celebrated his 60th year by climbing the mountain.

After a whirlwind romance, John Gunning married **Jane Popper** in 1968; she survives him with their two daughters.

With acknowledgements to Daily Telegraph Obituaries

His Excellency Sayyid Badr bin Saud bin Harib Al Busaidi

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the death of **His Excellency Sayyid Badr bin Saud bin Harib Al Busaidi** on 7 March 2023, 14 Sha'ban 1444 AH.



He was the Minister of Interior from 1979 to 1997, and then served as the Minister Responsible for Defence Affairs from 1997 to 2020 when he retired.

He will be remembered by many members of the Association as a prominent member of Oman's Government for over 40 years.

Wing Commander Martin Bee SOAF 1977-1979. Died 21 May 2023

Wing Commander Martin Elis Bee was born on December 31 1937 in India, where his parents farmed; the family was forced to leave in the tumultuous years of independence leaving everything they owned behind. Bee won a scholarship to pay for his education at Kingham School near Chipping Norton, where he rose to be head boy.

He also won a scholarship to the RAF College, Cranwell, where he excelled, becoming an under-officer and being awarded the Queen's Medal as the outstanding cadet of his entry. He also received three academic prizes and was awarded his colours for swimming and water polo.

Martin Bee was one of a select group of RAF fighter pilots chosen to fly the top-secret Lockheed U-2 reconnaissance aircraft while serving on an exchange appointment with the United States Air Force. The existence of the aircraft was brought to the world's attention by the shooting down of Gary Powers over the Soviet Union in May 1960, but the involvement of RAF pilots in the development of the aircraft remained top secret for decades, and some aspects of their work are still classified.

Bee joined the Sultan of Oman's Air Force for the latter stages of the Dhofar War. He became base commander of the former RAF airfield at Salalah, where he flew a variety of fixed wing and rotary aircraft.

While in Oman, he completed a correspondence course for his civil pilot's licence and joined the rapidly expanding Laker Airways in 1979, flying the Douglas DC-10 on package holidays and trans-atlantic flights. Within two years, the airline went bankrupt, but a chance meeting with a former RAF colleague led to a job with the Dubai Royal Flight as chief pilot, flying the Gulfstream IV. He remained in this post for the next 17 years, flying worldwide routes until his retirement.

In later life, he spent the European winters at his house in South Africa with visits to London and Norway during the summer.

Martin Bee is survived by his Norwegian wife, **Lilleba** and their daughter.

(Adapted from the Daily Telegraph obituary)

John Charles Edwards MBE 6 May 1938 – 15 July 2023

John Edwards died in Wiltshire on 15 July 2023, aged 85. John was an Honorary member of the SAF Association and served in Oman for 40 years. He was the founder and Head of the first English-speaking School in Salalah.



John was born in Wales in 1938 and went on to train as a school-teacher. In 1975 he applied for the role of schoolteacher in Salalah. He was successful and on arrival found a very small, tin-hutted school with minimum resources. With great energy and dedication, he managed to cajole funds to build the school and within a year its

reputation was such that the numbers of Salalah children wishing to attend exceeded capacity.

The Dhofar war was just ending at this time so John appealed for further resources to **HM Sultan Qaboos**, who approved a new infrastructure project for a large, purpose-built modern school. It was duly completed in April 1981 and officially opened by HM The Sultan.

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, on her visit to Salalah in 1981, had been invited by John to find time in her busy schedule to visit the school which she did. She continued to correspond with John for the next seven years to enquire about the progress of this remarkable school.

John was awarded an MBE for 'Services to Education Overseas'. He finally left Oman in 2010 and retired to Wiltshire. He was a wonderfully kind, thoughtful man and a very sincere friend to all who knew him. He is survived by his wife, **Terri** and stepson, **Justin**.

Wing Commander George Aylett OBE SOAF – September 1974 to August 1976

George Aylett died on 8 August, 2023, aged 88. A former Officer Commanding 1 Squadron SOAF based at Salalah, George flew the BAC 167 Strikemaster and the FR10 Hunter in support of military operations during the difficult but ultimately successful years of the Dhofar war in the mid-1970s. The pilots of 1 Squadron were repeatedly called upon to assist operations on the ground and were often in low-level engagements with enemy forces. George was much admired by his Squadron members for his calm and effective leadership skills. He had an 'if it's needed – do it' approach to normal flying regulations, nurturing a strong team spirit and encouraging all those under his command – from the pilots to the ground staff.

John Paxman recalls the occasion when, heading up a well-known Dhofar wadi, his leading platoon was pinned down by very accurate and devastating mortar and small arms fire from both sides of the wadi. He hastily called up for immediate air support and was relieved to hear the comforting and reassuring voice of George on his Sarbe ground-to-air radio. George – flying the lead Strikemaster of a pair – calmly assessed the somewhat difficult situation and, having made a fast run over the length of the wadi and over John's position, returned some minutes later at a frighteningly low-level, to accurately engage the *adoo* and save the day.

