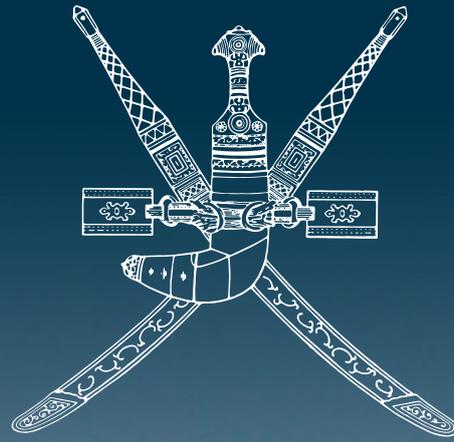


THE
JOURNAL
OF THE
SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES
ASSOCIATION



الحماية المتنقلة في خدمتكم





THE JOURNAL

OF THE SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES ASSOCIATION



SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES ASSOCIATION & OFFICERS

President

Vice-Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis Al Raisi
WSQ, WO, WKhM

Vice-President

Marshal of the Royal Air Force
The Lord Stirrup KG, GCB, AFC, WO

Chairman

Mike Lobb MBE, GMV, WB, WKhM

Vice-Chairman

Air Vice-Marshal Tony Nicholson CBE, LVO, WKhM

General Secretary, Treasurer and Membership Secretary

Lieutenant-Commander Neil Fawcett RN
Two Oaks, Mayfield Fold, Rock Lane
Burnley, Lancashire BB11 2RN
E-mail: neil.fawcett@btinternet.com

Editor: "The Journal"

Tim Jones WKhM (G), FRAeS
Email: tim.tbpp@googlemail.com

Deputy Editor

Charlie Daniel WKhM (G)
Email: gallivanter02@gmail.com

Website Manager

Keith Ryde WKhM (G)
E-mail: saf.business@dudwell.co.uk

Members

John McKeown CBE
Gordon Allen QGM, WKhM (G)
Kieron Shaw MBE
Mqm (Rtd) Ian Buttenshaw WKhM

Association Representatives in Oman

Ameed Rukn Hassan bin Ali Al Mujaini WKhM
Head of Morale Guidance and PR
Office of COSSAF, PO Box 113, Post Office Code 100
Sultanate of Oman
Telephone: +968 993 37323
E-mail: hassoman@gmail.com

Mqm (Rtd) Ian Buttenshaw WKhM

PO Box 2990, CPO Seeb 111, Sultanate Of Oman
Telephone: +968 993 22850
E-mail: buttens@omantel.net.om
ianbuttenshaw@gmail.com

Printed by:

Brunton Business Publications

ADVERTISING/PR MANAGER STILL VACANT

"URGENT" Revenue sharing opportunity!

The Committee is still looking for a volunteer member to offset the costs of the Journal by generating income from advertising.

Targets are Omani Companies and British organisations who have business interests in Oman. Role spans all aspects from initial contact through selling space to chasing payment.

This is an opportunity to earn modest income, contribute to the aims of the Association and stay in touch with Oman.

Interested? Want to know more? Contact the Editor

PROTECTIVE NOTICE

Unless stated to the contrary, the copyright of all articles in this Journal is the property of the SAF Association. No part of this Journal may be reproduced in any way whatsoever without the permission in writing of the Association.

Every effort has been made to trace and acknowledge ownership of copyright material; the publishers will be glad to make suitable arrangements with any copyright owner it has not been possible to contact.

THE JOURNAL ONLINE THE JOURNAL ONLINE THE JOURNAL ONLINE

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

www.oman.org.uk/journal

WELCOME TO THIS YEAR'S JOURNAL

Covid is still very much with us and affecting us all. My sincere sympathy to all members who have lost loved ones and have had their lives disrupted, but I won't dwell on this. I would rather focus on the Association's achievements and plans.

For us, a key feature of last year was the visit in November of our President, COSSAF, **Vice-Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis Al Raisi**. He attended our Committee meeting at AOS in London on 25 November and was guest of honour at our Annual Dinner that evening. This issue includes coverage of his visit and we reproduce his after dinner speech which was very positive and encouraging – it drew a spontaneous, unusual standing ovation.

A number of other events were held through the year, despite restrictions, and are duly reported here. Thank you to the organisers and attendees for your perseverance and determination to press on despite the difficulties. I very much enjoyed the events I attended and was struck by the enthusiasm of members at achieving direct face to face contact again at last!

Once again, we include a list of future events for your diary. Of course, this is our 'wish list' and you should keep up to date with changes via website and, if in doubt, contact organisers. Thanks to Kieron Shaw and Keith Ryde as well as event organisers for their energy and effort to keep our events going. Thanks also to all who are supporting our events by attending in these difficult times.

The article "Airbridge to Simba/Sarfait" in the last Journal drew quite a lot of comments and clearly stirred some memories. Hardly surprising since it lasted a long time and involved so many of us! However, there was one major omission for which I apologise. In the early stages, DR was supported by B Coy NFR (with **Tresham Gregg** and **Graeme Smyth-Piggot**) who also scrambled down the

scarp to take and hold Capstan against stiff opposition until they had to withdraw back to Mainbrace. Their role and contribution should be recognised.

UK/Oman military co-operation continues apace and the huge training area adjacent to Duqm is now getting regular use and replacing Canada as the major overseas training area for the British Army. SAF Association was pleased to host a talk on Duqm at AOS in September and there will be an article in next year's Journal. Meanwhile, in this issue we include an update on RAFO training activities at Masirah where world class fixed wing and helicopter flying training is delivered. This also captures a picture of the RN Carrier *Queen Elizabeth* off Oman with RAFO Hawks.

Also in this issue **General Felix Gedney** (SBLSO) reflects on his first year in post whilst **Russ Peart's** book describes his two very different tours with SOAF (RAFO). He first flew Strikemasters and Beavers (1972-74) and ten years later returned to fly Jaguars. (Two bites of the cherry!)

We include the next chapter of **Ian Buttenshaw's** "History of SAF". Ian continues to serve as our Committee member in Oman and I would like to record my thanks to him for the excellent links he provides between the Association and today's SAF. His insights into modern Oman also contribute greatly to your journal.

I hope there is something for everyone in this Journal. Once again, it has been produced by Dan Brunton and his team at Brunton Business Publications without any physical meetings but with huge effort. Particular thanks to Julie who pulls it all together and keeps us in line! Read on... and please keep your Journal articles coming!

Tim Jones, Editor

PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

Front Cover: GNO Corvette Qahir Al Amwaj firing Exocet Anti-ship Missile

Association Future Events	5	British Loan Service	40
Chairman's Notes	6	Office of COSSAF / Ministry of Defence	41
SAF Association Annual Dinner / COSSAF Speech	7	Royal Army of Oman	43
51st National Day	10	Royal Air Force of Oman	47
Armed Forces Day	14	Royal Navy of Oman	51
New Forest Curry Luncheon	16	The Sultan's Special Force	56
Heli 50+1 Anniversary Lunch	19	Royal Guard	59
The Jebel Akhdar	22	Royal Office / SAF Museum	60
SAF Arboretum Memorial Visit	24	National Defence College	61
RAFO at Masirah	25	Command and Staff College	62
Wessex Lunch 2021	29	"Khanjar Oman" Exercise	63
Cemetery Bay Clean-up	31	Shabab Oman II	66
SE Region / Tiger Wright Memorial Lunch	32	Book Reviews	70
Oman Gunners' Lunch	35	Remembering...	72
Scottish Dinner	36	Stuart Rae Awarded The Elizabeth Medal	80
SON/RNO Reunion Lunch	37	Transformation and Omanisation 1975-1990 – Part II	84

ASSOCIATION FUTURE EVENTS

PLEASE ALSO MONITOR THE WEBSITE

A forecast of Association events in 2022 is shown below. All of these events have now been confirmed, with the exception of the dates of the proposed trip to Oman, which are awaiting confirmation. In addition to this list in the Journal, further details of these events are contained on the Association website. However, if you wish to contact the organiser of an event and are having difficulties, please contact Kieron Shaw (k.d.shaw@btinternet.com) who will be pleased to point you in the right direction.



NOTES FOR YOUR DIARY!

MONDAY 28 MARCH • NORTHERN LUNCH • THE PRINCIPAL HOTEL, YORK

Contact: Geoff Hill • SAFANorth19@outlook.com or Alasdair Halford-MacLeod • alasdairh_m@hotmail.com



THURSDAY 19 MAY • SCOTTISH REGIONAL ASSOCIATION DINNER • DOUNESIDE

Contact: Jonathan Forbes • jonathan_forbes@hotmail.com



FRIDAY 24 JUNE • SAF CURRY LUNCH • THE RAG

Contact: Neil Fawcett • neil.fawcett@btinternet.com



SUNDAY 31 JULY • THE WESSEX LUNCH • SHERBORNE

Contact: John Kirkham • johnkirkham@uwclub.net or Nick Holbrook • nickholbrookoldmill@gmail.com



THURSDAY 8 SEPTEMBER • EAST ANGLIAN LUNCH • HINTLESHAM

Contact: Tresham Gregg • treshamgregg@hotmail.com



FRIDAY 9 SEPTEMBER • SALALAH/DHOFAR LADIES LUNCH • THE RAG

Contact: George Correa • georgecorrea@btinternet.com



TUESDAY 13 SEPTEMBER • GUNNERS' ANNUAL REUNION LUNCH • THE HAC

Contact: Jimmy Garnier • jimmygarnier@aol.com



SUNDAY 25 SEPTEMBER • NEW FOREST LUNCH • LYMINGTON

Contact: Mike Lobb • mikelobb@hotmail.co.uk



THURSDAY 6 OCTOBER • SOUTH EAST REGION AND "TIGER WRIGHT" MEMORIAL CURRY LUNCH • CHATHAM • Contact: Nick Larkin • nicklarkin1@aol.com



FRIDAY 25 NOVEMBER • SAF ANNUAL DINNER • THE RAG

Contact: Neil Fawcett • neil.fawcett@btinternet.com



(PROVISIONAL) 2-12 DECEMBER • ASSOCIATION VISIT TO OMAN

Contact: Gordon Allen • gda.gac@gmail.com and Neil Fawcett • neil.fawcett@btinternet.com

"As usual, would event organisers please arrange for best resolution photographs of the event to be taken and sent with a short report (including details of who is depicted in photos and a list of all attendees), to the Editor for inclusion in the next Journal.

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

by Mike Lobb



Roll on 2022! We managed to run with the ball throughout 2021, picking up again from where we left off in 2019 (2020 is best forgotten).

The highlight of the year has to be the flagship dinner, actually held on a Thursday this year but returning to its more familiar last Friday in November in 2022 and thenceforth. Seventy-one of us welcomed our

new President, **Vice-Admiral Abdullah Khamis Al Raisi** and were much cheered by his excellent after dinner speech of encouragement and engagement in the future. You will find the event written up elsewhere in this Journal. Unfortunately, our retiring President, **Lieutenant General Ahmed Harith Al Nabhani**, was unable to attend so there will be an impromptu event for him in 2022 to express our thanks for his staunch support for the Association.

Unit and Regional events were well attended. Everyone seemed intent making up on the absence of events in 2020. I managed to attend the Gunners, the Helis and the Navy events, as well as the Wessex, Tiger Wright's Memorial Lunch and to organise one in the New Forest. It is apparent that most of the attendees were from the Dhofar War generation, so I address this comment to the post-war members whose contribution for capacity building was so important to Oman's stability. We would very much like to see you

at these events. If you think you may not know anyone, then come as a group or bring guests. If you don't attend then eventually the Association will wither on the vine.

I am pleased to report that the Association was back at Shrivenham, supporting the Advanced Command and Staff Course. Eleven veterans gave presentations to syndicates on the newly named Ethics & Leadership in Conflict (ELiC) from the old Realities of Conflict phase and we have already been invited back for 2022. Unfortunately, I missed making early contact with the RCDS students but the new Military Attaché, **Brigadier Ahmed Ibrahim Ambu Saidi** and the Assistant Military Attaché, **Captain Said Sulaiman Al Shabibi** have contacted the eight Omani Loan Service in this country. We will arrange an event (or two) in order to meet all 17 Omanis currently in UK.

The Specialist Infantry to whom the Association has made presentations in the past has now been re-organised into Rangers. The Association has already been invited to make further presentations in 2022. Our links with the Anglo-Omani Society were strengthened with the AOS providing the venue for **David Bennett's** talk on the military training facilities and the port at Duqm in September. It has been pleasing to keep reading of the increasing joint Omani and UK ventures there. The AOS also hosted a reception for the Walking for Wounded Charity who were due to conduct their walk in Oman but were cancelled because of the pandemic, so they did it in UK instead. **Kieron Shaw** hosted the group at the SAF Memorial as they marched past at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire.

The Association has much to look forward to in 2022 – not least the long-anticipated visit to Oman.

I look forward to meeting many of you at one (or more) of our events in the coming year. Until then stay safe. ■



Before the Annual Dinner, COSSAF attended the Association Committee meeting which was also attended by our Vice-President, MRAF Lord Stirrup. The photo shows the Committee with the President and Vice-President.

SAF ASSOCIATION DINNER

The annual Dinner was held at the Army and Navy Club on Thursday 25 November 2021 – the change to Thursday being forced by circumstances as so many organisations battled for dining-room availability after the non-events of 2020.

It was very good to see predicted numbers almost reach 80 in the weeks preceding the dinner, despite reducing to 71 on the night due to various circumstances. As ever, the RAG put on an excellent dinner and there was a great buzz around the tables. Whatever impact COVID might have had was not in evidence and all who attended clearly derived immense pleasure from being able to get together again for our traditional November 'fuddle'.