George attended RAF Cranwell as a member of Intake 68 – from January 1954 to July 1956. Following various training courses at RAF Chivenor he flew Hunters from RAF Middleton-St-George from June 1957 to January 1962. During this time, he was a member of the RAF Blue Diamonds Display Team – the forerunner to the Red Arrows Display Team.

George's time in Oman with 1 Squadron flying operational sorties on an almost daily basis was one of the happiest times of his flying career. He also flew the Beaver on a number of covert missions. He was particularly effective when the SAM 7b made its anticipated appearance in Dhofar and the extent of the vulnerability of the Strikemaster aircraft to this anti-air system became apparent. Not only did he work hard to introduce new tactics and ensure Squadron morale, but as an experienced Hunter pilot he undertook a series of Hunter reconnaissance missions from Thumrait to areas of western Dhofar.

Following his time in Oman he held a series of staff jobs in BAOR and then, towards the end of his career, back in the UK. Following his retirement he was a Harrier Simulator Instructor at RAF Wittering for 10 years. George's flying logbooks show that he flew a total of 4400.35 hours throughout his long and distinguished RAF – and SOAF – career.

Lieutenant-Colonel Bryan Ray 6 March 1929 – 4 September 2023

Lieutenant-Colonel Bryan Ray, who has died aged 94, had a life of tough soldiering in British Somaliland, Northern Ireland and Oman.



**Ray during Operation Simba
in Oman in 1972**

Ray was commissioned into the Royal Fusiliers in 1948 as a National Service officer, but volunteered for the Somaliland Scouts. Based in Awareh – one of the few watering places, and a confluence of camel trails – he assisted the District Commissioner for two years.

Tribal quarrels, often over water, were taking place in Ogaden, the strip of country between the Somaliland Protectorate and Ethiopia. The Scouts had the challenging task of keeping the warring clansmen apart.

There was always a danger of disputes turning into outright conflict, and Ray assembled the headmen and forbade any gathering of people in the town at night. Whenever he heard shouting, he ordered his men to fire 2-inch mortar parachute illuminating flares over the town, and this produced a satisfactory silence.

He learnt the Somali language and, aged 94, could still sing the Somali "Camel Milking Song". On one occasion, he surprised a

Somali taxi driver in London by engaging him in his own language.

James Bryan Ray was born in Crayford, south-east London, on March 6 1929. During the Second World War he was evacuated from London and lived with his mother's family, who farmed near Llandrindod Wells in Radnorshire.

Always known as Bryan, he attended the local school, where he learnt Welsh. To the end of his life he would sing Land of My Fathers in Welsh when watching the Wales rugby team. He learnt to ride, rounding up the sheep on a small Welsh pony, and this was the beginning of a lifelong love of horses.

He was granted a regular commission and joined the 1st Battalion East Surrey Regiment in Mogadishu. The battalion subsequently amalgamated with the Queen's Royal Regiment to become the Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment, which later became the Queen's Regiment.

Ray served in Libya, Egypt's Canal Zone, Cyprus, where he was ADC to the Governor, and West Germany. He was one of the first soldiers to be posted to Northern Ireland during the Troubles, and in 1969 he commanded B company of 2nd Battalion The Queen's Regiment in Belfast. He was appointed MBE at the end of an exacting tour.

He was part of Nato Forces Baltic Approaches in Denmark before being seconded to the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) in Oman. SAF was engaged in a war with Communist-backed guerrillas (the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf, or PFLAG). From 1972 to 1974 he commanded the Northern Frontier Regiment and saw action in the southern province of Dhofar.



Ray was directly responsible for blocking the enemy's access to the vital Salalah Plain area and for conducting helicopter operations against the enemy camel-train routes further west. This resulted in the scale and frequency of stand-off attacks on Salalah declining to almost nothing.

His skill, patience and persistence were rewarded by the apprehension and partial destruction of two enemy camel trains in the Wadi Ashoq – the first time this had happened in two years. These intensive operations placed a heavy burden on his officers and men, and the regiment suffered 10 killed and 13 wounded in action.

Ray's brigade commander, **Jack Fletcher**, who had previously been his CO in Belfast, said of him: *"His courage, cheerfulness and steadfastness never faltered and he was both an example and an inspiration to his battalion. Whenever one of his companies was in contact with the enemy and casualties were incurred, he was quickly on the scene and by his presence did much to banish fatigue and sustain and encourage his men."*

He was awarded the Sultan's Commendation Medal. In the Northern Frontier Regiment there were Omanis, Baluchis, British contract and seconded officers. He was deeply respected by all ranks for his consistency, fairness and a steely determination to get the job done.

After leaving the Army, Ray spent six years with the Oman internal security service. He undertook several expeditions to Afghanistan between 1990 to 1993 in the company of **Brigadier Peter Stewart-Richardson** in support of the charity Afghan Mother and Child Rescue.

With the help of Afghan engineers and medical staff they surveyed the construction of dams and irrigation schemes to make improvements in sanitation and water supplies to Chak-e-Wardak hospital and other clinics in eastern Afghanistan.