COSSAF, Vice-Admiral Abdullah Khamis Al Raisi



Nick Mylne, Kevin Smith and
Brig Ahmed Ibrahim Ambu Saidi



HE the Ambassador, Abdulaziz Al Hinai

There were eight official guests and we were delighted to welcome:

COSSAF, Vice-Admiral Abdullah Khamis Al Raisi, HE the Ambassador, Abdulaziz Al Hinai, MA, Brig Ahmed Ambu Saidi, AMA, Capt Said Al Shabibi RNO, COSSAF's Flag Lieutenant, Lt Cdr Khalid Al Tobi, Commander Hannah Mackenzie RN and Maj Tom Bright – both from Shrivenham for whom we continue to provide veterans in support of the Advanced Command and Staff Course and **Major General Tom Copinger-Symes**, Director of Military Digitisation.



L-R: Jane Handley, David Bell and Brian Tyekiff

L-R: David Sandifer, Neil Fawcett, Tom Hammon and Robin Gainsford



Following a short address from our Chairman, COSSAF took the opportunity to address the gathering at his first Dinner since assuming the role as our President in January 2021. He spoke with great warmth for, and commitment to, the Association and emphasised the enduring strength of the links forged so many years ago. His clear message to those present and the Association at large was that Oman is every bit as close to its veterans as it ever was. COSSAF received a standing ovation – his words striking a chord with everybody in the room

(a copy of the speech is included here.).Following his speech, COSSAF was presented with a copy of 'Dhofar Voices' by the author, Stewart Wilson (NFR/FF '77-'82).

In all, it was a memorable evening and wonderful to be back together again. We have taken early action to secure the RAG as a venue for the next five years and can confirm that we are back to the traditional date of the last Friday in November. Let's hope that Friday 25 November this year will see even more of us together again.

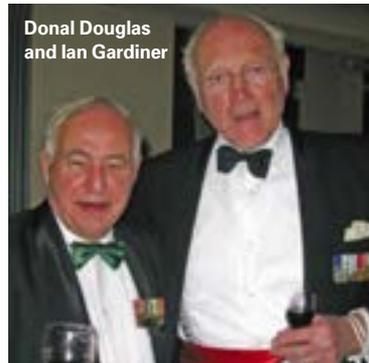
Mike Lobb



Michael Chandler and Patrick Davidson-Houston



Donal Douglas and Ian Gardiner



Peter Issacs



Tim Jones and Mike Austin



Richard Shuttleworth and David Maudesley



Keith Ryde



L-R: Nick Larkin, Penny Lobb, Lt Cdr Khalid Al Tobi RNO and Cdr Hannah Mackenzie RN



Mike Goodfellow



COSSAF'S ADDRESS TO THE SAF ASSOCIATION DINNER

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my great pleasure and honour to be amongst you today at the annual dinner held by the Sultan's Armed Forces Association. Indeed, I am very much privileged to have the honour of meeting such an extraordinary group of veterans and warriors who contributed massively to the establishment of the Sultan's Armed Forces during the early '70s, maintaining security and stability in Oman at that time.

Thank you for your courage and bravery in the battlefields, and for your unwavering commitment to help and train your fellow Omanis. We as Omanis appreciate all your tremendous efforts and sacrifices to help us during that difficult time and my respect to all those who are not here with us today. I personally had the privilege to work with some of you and have some fond memories of our times together that I extremely cherish and hold dear to my heart.

I thank you for your understanding and positive impact leaving a distinguished mark in the Armed Forces ties between our countries.

As Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces, and thereby the President of the Sultan's Armed Forces Association, it is a profound privilege for me to be part of such a pioneering Association that celebrates the distinguished military partnership between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom.

Since its establishment in 1968, the Association has strengthened the relations between those who served in the British and Omani Armed Forces. It is indeed, a vital link in the ongoing military

partnership between UK and Oman. The Association received the care and support of **His Late Majesty Sultan Qaboos** and this will continue under the wise leadership of **His Majesty the Sultan Haitham bin Tarik – the Supreme Commander**. We continue to share the same ethos which is a clear reflection of our bond and what we cherish today in SAF was a great joint venture. The seeds of today's success were put by many of you who assisted us on loan or contract in the '70s. Our countries have been friends for as long a time as the treaty of 1800. The relationship has been particularly close over the last 50 years of the renaissance under his late Majesty the Sultan Qaboos and remains so today under H.M. Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. It was marked by the landmark joint Defence Agreements and by a wide range of Oman and UK comprehensive agreements.

We are confident that we will remain good friends. We will do everything in our capacity to enhance this outstanding relation and will cherish the strong bond and friendship of our two countries.

Also, I would like to highlight the Journal of the Association and thank its editors and all those who contribute to it. There is no doubt that the Journal is an important factor to reinforce the roles of the Association, through documenting important historical events, as well as recent updates related to both Armed Forces. The pages of this Journal reveal the Association's determination to adapt to the future and encourage forthcoming generations to maintain visions and impetus. One of the distinctive features of the Journal is that it contains some cherished experiences and incidents, shared by the members during their service in the Armed Forces. Thank you for sharing such fascinating memories.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reassure that I will do my utmost best, utilising all efforts within my capacity to elevate our military co-operation between our Armed Forces in all possible aspects to widen horizons in my new capacity as Chief of Staff of Sultan's Armed Forces.

From this platform, I also would like to take this opportunity to thank **Lt. General, Ahmad bin Harith bin Nassir Al-Nabhani** for his unremitting commitment and efforts to this Association for more than 18 years, through providing the appropriate atmosphere and environment for the Association to practise its roles. He will definitely remain one of the pillars of this Association.

One thing that this pandemic taught us is that some challenges are universal and can only be overcome through human unity. Indeed, the deep-rooted friendship and partnership between UK and Oman is a great example of such unity.

His Highness Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs sends His regards to you all. Once again thank you for this gathering and warm hospitality. I fully appreciate all the tremendous efforts put into organising this event in the light of Covid-19 restrictions. Kindly accept my deep appreciation and gratitude to all members of this Association and its board for organising this dinner and exceptional gathering tonight as I was really keen to meet you all.

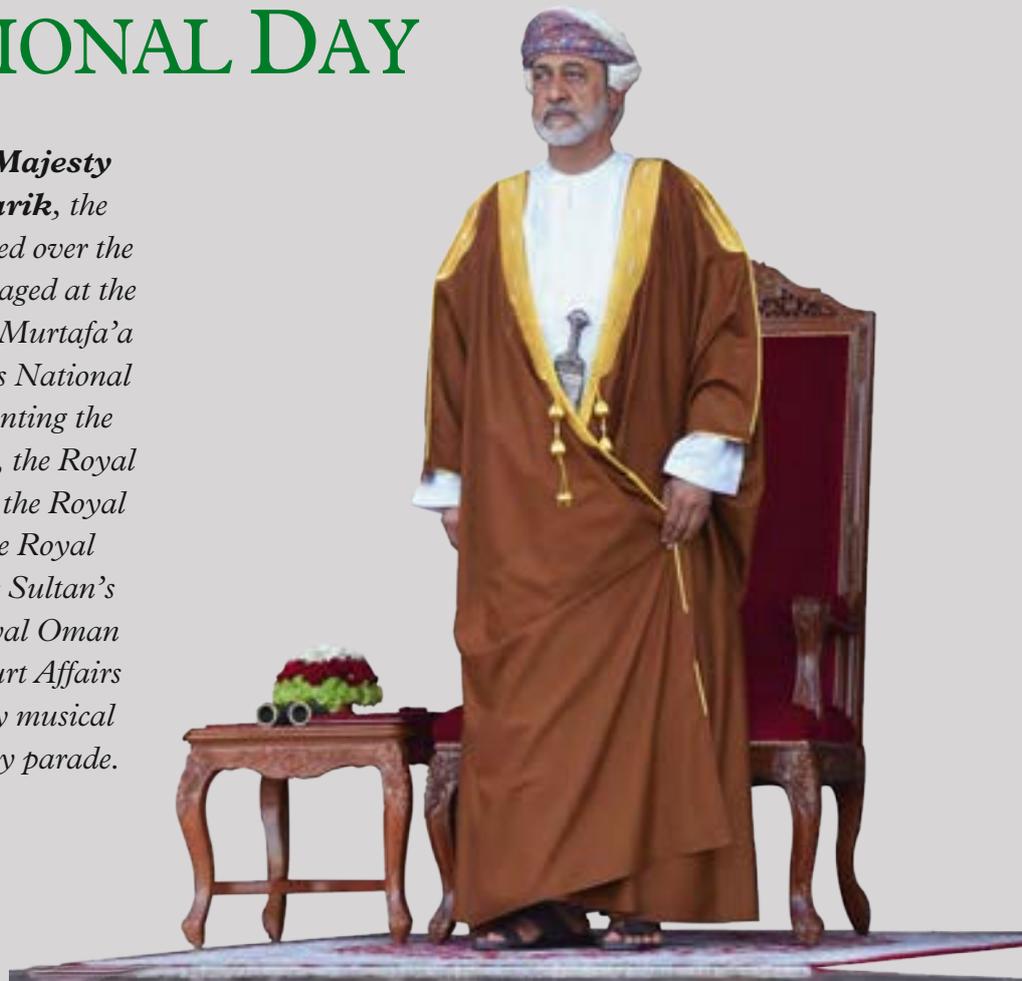
I pray that we all as one global entity come together and stop the spread of this virus. May the divine mercy bestow upon all humanity with you and your families good health and stay safe. ■



COSSAF, Vice-Admiral Abdullah Khamis Al Raisi

51ST NATIONAL DAY

*On the 18 November, **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**, the Supreme Commander, presided over the military parade, which was staged at the military parade ground of Al Murtafa'a Garrison on the 51st Glorious National Day. Symbolic 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), the Royal Court Affairs (RCA) and the joint military musical band took part in the military parade.*



51ST NATIONAL DAY



51ST NATIONAL DAY



51ST NATIONAL DAY



ARMED FORCES DAY

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

The ceremony comes as an honour by His Majesty the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces for all military formations and units on this glorious day for their great national role and their dedication in performing the sacred duty to defend the homeland, protect its security and ensure its stability and safety, as well as maintaining its achievements, which led to security, safety, harmony and peace in Oman.

The Deputy Prime Minister attended the ceremony for Defence Affairs, as well as some ministers, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), Royal Oman Police and senior military and civil officers.





NEW FOREST CURRY LUNCHEON

The third New Forest Curry Luncheon was held at the South Lawn Hotel, Milford on Sea on Sunday, 26 September, 2021.



Sandwiched carefully between an uninspiring chill Saturday and a horrendous fierce stormy Monday, Sunday 26th September arrived modestly with no promises but by 12 noon had turned into a delightful sunny early autumn day, off with the thermals. How lucky were we.

For our third annual New Forest SAF Association luncheon we assembled again at the South Lawn Hotel in Milford. After so little socialising for so long, it was an absolute delight to see old friends and some new faces and at last start catching up in the best possible SAF way. A leisurely curry lunch with a few drinks on the side in very pleasant surroundings.

It was a great pleasure to welcome a rare visitor from SOAF, **Russell Peart** and I think several of us will be looking forward to the publication of his book *(From Lightnings to MiGs)* in October.

Janet Hughes was pleasantly surprised to meet a fellow SAF widow **Carole Barnett** and discover that they have great friends in common.

We warmly welcomed newcomers, **Roger Brown**, **Al Howard** and **Tim Jones** and were sad that a few of our number were unable to attend due to last minute set backs. We look forward to seeing them next year.

As usual the Gunners were very well represented, **Ken** and **Doe Brown** (with guests **Ron** and **Patsy Back**, also Gunners), **George** and **Venice Correa** (again with a Gunner guest, **Mike Halliwell**), **Fiona de Fontblanque** and **Miles** and **Jean Thomson** and last, but not least, the most famous Gunner of all (no I did not say infamous) **Hugh Colley**. I am not sure if our Chairman was wearing his Gunner hat but I suppose I must include him in the roll call, **Mike Lobb**.

NEW FOREST CURRY LUNCHEON

It was good to see some long distance visitors, notably from FMS **Nick Cooper, Gwen Davis, Bobby Foxtton and Jane Hanley** but also our regular visitor from SOAF **Bill MacGillivray**. Then we come to the hard core of regular supporters all of whom are very welcome and full of wonderful tales of times long ago when a fuel crisis meant that the Middle East would once again become a war zone.

Our very rare, sole member from SON, how is it possible that in an area where nowhere is more than a couple of miles from the sea, **Mike Ridley-Martin** is our sole exhibit? Come on SON where are you all hiding? We thank all our regulars some of whom have already been named but include the following **Mike and Rose Farquharson, Keith and Sheena Ryde, Rory Steevenson** (and

guests **Ian and Diane Thompson), Mike and Nikki Watson, Peter Isaacs, David and Pauline McAllister and John Wooldridge**.

A very big "Thank you" goes to all of you who made the effort to get to our little outpost and we hope that your fuel lasted all the way home. Next year should be bigger and better with more stories, more memories and the lasting friendships which arise from the peculiar lives we have enjoyed. Keep safe everyone and see you next year.

Next year's New Forest Curry Luncheon will be held on 25th September 2022 at the South Lawn Hotel, Milford on Sea. Details are in the Calendar of Events and in due course, on the Association website. ■

David and Pauline McAllister, Ken and Doe Brown, Ron and Patsy Back



Miles and Jean Thomson, Carole Barnett, Peter Isaacs, Fiona de Fontblanque and Janet Hughes (hidden)



George and Venice Correa, Bill MacGillivray, Gwen Davis, Mike Halliwell and Nick Cooper



Russell Peart, Penny Lobb and Tim Jones



Mike and Rose Farquharson, Mike and Nikki Watson, Mike Ridley-Martin and Roger Brown



NEW FOREST CURRY LUNCHEON



THE NEW FOREST REGIONAL LUNCHEON 2022

The fourth 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 25th September 2022. Those wishing to attend should contact Mike Lobb (safassn@outlook.com). The price will be £30 for members and £35 for guests, a modest increase which includes an introductory drink (wine, beer or soft drink) as well as wine with the two course meal followed by coffee. Please see the Association website www.oman.org.uk for any changes nearer the date.

Bookings should be made after 1st July to Mike Lobb, 28 Richmond Court, Park Lane, Milford on Sea, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 0PT together with a cheque payable to Mike Lobb. Please indicate if you have any special dietary requirements or require a table for easy access. If a receipt or acknowledgement is required other than by e-mail, please provide an SAE.



Following the great success of their 50th Anniversary celebration last year, albeit held by "Zoom" because of lockdown, the Helis were determined to defy Covid again in 2021 but this time to hold a face to face celebration. So, the Mill House pub near the RAF Heli base at Odiham was chosen as the venue and former "helis" and assorted friends and families assembled to remember old times, miss absent friends and celebrate being "unlocked".

Dick Forsythe succeeded in passing the organisation to **Tony Nicholson** this time(!) but kept a careful eye on things! The Mill House provided an excellent venue with a private bar area and dining tables. We enjoyed a selection of tasty curries with rice, naan and chutney followed by a very "choccy" pudding!



50+1 ANNIVERSARY OF HELICOPTER OPERATIONS IN OMAN

Held at the Mill House, Odiham on Saturday, 4 September, 2021



Bell 205 – the famous "Huey" all-purpose heli of Vietnam fame in service in Dhofar.

50+1 "HELI" ANNIVERSARY

Despite a few last-minute cancellations there was a good attendance as follows: **Dick Forsythe** with **Natalie**, **Brian Freeman** with **Aquilla**, **Nick Holbrook**, **David Mawdsley** with **Dotty**, **Tony Nicholson** with **Nell**, **Al Skennerton** with **Rania**, **Kevin Smith** with **Carol**.

Jebel Regiment fielded a strong team of "heli users" led by ex-CO **Roger Jones** who was ably supported by **Joan**. (We calculated that Roger earned more air miles shuttling between Manston and Simba than **Prince "Andy Pandy"**). Also: **Mike Austin**, **Tim Jones**, **John Burbidge-King** and **Peter Morgan**.



Mike Lobb with **Penny** joined us to see fair play, while **Peter Isaacs** nobly represented the Isle of Wight. It was good, too, to see **Stan Stanford's** daughter **Arlene Mitchell**, together with **Gary**.

Much chit chat about "the good old days" and "do you remember?" ("No, you've got it all wrong – what really happened was...!")

It was amazing how events and memories keep flooding back when prompted; and the general hub-bub told its own story.

Tony made the promised brief speech, prompting some other spontaneous contributions; and toasts were drunk as we remembered old comrades and wished good fortune to the current generation who fly the flag today. We also remembered "Abu Heli" – **Nev Baker**, founder of the Heli tribe those 50+1 years ago, and whose generous bequest to the Association helped sponsor our gathering. **Nick Holbrook**, one of the original Helis, proposed the concluding toast to Neville. ■



THE JEBEL AKHDAR

by *Lionel F. (Dag) Saunders*

One of the pilots for SOAF was **Flt Lt Roger Henson** with whom I am still in touch. He was an avid rock climber and, while on his flights, would search for possible places to climb. The quality of rocks in this country were, for the most part, bloody awful and didn't make climbing them a low risk endeavour.

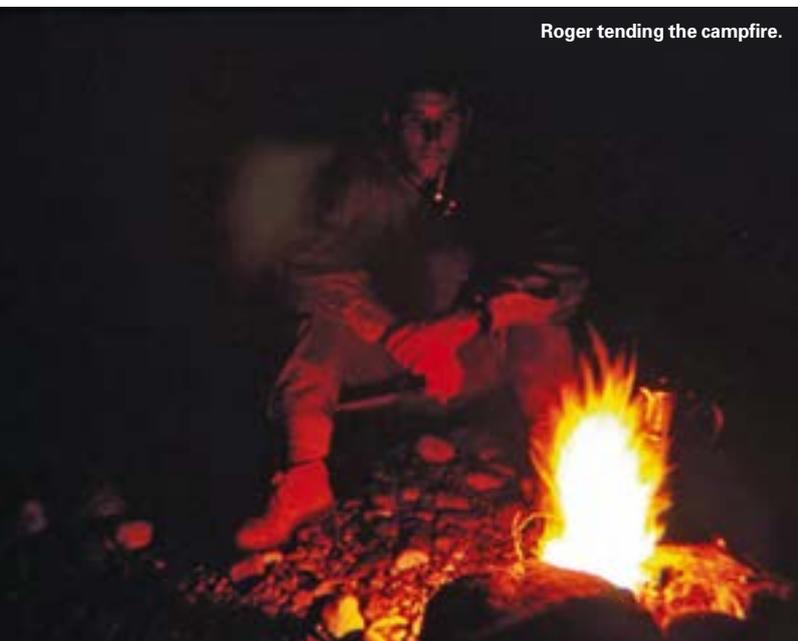
Roger had been looking for a climbing partner so one day he came to the Airwork mess to ask around to see if anyone would be interested in partnering with him. I jumped at the chance for two reasons. **1.** I had always enjoyed various types of climbing as a boy, so it appealed to me to do it with an expert. **2.** Roger was a very personable sort of chap who wasn't too snobbish to rub shoulders with the civilian equivalent of an 'other ranker'.

Whenever Roger flew over a likely spot he would note where it was and we'd go check it out. That, sometimes, led to a decent climb but we both wanted something a little more challenging.

So, sometime in 1968, the day came when Roger said that we should have a go at the Jebel Akhdar, which was quite a long drive from Bait al Falaj.

I don't remember the whys and wherefores, but I do remember that we had two or three days off from our usual duties. It took a full day to drive to the Jebel, so we had to camp for the night in a wadi near the Jebel.

When it got dark we sat beside a camp fire and watched the many fires of Arab travellers across the wadi from us. They were from several camel trains that were frequently seen in those days. I daresay that today their goods are carried on super highways. Sad!



Roger tending the campfire.

In the morning, after a wholesome breakfast of eggs and bacon etc., we set off on our journey. Roger was the most experienced so he led most of the way. But, just to give me the experience, he would urge me to lead once in a while.

There was one spot where we were literally walking on both sides of a peak. It came to a sharp edge and to cross it we had to have a foot on each side. We were tied together and it was pre-



I would lead sometimes.



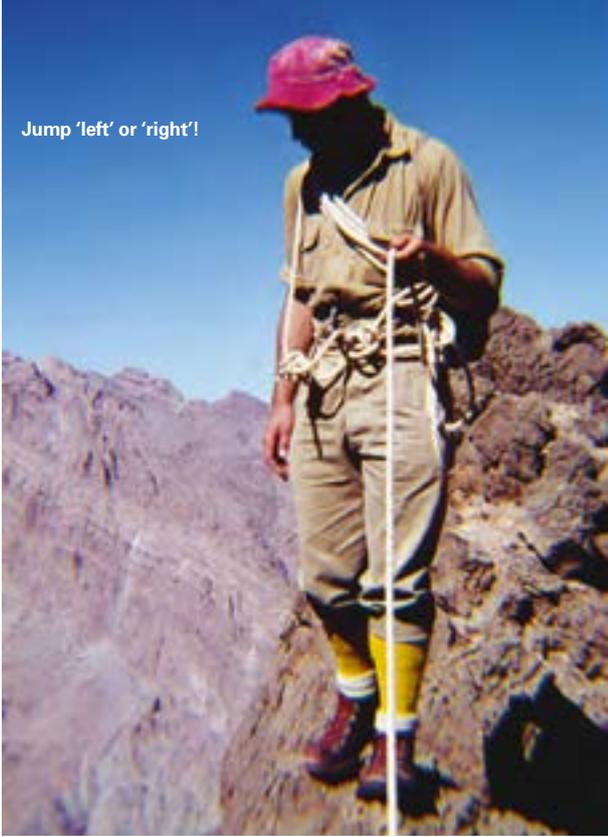
Roger Henson and Dag climbing Jebel Akhdar 1968 (We were the first!)

Near the beginning of the climb.

arranged that if either one of us fell we were to yell 'left' or 'right' and the other would jump the other way. That way we'd counter each other. I led the way on that part so that Roger could keep his eye on me. His mum didn't have any daft kids!

This was one long day and we saw many interesting things on our journey, not the least being the skeleton of a goat, or sheep, on

Jump 'left' or 'right'!

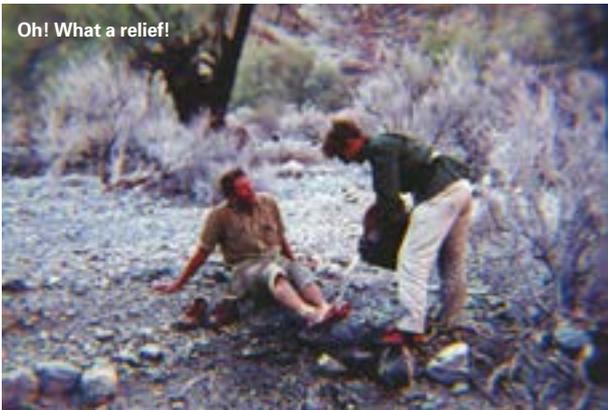


the very top of a pinnacle about four feet wide, but about ten feet from the main cliff. I imagine it jumped on there to eat something, then had no way of getting back. Or perhaps it was the leftovers of some flying raptor.

Finally, absolutely exhausted and with our feet on fire, we made it back to our Landrover. We took turns in pouring water over each other's feet. It felt like heaven! We decided not to stop for the night, and headed back to Bait Al Falaj as soon as we'd rested and had something to eat.

To this day I feel bad about the fact that Roger had driven 90% of the way back when he asked me to take over, not surprisingly, because he was tired. I drove for about five minutes and had to

Oh! What a relief!



My turn!



THE JEBEL AKHDAR

quit!!! I couldn't keep my eyes open and I was afraid of running off the road. Poor Roger had to take over again, not too happily, I could tell.

Recently I chatted with Roger about this little exploit and he took great delight in saying that we did it first... and we did it best! Amen!

Naturally I have many, many more photos of this trip, as I do of other escapades. I have put all the ones I have digitised onto a flash drive.

In 2014 I was able to find Roger on Skype after so many years. We had written for a couple of years after I had left Oman in 1968, but somehow we had lost touch with each other until I found him again, as I said, on Skype. So now we email each other and have the occasional chat on Skype. In fact I am in touch, on Skype, with some of my best buddies... **Ted Weinel** who lives in Spain, **Chris Perry**, **Bob Hobson** and **Bill Stewart** who all live in the UK. I have tried, in vain, to find others, and will continue to try. I find it very refreshing to be able to go over old times with these really good friends. I would love to be able to get in touch with other Airworkies (as we were called) and a couple of the pilots with whom I was on a very friendly basis. I would particularly like to be in touch with pilots **Jules Brett**, **Mike (Spider) Webb**, **Peter Wright**, **Don (Jock) Angus** and last but not least the CO (who we all affectionately called 'Boss') **Brian Entwisle**. I was saddened to learn of the death of pilot **Keith Wharton** who was very well liked. There were others whose names I'm afraid I have forgotten but whose faces I remember... because I still have photos of them! In those days they were all Flight Lieutenants with the exception of Brian who was a Squadron Leader. A great bunch of guys with whom I was proud to serve. ■

Editor's Note: Dag Saunders left Oman in 1968 and moved to USA in 1969 where he started an engineering company specialising in Vacuum inert atmosphere furnaces. Today he is President of Oxy-Gen Industries Inc. but reflects fondly on his days with Airwork supporting SOAF in Oman.



Like so many people I took advantage to do something that had been planned but, until the pandemic, not executed and that was to write an illustrated story of my life. With time on my hands, I set to it and wrote a 210 page book.

WALKING WITH THE WOUNDED VISIT TO SAF MEMORIAL

The SAF Association was recently approached by Walking with the Wounded, a registered charity in the UK, which exists to support disadvantaged veterans, who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, empowering them to regain their independence, to thrive and contribute to their communities. The charity works in partnership with the NHS. Two years ago the charity started to plan a walk of some 400 kilometres across part of Oman to draw attention to its work and to raise funds to enable it to continue to support the beneficiaries. When the Covid-19 pandemic spread across much of the world, the intended visit to Oman had to be cancelled, but plans were drawn up for a challenging walk across the UK. To retain the intended link with Oman, the charity and the walkers decided to visit the SAF Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum, on the 9th October 2021.

The walkers, who had served in a variety of capacities in the Armed Forces, were accompanied for the visit by **Fergus Williams**, a former member of the Welsh guards and the CEO of the charity, and **Andy Sloan**, the charity's marketing director. They were also accompanied by a film crew and a photographer, all of whom had been commissioned to record their progress on the walk.

The walkers were met at the National Memorial Arboretum by **Kieron Shaw**, representing the SAF Association. At the SAF Memorial, they were given an overview of the two wars in Oman (the Jebel Akhdar and Dhofar Rebellions) which had led to the Memorial being dedicated and placed at the Arboretum. All showed interest in the Memorial and in the context that was provided. The photograph shows Kieron and a number of the walkers standing at the Memorial.

The walkers were also escorted to the Special Forces Grove at the Arboretum, which has been created and developed by **Mike Colton**, also a member of the SAF Association. Although the Arboretum was closed throughout the periods of lockdown associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, work at the Grove had continued; and fundraising for further memorials and development work continued throughout these periods. A number of the memorials at the Grove relate to the conflict in Dhofar.