He subsequently branched out on his own and worked as a security adviser for various non-governmental organisations. This work took him to South Sudan, Pakistan and Kenya, where he helped aid organisations working in areas of conflict.

Staff might face a variety of dangers: being caught in crossfire between warring factions, being ambushed or taken hostage, or assaulted for robbery or political motives. They might have their vehicle hijacked or booby-trapped or they might be caught in a minefield. His consultancy also taught first aid and helped to draw up evacuation and crisis management plans.

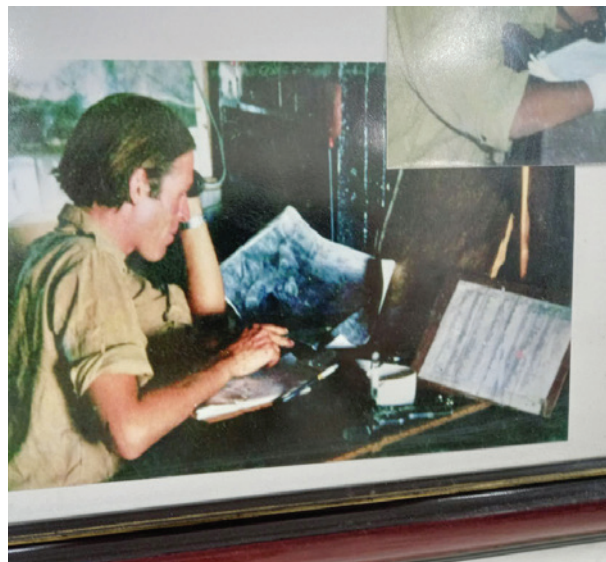
He published *"Dangerous Frontiers"* (2008), an account of his adventures campaigning in Somaliland and Oman.

Bryan Ray faced much tragedy in his life, losing two wives to cancer: **Paula**, née Sillars, died in 1981, and **Mary**, née Shore, in 1994. He married, thirdly, in 1995, **Harriet Sandys**, whom he met through their joint interest in Afghanistan. She survives him with a son and daughter from his first marriage.

With acknowledgements to Daily Telegraph Obituaries

Simon Stewart (JR 1972-1974) Died 21 September 2023

Simon Stewart began his military career in BAOR during the Cold War as a troop leader in the Royal Tank Regiment on Saladin armoured cars and Chieftain tanks and, with **David Shillinglaw**, commissioned the first Swingfire anti-tank guided weapons troop.



He volunteered for secondment to SAF and joined the Jebel Regiment as Ops Officer shortly before their roulement to Dhofar. Based initially at Manston, he was involved in 'Op Dragon' in February '73, moving afterwards to become the Ops Officer on 'Simba'. He remained at Sarfait until the end of his secondment, and the photograph (above) is displayed in the Sarfait museum/ops room.

His favourite recollection was of one amusing occasion in Nizwa when a sand grouse shoot was arranged by **Richard John** and **Chris Bental-Warner**, with **General Creasey** as the VIP guest. The conditions were perfect. There had been no rain for many days and the water holes to the south were drying up: large numbers of grouse had been seen during the recce the week before.

Unfortunately, a freak rainstorm arrived just as the shooters were leaving Nizwa camp and they arrived to washed out butts. Not many cartridges were fired, not many grouse were seen, and the post-shoot breakfast was damp and dismal as the mess tent had blown away – happy days!! General Tim Creasey thought it was hilarious!

On return to the Regular Army and having transferred to 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards, Simon served in Northern Ireland, BAOR and then commanded the first British contingent into Beirut in 1983, where he was awarded the MBE.

He left the Army in 1994 and moved to Northumberland where he joined a barristers' set in Newcastle until retiring in 2018.

Dan Windham – late Royal Irish Rangers



Served in Muscat Regiment 1974 to 1975. Died in Norfolk 9 October 2023 – aged 74.

Flight Lieutenant Mike Perkins SOAF 1963-1965 and again 1972-1978

Michael (Mike) Perkins died on 20 October 2023, at the age of 84. He had been living in Sweden, with his wife, **Raili**.

Mike served in the RAF from 1958 until 1966 and flew the Hunter aircraft. He joined SOAF after leaving the RAF and initially flew Piston Provosts, mainly in Dhofar, during the early days of the insurgency. On the replacement of the Piston Provosts by the Strikemasters, Mike moved to Seeb to convert to and fly the Viscounts and subsequently also flew the BAC 1-11s.

Mike was one of the early pioneers of aviation in Oman and viewed the country and people with great affection. At the time and in later life, he viewed Oman as his indisputable second home of choice. His final departure from Oman is remembered by many

colleagues and friends as it involved an epic journey overland in a carefully-prepared Landrover.

Mike had a very varied flying career, spending the subsequent years in Saudi Arabia, the Isle of Man, Scotland, Ireland, Mallorca, France and several parts of the Middle East. He flew on a number of scheduled routes and also worked as a pilot for various airlines operating executive jets. He retired fully in 2003 to move to Sweden.