The SAF Association wishes the charity and the walkers every success, both for the walk and the future. ■



RAFO AT MASIRAH

by Ra'id Tayar Bob Bailey



RAFO Hawk welcomes RN Carrier Queen Elizabeth.

I know some of you will have either been stationed on Masirah or visited during your tenure. Conversely, you may never have been. Either way, please allow me to give you an idea of what the island is like in 2022 and, indeed, what may have changed from when you were last here. Before all that though, let me begin this article by introducing myself.

I've been in the RAF for over 22 years now. Following my flying training I was a Jaguar pilot and it was then that I first experienced Oman, as part of Exercise Magic Carpet in 2005 and 2006, and decided that if I was ever to work in the Middle East, Oman would be top of my list.

Following my time on the Jaguar I began my long association with the BAE Hawk. Various tours in the UK (three tours at RAF Valley on Hawk T1 and T2) and Canada (CFB Cold Lake) were followed by a secondment to BAE Systems as one of two QFIs (along with Bret Archer who many will already know through the associ-

ation) to introduce the Hawk 166 into RAFO service. At the completion of my secondment I elected to switch to Loan Service and so I have now entered my fifth year in Oman. I have also taken over the role as the Association's Loan Service point of contact in RAFO.

Oman has recently gone through a huge modernisation programme in many government departments and has especially invested heavily in its military equipment. The Hawk 166 came as part of a package of regeneration in RAFO that saw them take delivery of 12 Typhoons (based at RAFO Adam) and 8 Hawks (based at RAFO Masirah). Ultimately the Hawks were intended to replace the older single seat, radar equipped Hawk 203 and two seat Hawk 103 trainer models and fulfil a new role solely as a training platform (with occasional frontline support) and no operational tasking.

If you have visited recently you will have seen many differences from the Masirah of old.

RAFO AT MASIRAH

MASIRAH

The population has increased markedly and things such as modern(ish) restaurants, shops and even ten pin bowling and a resort hotel can now be found here.

Firstly, and most obviously, the town has grown somewhat. The population has increased markedly and things such as modern(ish) restaurants, shops and even ten pin bowling and a resort hotel can now be found here. However, having lived at the resort for five months, I can attest to the fact that it definitely has an air of 'Fawlty Towers' about it.



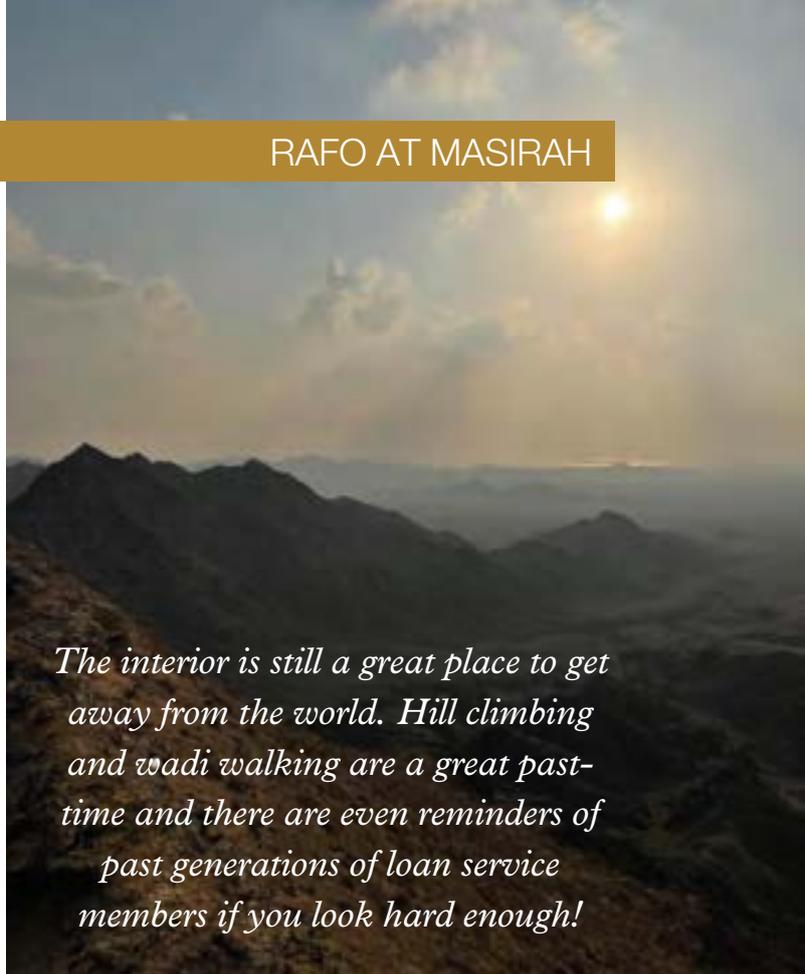
The interior is still a great place to get away from the world. Hill climbing and wadi walking are a great past-time and there are even reminders of past generations of loan service members if you look hard enough (see attached picture).

In summary, Masirah is still worth a visit, if you are in Oman, but you should be prepared for the ying and the yang of the changes that have been made. Anyway, that's enough of the Judith Chalmers bit. Let's talk about RAFO Masirah.

The airfield is largely unchanged although it has been extensively modified with a state-of-the-art ATC tower and many other new buildings and facilities. New accommodation blocks along with some relatively modern houses make life reasonably comfortable. Even the Turtle Beach Golf Club building is receiving a facelift.

Masirah is home to four aircraft types and a RAFO GBAD (Ground Based Air Defence) unit. It is primarily a flying training unit but with an important Search and Rescue (SAR) role as well.

SAR is carried out using Super Lynx, detached from 15 Sqn at RAFO Musannah. Despite being a RAFO asset, the UK Loan Service post is filled by an RN pilot (currently Lt Cdr Nick Bance)



The interior is still a great place to get away from the world. Hill climbing and wadi walking are a great past-time and there are even reminders of past generations of loan service members if you look hard enough!



since the RAF do not operate Lynx in the UK. I am reliably informed that the Super Lynx sits somewhere between the legacy Lynx and the Wildcat (which replaced the Lynx in RN and British Army service) in terms of capability and aircraft fit.

Along with their SAR duties, the Super Lynx also provides a CASEVAC role for the local hospital (a new and well-equipped building on Masirah) as well as being available as an aid to the civilian population.

Aside from the 15 Sqn detachment there are two permanent sqns, 1 and 6. 1 Sqn is equipped with a fleet of PAC MFI-17 Super Mushshak and Pilatus PC9 aircraft whilst 6 Sqn is now equipped solely with the Hawk 166.

1 Sqn provides flying grading and elementary flying training using the Super Mushshak aircraft. Successful pilot candidates then progress onto the Pilatus PC9. Much like the RAF of old, all pilots complete a comprehensive basic flying training course on the PC9 before being streamed to either fast-jet, multi engine or rotary units for further training. The usual mixture of general handling, instrument flying, formation, navigation and composite sorties amply test the students and they earn their wings upon completion of the course.

Instructors on 1 Sqn are usually dual-qualified and teach on both platforms to an annual course of between 20-30 prospective pilots. Flt Lt Phil Hird (formerly VC-10, Airbus A400, Tucano and PC-7) has recently arrived on loan service and joined 1 Sqn. He has already qualified on the PC9 and is eagerly awaiting his opportunity to complete his Super Mushshak rating.

6 Sqn is the fast jet training unit. Up until 2020 they operated a fleet of Hawk 103/203 aircraft which provided advanced fast jet (AFJT) and tactical weapons training along with a (moderate) quick reaction alert capability. Students would typically complete their training and then remain on 6 Sqn for up to two years to become 'limited combat ready' on the Hawk 203.

The Super Lynx also provides a CASEVAC role for the local hospital (a new and well-equipped building on Masirah).

In 2017 BAE delivered eight Hawk 166 aircraft (the same specification as the RAF Hawk T2) and began training a cadre of RAFO Hawk instructors on the new aircraft and syllabus. This fleet of Hawks was sadly reduced to seven in the first year when a solo student was killed in a flying accident at Masirah.

The introduction of the Hawk 166 saw a step change in the way training is delivered in RAFO. Not least because there is now a co-located full-mission simulator but also due to the enhanced avionic fit and performance. With upgraded engines and greater aerodynamic efficiency, the aircraft fly further and turn harder than their predecessor which means that sorties (air combat in particular) are now significantly more fatiguing; something the local pilots found to be quite a shock to begin with.

With a syllabus broadly similar to that delivered at RAF Valley to RAF and RN students, RAFO students now graduate from fast jet training with a wide breadth of knowledge and skills suitable for RAFO's modern fighter fleet of F16 and Typhoon.



In a similar vein to the 1 Sqn syllabus the students do the usual mixture of events during the AFT phase to familiarise themselves with the aircraft and prove their ability to progress onto the more complex phases.

The advanced avionics suite (including simulated radar and radar warning receiver) along with traditional practice bombs and strafe, using the 30mm cannon, make for an interesting and challenging course. Students will graduate 6 Sqn with a good understanding of air combat manoeuvring and BVR (beyond visual range) radar tactics, employing simulated AIM-9 (heat seeking missiles) and AMRAAM (advanced medium range air-to-air missiles) and be expected to handle swing-role scenarios (ie a combination of air defence and ground attack) both at low and medium level.

The day to day flying is as much fun as it probably ever was (albeit with a few more rules!) and RAFO have adapted extremely well to the rapid changes in technology and tactics throughout their short existence. The varied role and huge airspace coupled with some truly epic scenery makes flying a delight.

The people we work with are a professional and progressive cohort. Their openness to criticism and eagerness to embrace modern ways is very refreshing. As a Loan Service QFI it is great to feel so valued. The Sqn hierarchy consult me about all matters pertaining to Hawk 166 operations and I am genuinely made to feel like one of the team.

So, hopefully I have given you a taste of modern life on Masirah and highlighted the progress that has been made both within the military units on the island and also outside the wire. If you ever find yourselves in the area please feel free to let me know and I'd be happy to give you the guided tour. ■

WESSEX LUNCH 2021

This year's Wessex Lunch was held, as it has been since 2016, at the Sherborne Golf Club on Sunday, 25 July, 2021.

The Covid restrictions resulted in a greatly reduced number attending – 31 members, wives and guests turned up out of an original nearly 60 who had expressed interest. Although slightly disappointing, the smaller number did make it easier to get around the group and speak to people! We were also very pleased to welcome six 'First Time' attenders, who we hope will now have the event firmly in their 'SAFA Calendar'.

As usual the SGC kitchens produced a delicious 4-curry lunch with desserts and coffee to follow, and the whole event seems to have been a great success and enjoyed by everyone. Despite the several last minute cancellations, the club offered us a very generous deal which meant that we were able to make full refunds to everyone who cancelled without breaking the bank!

This is the list of those who attended:

Nick and Mary Holbrook, John and Jenny Kirkham, Mike Lobb, Kevin and Carol Smith, Mandy West, Suzie Quinn, Tom and Colyn Moore, Chris Griffiths, Mike and Pamela Martin, John Blashford-Snell, Chrissie Heslop, Nick Mylne and Dawn Chatty, Peter Ward, Don and Pearl Hargreaves, Lena Mander, Nick Cooper, Patrick and Penny Dunn, Robin and Kate Gainsford, Julian and Nellie Paxton, and Edwin and Margaret Lovegrove.

Next year's Lunch is to take place at Sherborne Golf Club on Sunday, 31 July, 2022. Details are contained in the calendar of events and, in due course, will be published on the Association's website. ■



Carol Smith, Mary Holbrook and Jenny Kirkham



Colyn and Tom Moore with Peter Ward and Nick Holbrook in the rear



John Blashford-Snell, Chris Griffiths and Mike Lobb

WESSEX LUNCH



Donald Hargreaves



Kevin Smith, Lena Mander and Chris Griffiths



Mike Martin and Peter Ward



Julian and Nelly Paxton



Edwin Lovegrove



Johnnie Kirkham



Mike Lobb



Carol Smith and Pearl Hargreaves



Nick Holbrook



Kevin Smith and Johnnie Kirkham



Jenny Kirkham and Dawn Chatty



John Blashford-Snell, Chris Griffiths, Mike Lobb, Patrick and Penny Dunn

CEMETERY BAY CLEAN-UP 2021

We must never forget!



Five boat loads of Loan Service took to the seas
To clear up the mess and cut back the trees
Serving, and families, bent their backs to the task
For the men who lay there; who had given all without ask
Soon the sites were spick and span, just how they should be
Rubbish gone, graves cleaned and tended, no more eyesore to see.

It wasn't difficult; indeed it was fun
By the blue water and in the warm sun
Lunch on the boats, swimming and snorkelling too
Tending this site is an easy duty to do
Out of sight to most; this place where resting servicemen have met
Must be kept worthy of their sacrifice... we must never forget. ■

There are numerous graves in Cemetery Bay
Between Al Alam Palace and Haramil... not too far away
A place of peace with a breath-taking view
Rest for Sailors of old, and Army men too
The graves white, contrast with ground brown and dun
How brightly they shine when lit by the sun.

The bay is nestled between steep cliffs and crags
And it does get littered with plastic bottles, old nets and bags
And with no-one to contain the scrub and thorn trees
This site of peaceful rest can become shabby with ease
Clutter and rubbish has no home on this site
So the Loan Service deployed to set the place right.



SAF ASSOCIATION SOUTH EAST REGION AND MAJ PAUL WRIGHT MEMORIAL LUNCH

Chatham – 6 October 2021

The South East Regional Lunch was held in October in Chatham. Attendance was understandably "Covid-lite" but those who attended – travelling from as far afield as Dorset and Yorkshire – enjoyed a fine curry lunch and excellent company in the sumptuous setting of the Headquarters Mess Royal Engineers. We quietly commemorated the life of one of the most highly decorated Sappers, **Major Paul (Tiger) Wright** WSh WB RE who served in Oman with SAS and JR and was killed in action in Dhofar on 6 February 1973.

As part of that tribute **Tim Jones**, Editor SAF Journal, presented a print depicting the close air support provided on that fateful day.



Tim Jones with picture.



Tiger's Place.



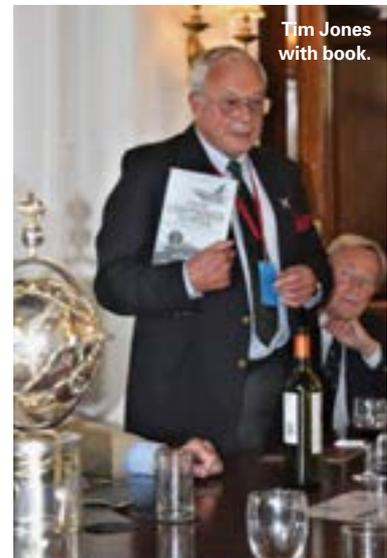
Tim Jones and Mike Austin with picture.



Nick Larkin with picture.

The lunch is what it says on the tin and provides the opportunity both for SAF members and Oman friends and colleagues to gather informally in the South East whilst at the same time allowing Tiger's friends and our hosts, the Sappers, to remember a highly decorated but little known (outside SAF) fallen comrade.

The Association would like to thank the School Comdt **Brig Peter Rowell**, and the PMC and CO 1 Royal School of Military Engineering Regiment **Lt Col Mark Stephenson**, for permitting us to use the Mess. Mark is himself posted to Oman to form up the Land Regional Hub in Muscat. (We wish him every success and are deeply envious of his appoint-



Tim Jones with book.



John McKeown, Keith Ryde, Tim Jones, Mike Austin, Nick Larkin, Bill de Bass, Penny Lobb and Chris Allanson

ment there!) Thanks also to the Mess Sec **Maj Simon Kerly**, **Joanne Stafford**, the Mess Manager and all the staff for their kindness and hospitality.

As previously, members met up at the Royal Engineers Museum in the morning and had an opportunity to view the many exhibits and take coffee. Guests were given the opportunity to take precautionary LFT tests and submitted with humour and good grace. All were negative! The Museum is world class and covers all aspects of the history of the Royal Engineers. It has an impressive medal collection including a number of VCs. It houses Maj Wright's medals obtained by private purchase by two members of SAF, together with details of his citation. Our special thanks go to the RE Museum for its front desk support and facilitating the visit at no cost. At midday, guests convoyed the short distance to the Mess in Brompton Barracks for drinks and lunch.



Keith Day and Hugh Willing



Bill de Bass, Penny Lobb and Chris Allanson



Lissie Larkin and Marion de Bass

SOUTH EAST REGION LUNCH

L-R: John McKeown, Keith Ryde, Tim Jones and Mike Austin



After lunch Tim Jones, who had served in JR with Tiger as a fellow company commander, reflected on the events the day Maj Wright was killed, including close air support, which Tiger Wright had directed so ably. There was no doubt that the land forces in Dhofar could not have won without air support. One of the Strikemaster pilots providing CAS that day was **Russ Peart**. Targets had to be acquired visually and with the enemy in close contact identifying friend from foe was vital and a life or death matter. That day, Russ flew so low and close that **Mike Austin** commented over the radio that any lower and his Strikemaster would have collected Adoo on its wing tips. That prompted **Jack Sullivan**, then IO Salalah, to produce a cartoon depicting the airstrike. Amidst tragedy was humour. With great pleasure Tim presented a framed copy of Jack Sullivan's cartoon signed by Mike Austin (Tiger's 2ic) and Russ Peart which **Brig McKeown** accepted on behalf of the RE Museum.



Marion and Bill de Bass, Penny Lobb, Christopher Allanson, Nick Larkin, Keith Day, Hugh Willing, John McKeown and Keith Ryde

Keith Ryde, John McKeown and Mike Austin with picture.



Attendance: **Christopher Allanson** – NFR 1964/5, **Mike Austin** – 2IC 1 Coy JR '73, **Bill de Bass** – 55 FST BAMC Salalah '72, **Marian de Bass** (G), **Keith Day** – HO SOLF '84-86, **Tim Jones** – OC 3 Coy JR '73, **Nick Larkin** – SAF Engineers '81-82, **Lissie Larkin** (G), **Mike Lobb** – Chairman SAF Association (SAS, Firqat, SAFTR) and **Penny Lobb** – FMS '83-86, **John McKeown** – GSO2 Int HQ SAF '75-77, **Keith Ryde** (KJ) – SAF Association Committee and **Hugh Willing** – Late RGJ & DA Oman.

Postscript. The provisional date for next year's lunch is Thursday 6 October 2022. Please make a note in your diaries. We wish to thank all those who were unable to attend this year and who responded with apologies. We hope you can make it next year. One apology in particular caught my attention with the words "Weren't we fortunate to have served there?" Indeed we were. ■

OMAN GUNNERS' LUNCH

14 September 2021



Back Row, Left to Right: Jimmy Garnier, Miles Thomson, Chris Long-Price, Ashley Loxton, Nick Holbrook, Ian Ventham, Peter Leicester, Alan Howard, Will Cook and Patrick Dunn. Seated, Left to Right: Johnny Kirkham, Graham Smith, Norrie Wallace, Hugh Colley, Ahmed Ibrahim, Mike Hardy and Mike Lobb.

The Annual Oman Gunners' lunch was held at the Honourable Artillery Company in London on Tuesday 14 September. **Colonel Hugh Colley** presided and we were honoured to welcome **Brigadier Ahmed Ibrahim**, Omani Military Attaché, as our guest.

The attendees were: **Hugh Colley, Will Cook, Patrick Dunn, Jimmy Garnier, Mike Hardy, Nick Holbrook, Johnny Kirkham, Mike Lobb, Chris Long-Price, Ashley Loxton, Graham Smith, Miles Thomson, Ian Ventham, Norrie Wallace**, and also **Alan Howard** (MR & Honorary Gunner) and **Peter Leicester** (MR & guest of Will Cook).

It was an excellent occasion to welcome Brigadier Ahmed in his new role and also to congratulate him on his recent promotion. Loyal toasts were given to **HM The Queen, HM The Sultan Haitham bin Tarik** and in memory of **HM the late Qaboos bin Saïd**. As always the event was an energetic occasion to reconnect with each other having skipped the event last year due to the Covid lockdown. Sadly we missed **Brigadier Saoud Al Habsi**, who was unable to travel from Muscat, but we look forward to him with other regulars joining us again next year. ■

SCOTTISH DINNER 2021

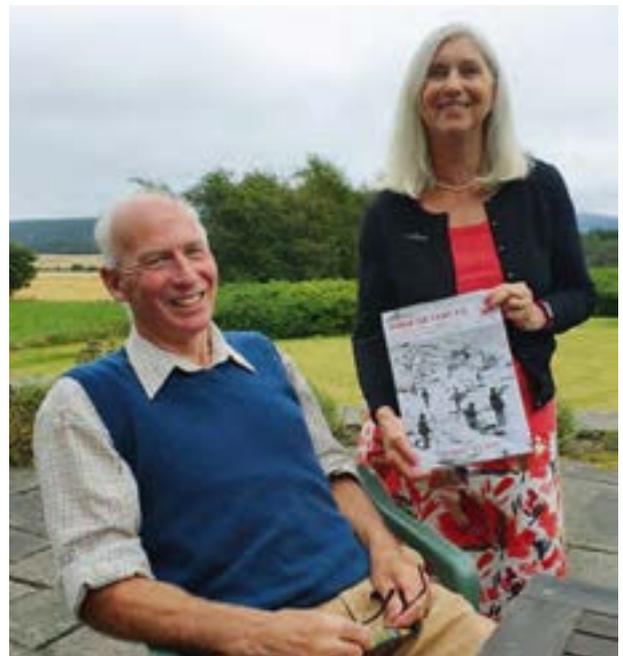


A follow up, part alfresco, lunch took place at Jonathan and Nicky Forbes' home the next day. All, excepting Sandy and Leslie Dawson, who sadly had found it necessary to return in the morning to the west coast, managed to 'continue the movement'. ■

Postponed from mid-May 2021 due to Covid restrictions, the Scottish dinner took place at Douneside House on Thursday 2 September 2021 – 19 Association members/spouses attended. As ever, Douneside provided excellent food and we were grateful for the assistance, provided to members, in respect of wine by the Association.

Those present were:

- Sandy & Diana Blackett**
- Nicol & Vi Cameron**
- Lynne Copping & Dave Stevenson**
- Sandy & Lesley Dawson**
- Jonathan & Nicky Forbes**
- Robin & Seonaid Hastie Smith**
- Neil & Margaret Lamb**
- Euan & Mollie Scroggie**
- Dave & Dawn Tennant**
- Fiona Warton**

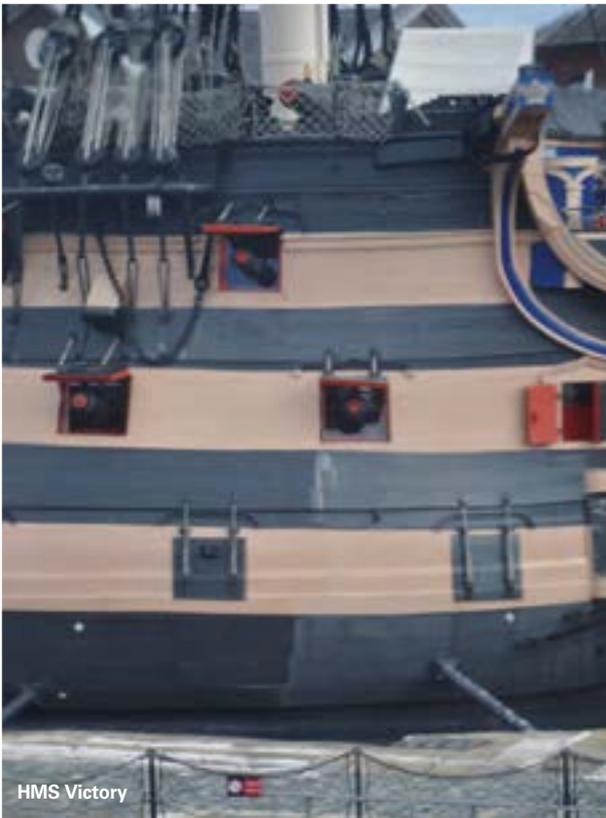


SON/RNO REUNION LUNCH

1 October 2021



Portsmouth Yacht Basin



HMS Victory

Third time lucky, we eventually got the second SON/RNO Reunion off the ground on Friday 1 October after two postponements due to COVID. It was a lunch in the Princess Royal Gallery in the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth and was well attended by 42 veterans.



Omani Flag and White Ensign in the Princess Royal Gallery.



Princess Royal Gallery in the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth.

SON/RNO REUNION LUNCH

Our Principal Guest was the new Assistant Military Attaché, **Captain Said al Shabibi**, who brought us up to date on matters in the Sultanate of Oman. The lunch was excellent and there was lots of chatting and laughter as the lamp was swung from one side to the other.



Captain Said Al Shabibi RNO and Admiral John Gunning RN

Those attending were **Captain Saed Al Shabibi, John and Jane Gunning, Robin and Kate Gainsford, Jolyon and Sue Hunt, Chris and Suzanne Spencer, David Bell, Peter and Anne Calliss, Stephen and Annie Bennett, Mike Ridley-Martin, Ron Broome, Alec and Pat Johnston, Gus Leighton, David Smale, Mike and Penny Lobb, Jane Hanley, David Bates, Nick Turner, Andy Potter, David and Irene Walker, Richard and Helen Osborn, Hugh Whitaker and Jenny Litton, Justin and Fiona Wilkes, Andrew Moll, Mike Butler, Brian and Margaret Tyekiff, John Davidson, Phil and Lynne Carol, Tom Hammon.**

The next event at this venue will in June 2023. Inshallah. ■



Robin Gainsford (with microphone)



Mike Ridley-Martin (centre)



SON/RNO REUNION LUNCH



BRITISH LOAN SERVICE

by Major General Felix Gedney, Senior British Loan Service Officer

I am now nearly a year into my time as Senior British Loan Service Officer. Although the first nine months were dominated by the challenge of COVID, there is a strong theme of change as well as continuity within the Sultan's Armed Forces. This need for urgent change, which must be tempered by continuity is also true in Oman more generally.

As I arrived in Muscat, a year after accession, **His Majesty Sultan Haitham** issued a Royal Decree appointing new officers into most of the senior posts within his Armed Forces. Many leaders, who had served Oman for several years within senior posts, were able to take well earned retirement. A new generation will now lead the military through the years ahead as the Sultan's Armed Forces adapts and transforms to deal with contemporary threats in an era of fiscal constraint. This will inevitably presage some significant, and I suspect at times uncomfortable, change.

Despite the irresistible need to adapt and transform, there is much that must not, and will not, change. Oman's strong national culture and identity, a unique and effective foreign policy, the

potential that lies within its people and, I hope, the strong alliances with close allies, will all endure. This continuity is a great strength that will see Oman prosper through changing times.

The closeness of the Defence relationship between Oman and the UK also remains unchanged. Indeed, the UK's recent Integrated Review will result in a greater focus on the UK's relationship with Oman, and an increase in bilateral exercises and UK training in Oman. The military links between our two Nations are as 'unshaken' as ever.