Mike Shanley recalls:

*"I shared many pleasant evenings with Mike for most of my tour of Oman. Mike was an interesting character and the only person I've ever met who had a case of antique, muzzle-loading rifles under his bed. He was on Viscounts then BAC 1-11s while I was there and he and **Barry West** were the best of mates. They often flew together and if you walked up to the cockpit (as you could back then) if you saw Barry in one seat, you would invariably find Mike in the other. I like to think they are even now plotting a course to somewhere interesting. Vale, Mike!"*

Brian Harrington Spier MBE Staff Officer – HQ Dhofar Brigade 1974-1975 and HQ SAF 1981-1982



Entering the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, in 1960 with Intake 28, **Brian** was commissioned in December 1961 into the (then) 3rd East Anglian Regiment. He served in Shoeburyness and Ballykinler, then at the Regimental Depot at Bury St Edmunds. He rejoined his parent battalion, renamed the 3rd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment, in Berlin, moving subsequently to Tidworth and Aldershot.

Brian was to make his name during the Battalion's operational tour in Aden in 1967 when he was awarded an MBE for Gallantry. He had extracted his platoon, and its armoured car support, from an ambush in the Sheikh Othman area. When he realised that two of his men had been left behind he returned immediately, despite coming under heavy fire, in a single armoured vehicle: he found, and safely extracted, two terrified but grateful young soldiers. After an UNFICYP tour with the battalion he was posted as an instructor to the Junior Tradesmen's Regiment at Rhyll.

Between 1973-1975 he was seconded to the Sultan's Armed Forces where he served on the staff of fellow Royal Anglian, (then) **Major General Tim Creasey**, in the fort at Bayt al Falaj. This was at the height of the Dhofar Rebellion and working for Tim Creasey was 'exacting and rewarding in equal measure'.

Brian's final tour of duty with the British Army was as a company commander back with his parent 3rd Battalion in Cyprus after which, in April 1978, he retired. He returned on contract to Oman from 1981-1982, assuming a role on the staff at HQ Southern Oman Brigade. Many who were there at the time remember the ebullient Brian – a charmer and raconteur.

Brian then went to Africa for many years to work in the field of security of gold and diamond mines – in the kinds of places where perhaps only an 'old soldier' would know how to operate. First was Sierra Leone, later Angola. The work was dangerous, and according to his sons, 'he escaped death so many times it was almost comical'. In Angola his mine was frequently attacked by UNITA rebels, each time at a cost of many lives. But of all the places around the world, it was China that he loved the most.

Brian's nomadic days drew to a close when he returned to UK in 2005. In 2020 he moved to be with his two sons at Barton le Clay, near Hitchin, making many friends throughout the village. He died peacefully on 23 October 2023 aged 82.

Captain Mike Clinch Muscat Regiment 1960-1962

Mike Clinch died on 2 January 2024. Commissioned into the Queen's Own Buffs (now the Queen's Regiment) in mid-1950s, he served on secondment to the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) from 1960 to 1962, in the Muscat Regiment.

Prior to his recent death, Mike is believed to have been one of the last officers alive to have served in SAF when **His Majesty Sultan Taimur bin Feisal** was in power.

Mike retired from the British Army in 1968 and then joined Barclays Bank for the rest of his working life, living at Brendon Hill near Exmoor before moving to Dunster, near Minehead in 2016.

Nigel Sharp – HQ SAF 1975 and then HQ SOLF 1985

Nigel Sharp died in Airedale Hospital, West Yorkshire on 17 January 2024 after a short illness.

He was originally commissioned into the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and was a very popular officer. He commanded the Recce Platoon and then the Signals Platoon. His final posting in the British Army was as Adjutant of the Infantry Junior Leaders Battalion at Shorncliffe, Kent.

He then served twice in Oman as a Contract Officer – first as a staff officer in HQ SAF at Bayt al Falaj in the mid-70s and then again in the mid-80s in HQ SOLF as SO3 (Ops) for **General Johnny Watts**.

He was well-liked in the headquarters due to his cheerfulness, optimism and his attention to detail – and especially because of his ability to tell an amusing and clever story.

Following his time in Oman, Nigel returned to the UK and went into publishing – initially in Edinburgh and later in Gargrave, near Shipton, Yorkshire.

Squadron Leader 'Phil' Philo SOAF 1976-1980

Squadron Leader Philip (Phil) Philo died on 19 January 2024. After serving as a logistics and air movements specialist in the RAF, Phil joined SOAF in 1976 and remained until 1980. During that period, he served at Seeb and Salalah, bringing order and professionalism to the rudimentary air movements systems and to the associated logistics chains. Always positive and very collegiate, he enjoyed Oman, its people and culture and the many challenges that the rapidly-developing country and the armed forces provided.

On leaving SOAF, Phil was persuaded to rejoin the RAF. He served at the RAF College Cranwell; as the logistics specialist on the RAF Tactical Evaluation team; in the Falkland Islands; and in the first Gulf War planning team. Retiring from the RAF for the second time, he worked for the United Nations in Bosnia as the senior logistics and movements specialist. He often attended SAF Association dinners and kept in regular contact with his friends from Oman.

Major David Shillinglaw WB, WKHM

We regret to report the death of **David Shillinglaw** on Saturday 20 January 2024 after bravely battling ill health for some time. David served in NFR from 1968-70 and then in ORD/ISS from 1974-1986. He served in the Royal Tank Regiment and resigned from the British Army in 1976. David was a gregarious and charming man who lit up any room and was a good friend to many as well as being a brave and accomplished leader. **John McKeown** has kindly shared with us the following tribute.

"David was the holder of The Sultan's Bravery Medal, which is an award for gallant and distinguished service in action against the enemy, and the standard of bravery required is very high. It is second only to the Sultan's Gallantry Medal which is one of the rarest medals of its kind in the world, awarded to less than 20 recipients.

"He was awarded the medal in 1970, having served as a company commander on the Dhofar jebel during the most difficult times, before the arrival of increased British assistance. The tribal rebellion had evolved into a Communist revolution, with assistance in training and supplies from China and then Russia coming through South Yemen. The Sultan's forces were outnumbered by the organised fighters on the jebel, and support was very limited: for example there were no helicopters available to evacuate casualties, of which there were many in the remote mountains.

*"One of the major operations in which David took part was the opening of the Midway road which enabled coastal Dhofar to be connected to the rest of the Sultanate through the mountains. David was commanding one of two companies clearing from the North – a splendid, aggressive leader according to the Commander of SAF, **Corran Purdon**, who was personally on the operation.*

*"After his gallant and distinguished service as an infantry company commander, David was one of the relatively small number of officers who joined and developed the Oman intelligence service, known in its early days as the Oman Research Department. He had a successful career there for some years before he and his wife, **Justine**, decided to return to Britain. Justine herself was the daughter of another highly-regarded district intelligence officer.*

"David was one of nature's gentlemen, always courteous and smiling whatever the situation – a calm, professional colleague and a loyal friend."

Wing Commander Paul (Curly) Hirst CSOAF 1970-1973

Wing Commander Curly Hirst died peacefully in his sleep on 24 January 2024. He was 91 years old.

He was CSOAF from 1970-73 and Air Attaché to the British Embassy in Muscat from 1976 to 1979. He presided over a period of significant expansion of Oman's Air Force with the addition of Bell 205 and 206 helicopters and Strikemaster jet aircraft. He was well-liked and respected by all and was a regular attender for many years at SAF Association events. Both he and his wife, **Margaret**, shared particularly happy memories of their years in Oman.



Right: Curly Hirst presented to HM Sultan Qaboos at the 1984 SAF Dinner at Mamurah, with CDS, General Sir Tim Creasey, in attendance.

LOST SINCE 2023 JOURNAL

The following deaths have been recorded:

- Aug 21 **Tony Box HQ Dhofar Bde. 1973-77** *(see obit)*
- Mar 23 **John Gunning SON 1980-85** *(see obit)*
- Apr 23 **Richard Lowther SON 1977-85**
- May 23 **Mike Harrall SOAF 1975-80**
- May 23 **Martin Bee SOAF 1977-79** *(see obit)*
- Jul 23 **John Edwards Salalah School 1976-2000** *(see obit)*
- Aug 23 **George Aylett SOAF 1974-76** *(see obit)*
- Sept 23 **Bryan Ray NFR/ORD 1972/74 + 82/88** *(see obit)*
- Sept 23 **Simon Stewart JR 1972-74** *(see obit)*
- Oct 23 **Dan Windham MR 1974-75** *(see obit)*
- Oct 23 **Mike Perkins SOAF 1963/65 + 72/78** *(see obit)*
- Oct 23 **Brian Harrington-Spier**
HQ SAF 1974/75 + 81/82 *(see obit)*
- Nov 23 **Gordon Gillies SON 1972-78**
- Jan 24 **Mike Clinch MR 1960-62** *(see obit)*
- Jan 24 **Nigel Sharp HQ SAF 1975-85** *(see obit)*
- Jan 24 **David Shillinglaw NFR/ORD**
1968/70 + 74/86 *(see obit)*
- Jan 24 **Phil Philo SOAF 1976-80** *(see obit)*
- Jan 24 **Curly Hirst SOAF 1970/73 + 76/79** *(see obit)*
- Feb 24 **Christopher Prentis SON 1983-87**