The Sultan's Armed Forces Association plays a critical role in this bilateral partnership. Experience, like trust and reputation, is built over time and easily lost. As well as providing an opportunity for friends and colleagues to gather and celebrate shared experiences, and our close bilateral links, the Association also represents an important network of expertise and understanding. In many ways, this is the 'corporate memory' of our bilateral defence relationship. As SBLSO, I hope that I will be able to encourage as many Omani and British officers currently serving in each other's Armed Forces to join in order to learn from this wealth of experience. ■

The closeness of the Defence relationship between Oman and the UK also remains unchanged. Indeed, the UK's recent Integrated Review will result in a greater focus on the UK's relationship with 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.*



On 4 March, **COSSAF** received in his office at MAM, **Ben Wallace**, UK Secretary of State for Defence and his accompanying delegation. The meeting was attended by **Brigadier Abdulaziz Abdullah al Manthri**, SAF Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning, the UK Ambassador to the Sultanate and the Defence Attaché at the UK Embassy in Muscat.

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE



On 4 March, an official session of talks between **His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimur Al Said**, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs and **Ben Wallace**, UK Secretary of State for Defence, was held at the Ministry of Defence in Al Murtafa'a Camp.

HH Sayyid Shihab welcomed the British guest and his accompanying delegation, wishing them a pleasant stay in the Sultanate. In turn, the guest expressed his thanks for the warm welcome and hospitality extended to him and his accompanying delegation. He also expressed the advanced, centuries-old relations between Oman and the United Kingdom, stressing the importance of upgrading these relations to serve the common interest of both countries.

The session explored areas of existing cooperation between the defence ministries in the two countries and means of enhancing them. The two sides also exchanged views on various other matters of common concern.

The session was attended by **Dr Mohammed Nasser Ali al Zaabi**, Secretary General at the Ministry of Defence, UK's Ambassador to the Sultanate and the Defence Attaché at the UK Embassy in Muscat.



On 9 September and on behalf of **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said**, **His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimur Al Said**, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Camp, **Hamish Cowell**, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the Sultanate, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty.

During the meeting, the UK Ambassador expressed his utmost thanks to His Majesty the Sultan for the support extended to him during his tour of duty in the Sultanate from His Majesty, the Government and the Omani people, which had enabled him to carry out his tasks. He wished His Majesty good health, happiness and a long life, and the Sultanate further progress and growth under the wise leadership of His Majesty.

In his turn, HH Sayyid Shihab expressed his utmost thanks and appreciation to the Ambassador for the efforts he exerted in serving the historical relations between the Sultanate and the UK, wishing him permanent success, and the friendly UK people further progress and welfare.



On 21 April, **His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimur Al Said**, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Camp, **William Murray**, Ambassador of the United Kingdom appointed to the Sultanate of Oman.



On 2 November, **Dr. Mohammed Nasser Ali al Zaabi**, Secretary General at the Ministry of Defence, received at his office in Al Murtafa'a Camp, **Air Marshal Martin Sampson**, Senior Advisor to the British Chief of Defence Staff for the Middle East and North Africa.



ROYAL ARMY OF OMAN



*On 11 December, The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) celebrated the graduation of a new intake of cadet officers, as well as the first intake of female cadet officers from the Sultan Qaboos Military College. The ceremony, held on the Parade Ground at Al Murtafa'a Garrison, was under the patronage of **Sheikh Al Fadhl Mohammed Al Harthy**, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers.*





His Majesty Visits 11th Infantry Brigade Command (RAO) at Umm Al-Ghawarif Camp

On 17 August, **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**, The Supreme Commander, visits the 11th Infantry Brigade Command (RAO) at Umm Al-Ghawarif Camp.

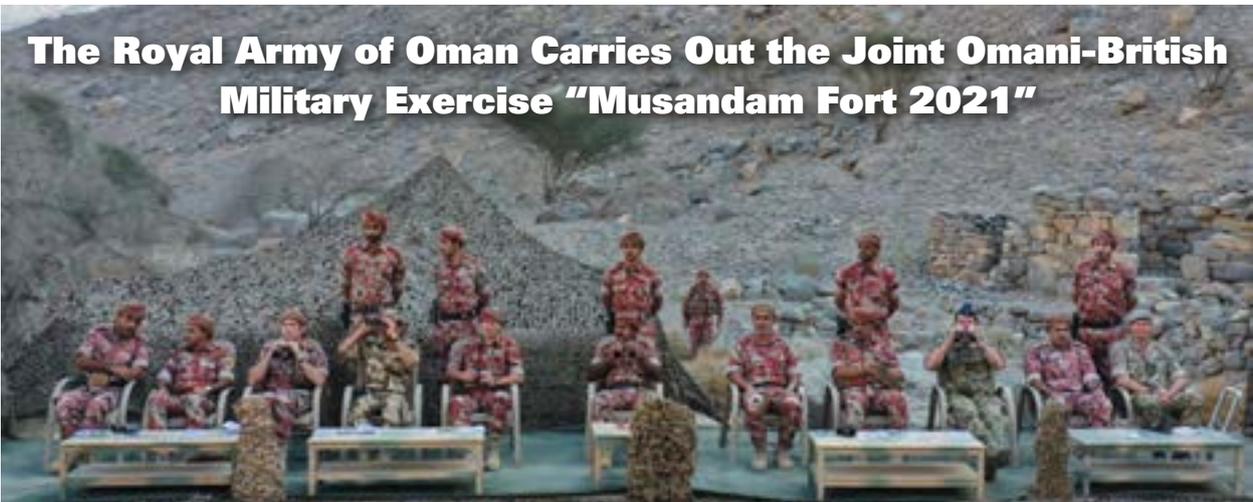




His Majesty, The Supreme Commander, visits 11th Infantry Brigade Command (RAO) at Umm Al-Ghawarif Camp.

At his arrival to the 11th Infantry Brigade Command, His Majesty was received by Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, **Major General Matar bin Salim Al Balushi**, Commander of RAO's 11th Infantry Brigade, a number of military and security commanders, and senior officers from RAO's 11th Infantry Brigade.

The Royal Army of Oman Carries Out the Joint Omani-British Military Exercise "Musandam Fort 2021"



From 8 November until 11 November, Oman-Britain military joint exercise, code-named "Musandam Fort 2021", was held between Musandam Security Force of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) and elements of the UK's Scots Guards, with backing from the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) and the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO).

The exercise, held in the military exercises area in Musandam Governorate, included a number of joint military drills and was

concluded with a practical demo under the patronage of **Major General Matar bin Salim Al Balushi**, RAO Commander.

The Omani-British military exercise comes in accordance with RAO Command's training programme to maintain the high level of training and combat competence of RAO personnel, and within the framework of exchanging expertise and military skills to achieve the desired training objectives.



Sultan Qaboos Military College Executes the Final Tactical Exercise "Shield 26"



On 22 September, Sultan Qaboos Military College of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) conducted the practical demonstration of the final tactical exercise (Shield 26) for the officer cadets' course.

The live ammunition demo was carried out as planned at the RAO range, with support from the Engineering Services division of the Ministry of Defence. The event was held under the auspices of **Major General Matar bin Salim Al Balushi**, RAO Commander.





ROYAL AIR FORCE OF OMAN



*On 8 December, the Royal Air Force of Oman celebrated the graduation of a new intake of pilots and air officers under the auspices of **HH Sayyid Asa'ad bin Tariq al Said**, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, and personal representative of **His Majesty the Sultan**, at Ghala Air Base and Sultan Qaboos Air Academy. The new intake includes air officers' course, officer candidates' course, and limited service course and college officers' course. The graduating officers staged a military parade as part of the graduation ceremony.*



His Majesty, The Supreme Commander, Visits Thumrait Airbase (RAFO)

On 30 August, **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**, The Supreme Commander, visited Thumrait Airbase (RAFO).

His Majesty the Sultan was received by **Major General Khamis bin Hammad Al Ghafri**, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman, commander of Thumrait Air Base, and commanders of wings and squadrons at the base.





His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik during his visit to the Royal Air Force's Thumrait Airbase.



The Royal Air Force of Oman Carries Out the Joint Omani-British Air Exercise "Magic Carpet 2021"

The Omani-Britain military exercise, code-named "Magic Carpet 2021", was held during the period 7-17 November, between the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) and the British Royal Air Force at the air training zone in the Governorate of Dhofar.

The joint military air exercise included the implementation of joint training air operations; with the aim of continuing to develop the capabilities of weapons, raising the combat effi-

ciency and operational readiness of arms personnel, technical cadres, devices and equipment, exchanging experiences and transferring military knowledge in the airspace between the two friendly countries.

The exercise included joint training duties in a number of air missions, according to the exercise plans developed for its sequence of events and course.



Royal Air Force College Cranwell (UK)

Air Lieutenant Hamid bin Muhammad Al Wahaibi of the Royal Air Force of Oman won the overseas prize at the Royal Air Force College Cranwell in the United Kingdom. **Air Lieutenant Asaad bin Omar Al Sawafi** also received the award for the best academic level, which award is given to the best results achieved in academic and professional studies among local and international students. It is noteworthy that the number of countries participating in the Royal Air Force College (Cranwell) is eight foreign countries, in addition to the UK. ■





ROYAL NAVY OF OMAN

*On November 3, The Royal Navy of Oman celebrated its annual day, while taking accelerated steps towards modernising, developing and arming equipment to enhance the defensive and combat capabilities of the Navy in line with modern technological changes under the wise leadership of **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**, the Supreme Commander.*



*On this occasion, the Royal Navy of Oman held a celebration on the military parade ground at Said bin Sultan Naval Base under the patronage of **His Excellency Abdulsalam bin Mohammed bin Adullah Al Murshidi**, Chairman of the Oman Investment Authority.*



ROYAL NAVY OF OMAN



The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) Celebrates Graduation of a New Intake of University Officers

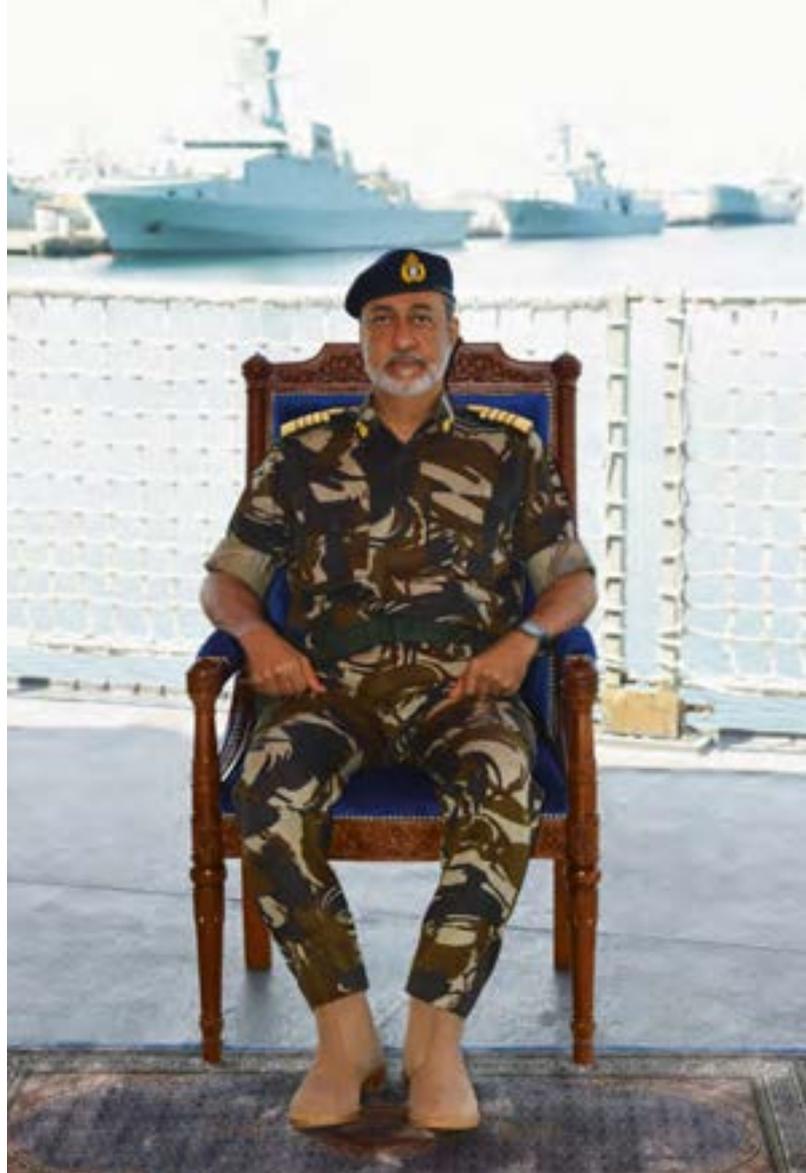
On 4 August, The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) celebrated the graduation of a new intake of University Officers under the auspices of **Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser bin Mohsen al Rahbi**, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman.



ROYAL NAVY OF OMAN

His Majesty, The Supreme Commander, Visits Said Bin Sultan Naval Base (RNO)

On 22 September, **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq**, The Supreme Commander, visited Said Bin Sultan Naval Base (RNO).



ROYAL NAVY OF OMAN

On his arrival at Said Bin Sultan Naval Base, His Majesty was received by **Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser bin Mohsen al Rahbi**, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman, Commander of Said Bin Sultan Naval Base and Senior RNO Officers.



The Royal Navy of Oman Concludes the Joint Omani-British Naval Exercise "White Shark"



On 2 November, The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) concluded the joint Omani-British naval drill "White Shark", which began in Al Batinah coastal zone on 29 October 2021 with the participation of vessels from the RNO and the Royal Navy of the UK.

The joint drill is an opportunity to exchange expertise and sustain the readiness of RNO fleet and personnel in line with the national duties assigned to them.