JOINED SINCE 2023 JOURNAL

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Gareth Pugh | SOA 84-85 |
| Burt Reynolds | Loan Service –
Parachute
Regt 21-23 |
| Tariq Al Harthy | Aeronautical Engineer |
| Lt Ashraf Al Nabhani | ADC to SBLSO |
| Lt Col Suleiman Al Youghabi | Director SAF Museum |
| Chippy Chandler | ROP |
| Cdr Glen Cuthbert | SON |
| Air Cdre Matt Stowers | DA Muscat |
| Wg Cdr (Ret'd) Martin Hooker | RAF Regt |
| Capt Tommy Laguna | US Army |
| Gp Capt (Ret'd) Steve Townsend | MASS |
| Col Robert Wright | SAF Signals |
| Maj Michael Rayner | Armd Bde HQ |
| Lt Cdr Jamie Vaughan | RNO |
| Maj Neil Guerin | LS – Weapons Advisor |
| Maj Nicholas Barron | LS – Trg Advisor |
| Maj Steve Lewis | FF/JR 74/76 |
| Michael Swift | MASS |
| William Shore | HQ SOLF Quartering |
| Major General G Strickland | SBLSO |
| Neil Coxon | Formerly BOS |
| Lt Cdr Waleed Al Sadi | RNO |
| Cdr Simon Hallett | RNO |

NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE

FROM DOWN UNDER AND THE FAR EAST

by Mike Lobb

No longer Chairman nor a Committee member does not mean that I have left the Association. Taking the opportunity for an extended holiday without being tied to an unreliable maritime internet meant that I was able to meet with some of our overseas members. **Penny** and I arrived in Melbourne on 16 January 2023 and boarded our ship bound for Osaka, Japan.

The first stop was Hobart on 18 January, there we met up with **James Ayliffe** (OG 1974-5) and his wife **Helen**. To be honest, it hadn't been that long since I had seen James. We were both on the memorable Association visit to Oman in December 2022 but it had been such a hectic programme with so many, there had been little opportunity to chat. James and Helen travelled from their home south of Hobart to meet with us in the State capital. We went to a hostelry close to the port and caught up with news and events in all too little time.



Mike and Penny with Helen and James in Hobart.

We crossed the Tasman Sea to New Zealand and eventually docked in Picton on 25 January, where I met with **Richard Potez** (SON 1974-6) and **Mary-Jo**. We went to a local vineyard for lunch and to sample the produce. Four years since we had last met and Richard and Mary-Jo continue to 'live the dream' although they suffered a few recent mishaps, losing the hay barn and having to drop a few trees.



Richard and Mary-Jo near Blenheim.

We continued our journey northwards eventually arriving at Tauranga on 27 January on a dreary dismal day threatening worse to come. **Simon Marriott** (ACS 1975-6 and SOAR 1980-3) and **Caroline** live at Paeroa midway between Auckland and Tauranga, where they run a very successful business bottling preserves. They made the drive in torrential rain to take me to the Cider Factorie (sic) which made a welcome change from New Zealand's normal beverage. Simon and Caroline are retiring and have purchased a new property on South Island not far from Richard and Mary-Jo. I expect they will have moved by the time this gets to press.



Simon and Caroline lunching near Tauranga.

The rain had become quite a downpour now sufficient to be called Cyclone Gabrielle and when we arrived in Auckland on 28 January, a State of Emergency had been declared to deal with floods from the previous night's rain. Our friends were swimming in the road in four feet of water. Unfortunately for us it delayed the ship's departure and as a consequence the Bay of Islands was dropped from our itinerary where we were due to meet with **Kevin Johnson** (SAFE 2006-9). That was a disappointment.

We crossed the Tasman Sea again to arrive in Sydney on 2 February. **Charles Knight** (WFR/KJ 1982-6) now works in



Charles overlooking Sydney's Central Business District.

Canberra but timed one of his occasional visits to Sydney to be there on the morning of 3 February. We went to Georges Head to the now disbanded site of the 'School of Guns' where we had a coffee and viewed the city of Sydney at a distance.

On 7 February we anchored off-shore from Mooloolaba just north of Brisbane having been refused permission to dock in Brisbane itself for reasons unknown, we had no cases of COVID aboard. **Jonathan Orr** (SAFE 1977-9) lives not far away in Elimbah and managed to find time between his silversmith's class and cards to meet at the Mooloolaba Bowls Club. He was exactly the same as when I last saw him some 45 years ago except that the beard had gone, he had had two hips replaced and was accompanied by his friend **Dolines**. Jonathan had been the primary instigator behind the construction of the Officer's Mess swimming pool in MAM (thought by some to be the ideal location to wash his parachute after a water jump!) Jonathan continued sport parachuting in Australia and was part of the 119 person link for the Australian record.



Jonathan with Dolines at the Mooloolaba Bowls Club.

David Marks recounts from Cyprus that he and Jonathan had been walking on Jebel Akhdar, allowing the last two hours of daylight for the descent, only to be told by a local that it would take eight hours! Fortunately their drivers spotted their descent by torchlight in the dark and waited for them.

Jonathan stopped practising as a GP a few years ago and specialised in the treatment of skin cancer with a never ending supply of patients in Australia's 'Sunshine State'. He still commits to the military, accompanying the Australian Navy on patrol boats as the ship's doctor and maintaining a presence as a mounted sentinel at local parades on ANZAC Day. He also does Father Christmas for the kids (perhaps he should have kept the beard!). As Jonathan gave me a lift back to the ship, I noted there was a volunteer firefighter's uniform in the back of his Ute (SUV). If anyone plans to be in or around Brisbane, Jonathan would be pleased to see you.



Colin with Mike at the Kowloon Cricket Club.

We reached Hong Kong on 9 March where we met **Colin Whittington** (RAO Ordnance 1995-97) for lunch at the Kowloon Cricket Club, surely the most expensive piece of real estate in this 'special administrative region'. We over-nighted in Hong Kong and the following day the ship's Covid rules had relaxed sufficiently to have Colin on board for lunch.



Mike, Penny and Colin lunching on board in Hong Kong.

Lena Mander, Nick's widow has relocated to Australia where their children live – **Adam** on the Gold Coast and **Cristina** in Sydney. Unfortunately, our respective travel routes did not coincide. There will be another time Lena!

It is unfortunate that our members are so widespread throughout Australia and New Zealand that it is impractical to form an ANZAC chapter of the SAF Association. Nevertheless the memories live on. ■

BRITISH OMANI SOCIETY (BOS)

The Anglo-Omani Society has changed its name to the British Omani Society (BOS), and this is a good time to remind SAF Association members of the close links between us and the benefits of joining.

Members of the SAF Association were heavily involved in the foundation of the Society in the 1970s. Several of our members are on the Society Board including their Chairman, **Maj Gen Richard Stanford**, and many Association members have joined the Society subsequently. BOS has its own premises in Central London with a busy and interesting programme of activities. It is generous in sharing these assets with the Association: hosting and funding events for us, making its facilities available for our committee meetings and making a grant towards the cost of our annual Journal.

BOS members and their connections are diverse. They represent British-Omani relations across the generations. Their connections allow the Society to act as a confluence for the government, academic, cultural and private sectors of both countries. At events you will meet a broad range of people united by their interest in the Sultanate – from students to government officials, academics to business-people and, of course, Britons who have lived in Oman and Omanis currently living in the UK.

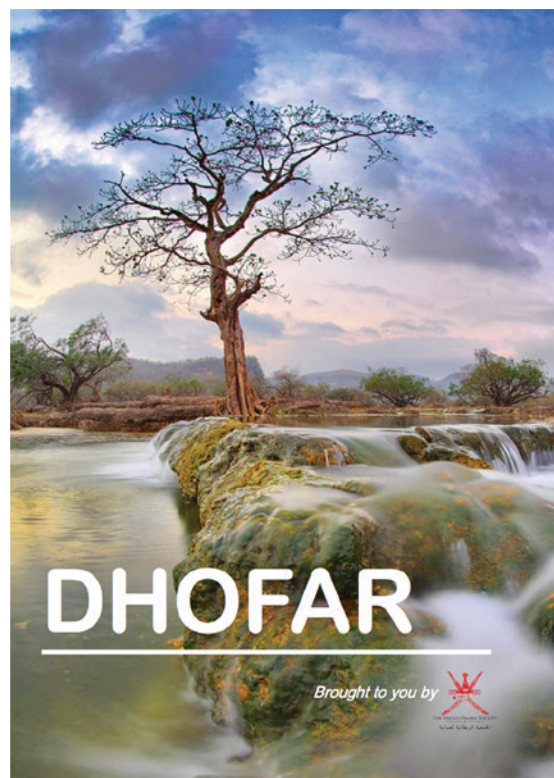
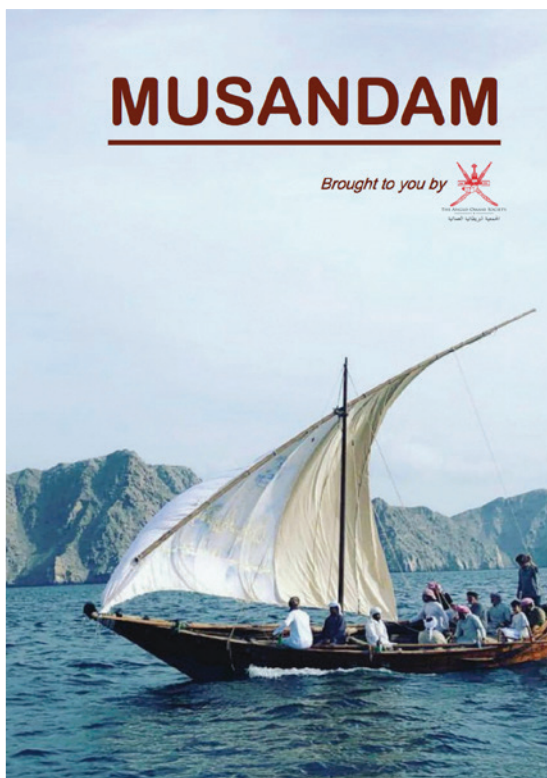
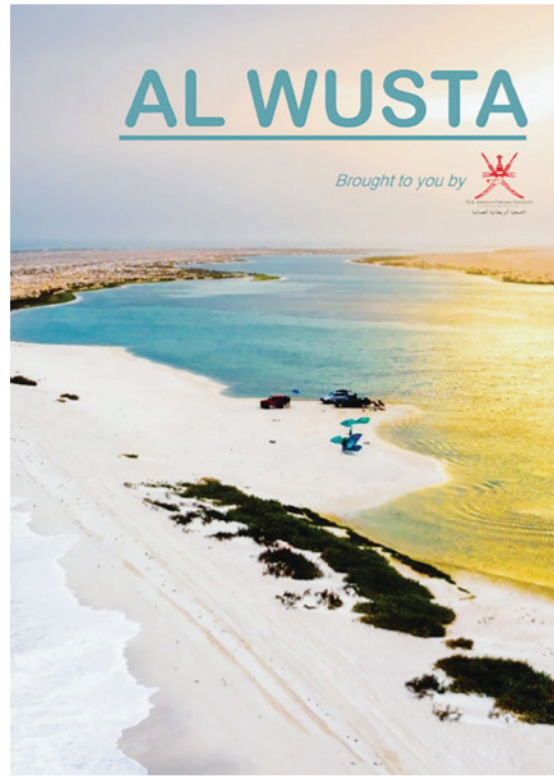
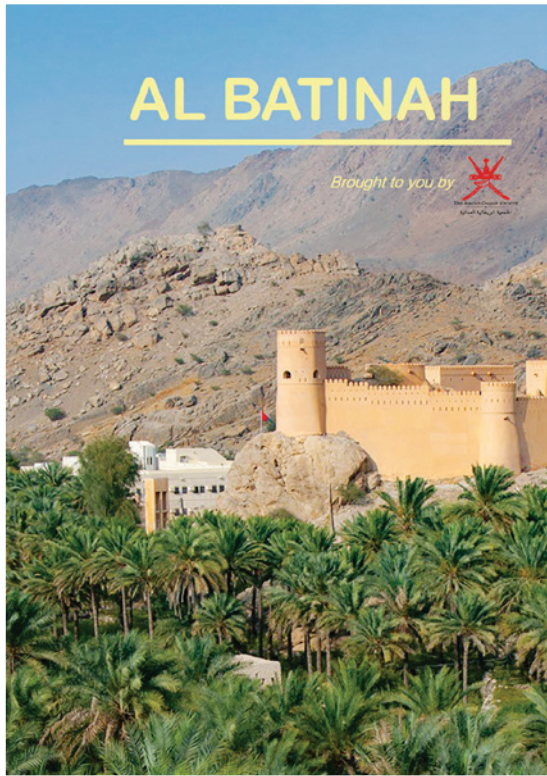
In the monthly events programme, which is free for members to attend, you can hear from both UK and Omani experts, contemporary and historical. World Record breakers, authors and explorers, scholars, musicians and academics will speak on topics ranging from Oman's natural heritage and religion to its history and contemporary culture.