The Royal Navy of Oman Conducts “Sharp Dagger” Naval Drill

From 21-25 February, amid full adherence to precautionary and preventive measures against Covid-19, the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) conducted the annual naval drill “Sharp Dagger” at Al Batinah Naval site with participation of friendly countries’ Navies and assistance of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) jets.

On 24 February, **Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser bin Mohsen al Rahbi**, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), inspected the exercise and viewed the drill’s activities and was briefed about the processes and the participating ships and the roles they are executing as part of the exercise’s plan to achieve the set objectives.

The drill comes within the framework of the RNO’s annual training plans, besides exchanging experiences with friendly countries to sustain the readiness levels of the RNO fleet and personnel on various marine disciplines in line with their national tasks. ■



Views of the “Sharp Dagger” Naval drill observed by Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser bin Mohsen al Rahbi.



THE SULTAN'S SPECIAL FORCE



*On 15 March, The Sultan's Special Force (SSF) celebrated its annual day under the auspices of **General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani**, Minister of the Royal Office.*



During the ceremony, **General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani** presented medals of excellent service and royal commendation on a number of SSF officers and personnel. The ceremony was attended by SSF Commander and a number of senior SSF officers.



His Majesty, The Supreme Commander, Visits Sultan's Special Force

On 20 October, **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**, The Supreme Commander, visited the Al Samoud camp (SSF).



Upon his arrival at the camp headquarter, His Majesty was welcomed by **Major General Musalam bin Mohammed bin Taman Jaaboub**, Commander of the Sultan's Special Force and the senior officers. ■



SULTAN'S SPECIAL FORCE



ROYAL GUARD



On 1 November, The Royal Guard of Oman (RGO) celebrated its Annual Day. The event was held under the patronage of **Major General Salim bin Ali bin Al Hosni**, RGO Commander. The ceremony, which was held at the Parade Field of the RGO Command, included a number of various paragraphs that embody the development and modernisation reached by the Royal Guard of Oman under the wise leadership of **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**, the Supreme Commander.



ROYAL OFFICE

On 4 March, **General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani**, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office, **Ben Wallace**, UK Secretary of State for Defence and his accompanying delegation.

During the meeting, General al Numani laid emphasis on the advanced, centuries-old friendly relations between the Sultanate and the United Kingdom. He also underscored the constant progress made in these relations under the leaderships of the two countries.

In his turn, the British guest expressed his appreciation for the Sultanate's positive role in regional and international arenas, as well as its contributions to cementing ties of friendship and understanding. The two sides touched on several matters of common concern. The meeting was attended by the British Ambassador to the Sultanate.



On 5 September, **General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani**, Minister of the Royal Office, received at his office, **Hamish Cowell**, the UK Ambassador to the Sultanate to bid him farewell on the conclusion of his tour of duty as his country's ambassador to the Sultanate.

The Ambassador expressed his appreciation for the cooperation he received from all officials in the Sultanate and praised the historic bilateral relations between the two countries. General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani thanked the Ambassador for his efforts in serving the relations between the Sultanate and the United Kingdom, wishing him permanent success.

SAF MUSEUM

Sultan's Armed Forces Museum displays the vehicle which carried the late Sultan Qaboos's body

On 9 January, The Sultan's Armed Forces Museum was honoured to displaying the Land Rover and the gun carriage that carried the body of late **His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said**, May Allah Almighty rest his soul in peace. The SAF Museum also obtained an original copy of the letter written by His Majesty and addressed to the Royal Family Council through the Defence Council, which contained the name of his successor. The SAF Museum also now displays the Saidi aumama (turban) and Khanjar (dagger) at the Sultan Qaboos Hall at the premises of SAF Museum in Bait Al Falaj Fort.



NATIONAL DEFENCE COLLEGE

National Defence College Graduates 8th National Defence Course



On 28 July, The National Defence College (NDC) held a graduation ceremony for the 8th National Defence Course under the auspices of **Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi**, Foreign Minister. Senior officers from the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO), the Royal Oman Police (ROP), military and security departments, as well as senior officials from the ministries, government civil authorities and institutions took part in the course. The course was organised amid full adherence to precautionary and preventive measures against Covid-19.



COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

Command and Staff College celebrates the graduation of the 34th Command and Staff Course



On 12 July, the Command and Staff College (CSC) of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) celebrated the graduation of the 34th intake under the patronage **Lt Gen. Sayyid Munthir bin Majid al Said**, Head of Liaison and Coordination at the Royal Office. The event was organised amid full adherence to precautionary and preventive measures against Covid-19.



“KHANJAR OMAN” EXERCISE

*On 4 November, **His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimur Al Said**, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs and **Ben Wallace**, Secretary of State for Defence of the United Kingdom, attended the practical demonstration for the concluding event of the joint Omani-British exercise “Khanjar Oman”.*



The exercise was carried out by the Royal Army of Oman represented by the Oman Reconnaissance Battalion, Infantry Brigade (11th) with the participation of units from the 4th Infantry Brigade of the British Army.

His Highness, the sponsor of the occasion, His Excellency the Minister of Defence of the United Kingdom, and the commanders participating in the demonstration area in the military training fields in Ras Madraka, Al Wusta Governorate, were briefed on the progress of the joint exercise activities and its various stages. The exercise plan included a set of operational procedures, according to the

latest methods of military planning and training, in order to achieve the training objectives envisaged by the exercise activities.

The participating forces implemented the plans drawn for the practical statement, during which the participants from both sides demonstrated a high level of performance and morale. The course of the exercise reflected the efficiency and capabilities of the Royal Army of Oman’s personnel indicative of the level of training and



high qualification, and the ability to integrate in the implementation of joint operational tasks.

The exercise comes within the framework of the training plan pursued by RAO Command to maintain the high level of performance and training and combat efficiency of its personnel, and within the annual training programmes that are implemented with brotherly and friendly countries.

“KHANJAR OMAN” EXERCISE



The practical demonstration was attended by **Vice-Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis Al Raisi**, Chief of Staff of the Sultanate's Armed Forces, **Major General Matar bin Salim Al Balushi**, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman and a number of senior officers from the Royal Army of Oman and the British Army.

At the beginning of the meeting, HH Sayyid Shihab welcomed the British guest and his accompanying delegation, wishing them a pleasant visit to the Sultanate. In his turn, the guest expressed his happiness for visiting the Sultanate. The session explored the advanced, centuries-old relations between Oman and the United Kingdom and areas of existing cooperation between the defence ministries in the two countries, and means of enhancing them. The two sides also exchanged views on various other matters of common concern.





HH Sayyid Shihab, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, paid a visit as an honoured guest to Aircraft Carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth docked at Duqm port.



The meeting was attended by **H.E. Dr Ali bin Masoud bin Ali Al Sunaidy**, Chairman of the General Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, Vice-Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis Al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultanate's Armed Forces, UK's Ambassador to the Sultanate and his accompanying delegation.

Thereafter, HH Sayyid Shihab, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, paid a visit as an honoured guest to Aircraft Carrier *HMS Queen Elizabeth* docked at Duqm port in Oman. His Highness was taken on a tour of *HMS Queen Elizabeth* and observed its modern military systems and was briefed on its operational tasks and duties. ■

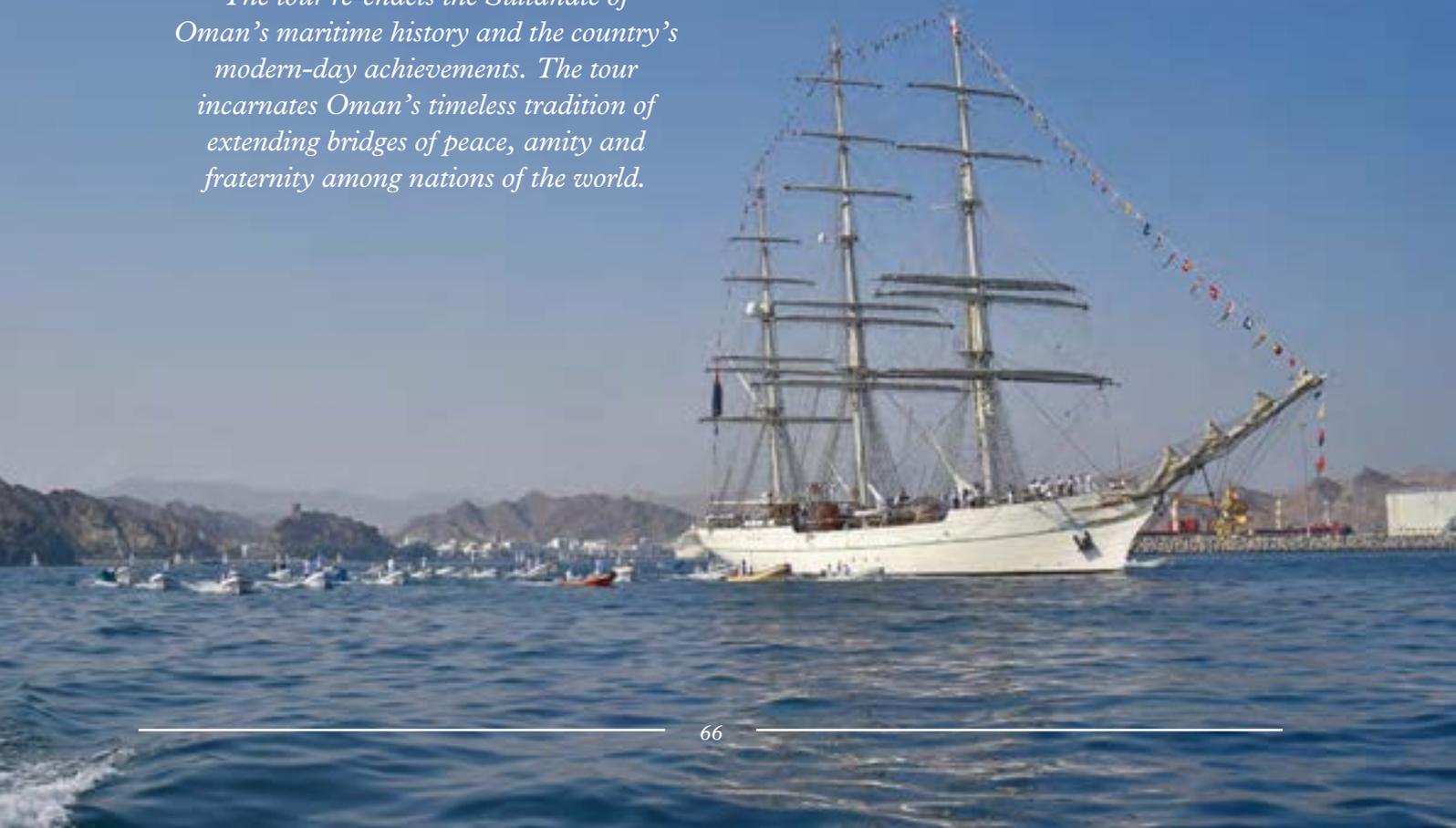


SHABAB OMAN II

Sail ship of the Royal Navy of Oman set out on a Maritime GCC tour themed “Oman, A Renewed Approach”.



The tour re-enacts the Sultanate of Oman’s maritime history and the country’s modern-day achievements. The tour incarnates Oman’s timeless tradition of extending bridges of peace, amity and fraternity among nations of the world.



The 28-day tour includes an academic programme for participants from different countries of the world and a stationary exhibition to be held onboard. The exhibition has embodied a pioneering Omani maritime and naval history, as well as military bands.

On this occasion, an official farewell ceremony for the ship was held under the patronage of **His Highness Sayyid Dhi Yazan bin Haitham bin Tariq al Said**, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, and in the presence of **His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimur Al Said**, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, and a number of Their Highnesses and Excellencies, Commanders of the Forces of The Sultan's Armed Forces and other military and security agencies.





The Royal Navy of Oman Vessel Shabab Oman II on its Fifth International Voyage Themed, "Oman, A Renewed Approach 2021"



His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tariq Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Special Representative of **His Majesty the Sultan**, this evening, patronised the official celebration of receiving the second ship Shabab Oman at the Dubai Marina port, participating in Expo 2020 Dubai.

The reception was organised by the General Commission of the Sultanate of Oman in the exhibition, in the presence of **His Highness Sheikh Maktoum bin Mohammed Al Maktoum**,

Deputy Ruler of Dubai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Head of the Ruler's Court of Dubai. The ceremony was also attended by a number of ministers and officials from the Sultanate of Oman and the UAE, Sister United Arab Emirates and a number of invited guests.

The ship docked at Dubai Marina Port in the Emirate of Dubai, after visiting Gulf ports in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries as part of its fifth international voyage (Oman, a Renewed Approach). ■



BOOK REVIEWS

BEYOND THE BLUE MOUNTAIN A MEMOIR

BY ALEC McDONALD

ISBN number. 978-1-80046-209-0

Published in hardback. Amazon £14.99. Paperback edition £12.99.

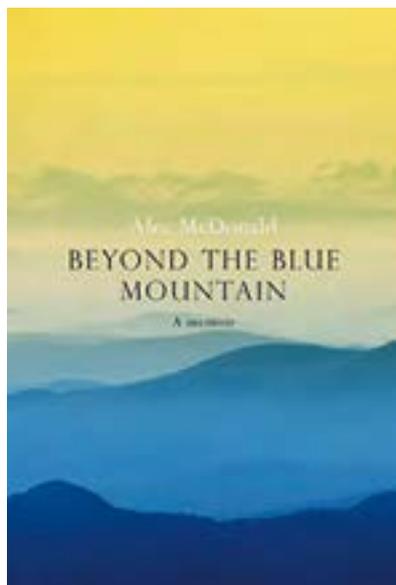
Available online and all good bookshops.

207 pages, 8 pages black and white photographs, 8 pages colour photographs. One fold out map.