BOS also hosts a high-profile lunch for members and Omani/UK government and VIP attendees each October. There is also an option to attend many events online (useful for members who are not based in London). See the upcoming events programme here: www.britishomani.org/events

This is your invitation to join. If your interest in Oman is just developing or built on decades of connection with the country, do become a member. The British Omani Society is your home in London and looks forward to welcoming you at events! The annual membership fee is £25. However, for those new to, or just joining the SAF Association, we are promoting a membership offer for the Association and BOS for £25 – giving you the benefits of both organisations for the price of one! Applications should be made via the SAF Association website form at: <https://www.omani.org.uk/membership>



The BOS website features the ‘Governorate Series’ of publications - each offering a fascinating compilation of stories told by a very wide range of subject matter experts. The Governorates are blessed with distinct identities steeped in culture, history and character. Whatever one’s level of interest, the series offers a unique insight into the jewel that is Oman.



PAUL 'TIGER' WRIGHT WSH WB RE

Bill and Tony from D Sqn, 22 SAS, Lt Col Chris Ankers CO 75 Engineer Regiment, Jonathan Salusbury-Trelawny, John McKeown, Mike Austin and Nick Larkin.



Mike Austin laying the wreath.



Paul 'Tiger' Wright, a company commander in JR, was killed in action on 6 February 1973 and was posthumously awarded the Sultan's Gallantry Medal (WSH) – one of only three British officers awarded this medal, and the only seconded British officer to be so honoured. The anniversary was marked by a moving ceremony beside his grave in Cheshire, organised by the local 75 Engineer Regiment with RE, SAF and SAS representatives taking part.

Mike Austin, who was with Paul when he was killed (and was awarded the Bravery Medal [WB] for his own actions on that day of fierce battle) laid a wreath on behalf of members of the SAF Association. John McKeown, Jonathan Salusbury-Trelawny and Nick Larkin were also at the graveside. At a ceremony afterwards at 75 Engineer Regiment RHQ in Warrington, Paul's sword, which had been given by his

Paul's grave with his grandparents.



mother many years ago to a reserve sapper was gifted by him to the Regiment.

The Tiger Wright/SE Regional Lunch was held on 4 May 2023 and is reported separately. ■

JOHN SURTEES



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