**By Matador, 9 Priory Business Park, Wistow Road,
Kibworth Beauchamp, Leicestershire LE8 0RX**

E-mail: books@troubador.co.uk

Website: www.troubador.co.uk/matador



From 1985 to 1993

Alec McDonald

was the last British Director General of the Oman Intelligence and Security Service (known to earlier members as the Oman Research Department [ORD] or Intelligence and Security Department [ISD]).

The question any reviewer asks when given a book by a career intelligence officer is, 'Has it

been through Disclosures?' The author answers that himself in the Foreword. It hasn't, on the grounds that it would be refused publication on principle. That said there are no great revelations into the world of spies. There are no names, other than those who have died or are already in the public domain but as the author says, 'If you were there you can work out who is who.' He has probably been stricter on himself than Disclosures would have been.

The author has covered every aspect of his life; from his birth in Liverpool in 1930 to the completion of this book 2021. Everything has been packed into the eventful years in between. It is perhaps a little unfortunate for us that of the 179 pages only 14 are devoted to his time in Oman. Time during which his primary task was the Omanisation of the Service.

That is not to say that the other 165 pages are a disappointment. They certainly are not. They cover his time as a child evacuee in World War II to his time at university, the first in his family to achieve that academic status.

Chapters are devoted to a succession of expeditions, Switzerland, Iceland and Spitzbergen (three times). From there the

reader is taken to the author's first employment with Rothschilds, his recruitment into the Service and his first posting, to Greece; thence Venezuela followed by Beirut, Benghazi and Tripoli. Following secondment to the Northern Ireland Office he became Head of Training to be followed by Controller Africa. Once the suggestion had been made that he should apply for the position of DG ISD, a swift study of a map which showed a plentiful supply of mountains was all that was needed to convince the author that was the way ahead.

It is easy reading and there is a sprinkling of humorous anecdotes throughout. The author's passion for climbing gets a mention in almost every chapter. There is no doubt that the author's time in Oman was the icing on the cake but he is grateful for all the opportunities he has been given in life. As the final sentence in the book reads...

'Who should have such fortune!'

MCL

FROM LIGHTNINGS TO MIGS

BY SQUADRON LEADER
RUSS PEART AFC, WKHM

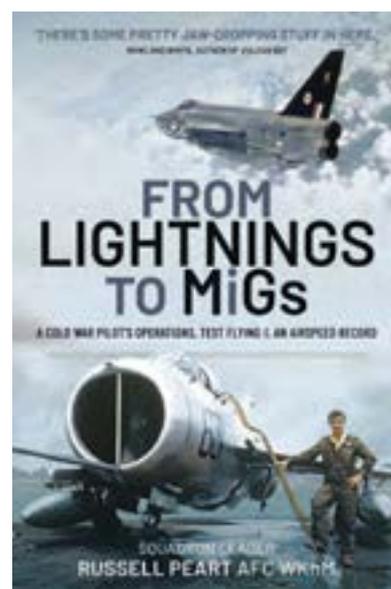
ISBN number. 978-1-39900-747-4

Published in hardback by Air World, 2021.

Available online and all good bookshops.

Available in Kindle version from Amazon

Russ Peart was a career fighter and test pilot in the RAF who went on to airline flying. He served in the Oman Air Force (SOAF) twice, first from 1972-74 on loan service flying Strikemasters and Beavers mainly in Dhofar at the height of the conflict. Then, ten years later, he returned on contract flying Jaguars from Thumrait – two bites of the cherry!



His autobiography will obviously appeal to aviators but his delivery of very close support of ground operations broadens its appeal to members hugely. Russ came to Oman after his first tour in Singapore where he flew the supersonic Lightning. He learned about SOAF from his Wing Commander, **Erik Bennett**, who later became CSOAF (CRAFO), and immediately volunteered.

Unlike most of his colleagues on the squadron, he had no previous experience of the ground attack role but quickly adapted and earned their respect. He also took every opportunity to go out on the ground with the army and see (and feel) what was required of effective air support. His unemotional descriptions of supporting troops in contact are well complimented by photographs and especially cartoons by **Jack Sullivan** who had a happy knack of “capturing the moment”. I can vouch for the fact that it was always comforting to know that Russ was “on the job”!

Russ was wounded on the ground by RCL Shrapnel when RAF Salalah was attacked on 8 June in 1972 but soon returned to continue his tour with his enthusiasm undiminished. He was asked to extend his tour and completed two very active years at the end of which he was awarded the Sultan’s Distinguished Service Medal.

Before returning to the RAF, on learning that a purchase of French Mirage jets was being considered for SOAF, Russ wrote a hasty handwritten note for CSOAF proposing instead that future

development should harmonise a next generation ground attack aircraft (with air defence capability) and short range air defence missile systems. It was clearly very gratifying for Russ to return to Oman ten years later to find his proposals had been implemented and to fly the Jaguar aircraft for a further satisfying tour.

Meanwhile, he flew the Jaguar in UK, broke a record – which still stands, became a test pilot, was awarded a Queen’s Commendation and an Air Force Cross, and found time to fly Russian Migs whilst on loan to the Bangladesh Air Force!

His second tour in Oman was clearly very different to the first but personal relationships and great camaraderie still prevailed as SOAF developed into a more potent, modern and much envied Air Force. Russ goes on to describe his later successful career in civil aviation but members will recognise where his heart lies.

A great read which fills an important gap in the history of SOAF (RAFO) and SAF.

Tim Jones

DHOFAR VOICES MEETING AT HAC

DHOFAR VOICES: FRONTIER FORCE, OMAN. ITS LIFE AND TIMES 1970-1980 (2020)

BY STEWART WILSON

Stewart Wilson’s book, *Dhofar Voices* was reviewed in last year’s Journal. Several of those who figured in the book met at the HAC on 21 July, 2021.

Any one interested in obtaining a copy of the book should contact the author, Stewart Wilson, at: dhofarvoices@gmail.com or on the website: <https://dhofarvoices.com/>



L-R: Ian Gordon, Mike Lobb, Jonathan Salusbury-Trelawny, Clive Ward, Mike Smith, Helen Ward and Stewart Wilson

REMEMBERING

**Air Marshal Sir Erik Bennett WO, KBE, CB, CVO
Special Adviser to HM Sultan Qaboos, Former Commander SOAF (RAFO)**

3 September 1928 – 28 January 2022

Erik Bennett was born in 1928, the fourth child of a farmer in Donaghmore, County Laois, Ireland. He was educated at King's Hospital School in Dublin but left early to study accountancy and gain a pilot's licence. Flying won and he joined the RAF as a pilot in 1948 serving in Egypt and Iraq before loan service with the Royal Jordanian Air Force. Here he earned the lasting gratitude of King Hussain whilst flying him in a small, unarmed twin-engined, propellor driven, transport aircraft when they were attacked by Syrian Migs over the Beqaa Valley. Bennett performed a high-risk barrel roll and dived to escape at low level!

As a Wing Commander, he commanded a UK Air Defence radar unit then moved to Singapore as OC Operations at the busy, multi-role station, RAF Tengah. He came to Oman towards the end of the Dhofar war to command the Oman Air Force which had played a key role in support of ground operations during that conflict. Bennett was a great believer in the flexibility of air power and set about modernising the Air Force in the post Dhofar era as an independent service – The Royal Air Force of Oman, equipped and trained to meet the needs of modern Oman.

Meanwhile, Bennett was also a keen supporter of modernising education in Oman and the local activities of the Royal Geographical Society. He was involved in supporting the 1985 survey of the Wahiba (Sharqiya) Sands in the East of Oman and established the Wilfred Thesiger Award in recognition of the explorer who lived with the bedouin for five years.

He officially retired in 1992 but remained in Oman as one of HM's closest advisers and was regularly involved in Ministerial and other senior visits and events. Erik Bennett died in Oman on 28th January, 2022, aged 93, following a heart attack. He was buried in Ireland.

TPFJ



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Defence
Chief of Staff
Sultan's Armed Forces



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
رئيسة مجلس الوزراء
وزيرة الدفاع
رئيسة الأركان
قيادة السلطان المسلحة

No. MOD/ CS/ PO/ 200/ 2022

06 February, 2022

Dear Sir Erik Peter Bennett family

It is with deep sadness and great grief that we have received the news of the passing of Sir Erik Peter Bennett. I offer you my sincere condolences on the passing of this exceptional military man. Sir Bennett will always be remembered in Sultanate of Oman, with gratitude toward his distinguished and exceptional service, where he served as Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman during the period from 1974 to 1991 at the rank of Air Marshal. He was also a trusted advisor to our late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, may his soul rest in peace. Please accept my sincerest sympathy, and may you be strengthened to bear such an irreparable loss.

Yours Sincerely

Vice Admiral

Abdullah Bin Khamis Bin Abdullah Al Raisi
The Chief of Staff of Sultan's Armed Forces

Captain Lilian Malcolm QARANC and FMS

Lilian Malcolm (nee Slack) died peacefully at the Borders General Hospital, Melrose, Scotland on the morning of Monday 19 October 2020, age 71. Lilian had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 2016 and at the time of her death the disease had reached an advanced stage that necessitated her hospitalisation.

Born in West Cornforth, County Durham in 1949 Lily, a name she hated, Slack trained at Bishop Auckland General Hospital and was admitted to the General Nursing Council as a State Registered Nurse in 1970. The following year she was commissioned in the British Army and served in various UK posts and in Germany. It was whilst she was at Catterick Military Garrison in 1973 that she would meet her future husband, **Allan**, who was serving with the RAF Regiment at nearby RAF Catterick. They married in December 1974 and had one daughter, **Samantha**, who was born in 1977.

In August 1986 Lilian followed Allan to The Sultanate where he was working in HQ SOLF and she served with FMS until December 1999 in both AFH and MAM Hospitals. Her last role was as Allocations Officer, an administrative role, in AFH. On returning to the UK Lilian worked for a short time at The London Clinic in Harley Street before taking up a role in a GP surgery in Surrey where she worked until her final retirement in 2015. Lilian is survived by Allan and by Sam who is based in Bali, Indonesia.

AM

Major General JJJ Phipps CB**30 June 1942 – 16 March 2021**

Jeremy Julian Joseph Phipps was born 30 June 1942 the son of a Royal Navy Officer **Alan Phipps** who was killed ashore at the Battle of Leros in 1943. Jeremy's mother **Veronica** remarried in 1946 to **Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean** and Jeremy was educated at Ampleforth before going to RMAS Sandhurst. Commissioned into the Queen's Own Hussars in 1960, he subsequently served in B Squadron, 22SAS and took part in the Iranian Embassy Siege in 1980. He returned to command his regiment and was subsequently promoted to command 11 Armoured Brigade. He was Director SAS from 1989-92 and took over as Senior British Loan Service Officer in 1993-96 when he retired from the Army to become a Director of Control Risks. He then became the Head of Security at the Jockey Club where he was the victim of a scam by the tabloid press, and he then worked for Aegis Defence Services.

Jeremy was part of the Association visit to Oman in 2005 and



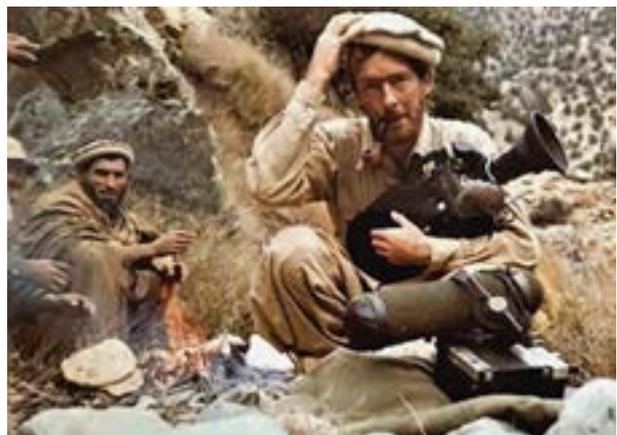
also with the SAS in 2013. He also attended a number of the social functions. Jeremy died on 16 March 2021 in UK. The photograph showing Jeremy meeting Commander SOA, **Brigadier Zahran bin Abdullah Al Hinai** in Oman in 2005.

Nick Downie, Firqat Forces 1972-4**27 May 1946 – 12 May 2021**

Nick Downie, who has died of Covid-19 in South Africa aged 74, was a former SAS soldier widely regarded as one of the world's best combat cameramen.

Downie had been a professional soldier for six years, three-and-a-half of them in the SAS, and also fought with Arab irregulars (Firqat) in the Sultanate of Oman against Marxist-led insurgents from 1972 to 1974, and with Kurdish Peshmerga guerrillas in Iraqi Kurdistan during the Second Iraqi-Kurdish War (1974-75).

Nicolas Jon Downie was born on 27 May, 1946 and educated at Haileybury and Imperial Service College. His father was a doctor and it seemed that Nick would follow him into the medical profession. He trained at Middlesex Hospital medical school, but found hospital life boring. Instead, he developed a keen interest in revolutionary guerrilla warfare, and joined 21 SAS Territorials. Dropping out of medical school in his final year, he applied to join the grueling selection course for 22 SAS. Although he was the only civilian among 120 candidates, he was one of only seven who passed.



From 1971 the SAS were involved in suppressing the Dhofar Rebellion, a clandestine war in Oman against communist-backed insurgents from South Yemen. Downie was sent to Oman as a trooper, but after a while decided to buy himself out to join the Sultan of Oman's Yemeni exile Bedouin irregulars as a contract officer.

He was put in charge of a unit with orders to penetrate deep into South Yemen to carry out acts of sabotage and foment insurrection among the tribes. On one raid from their base on the edge of the Empty Quarter they captured a large fort, 80 miles across the border. After the garrison surrendered, Downie decided to blow it up 'as a demonstration that we had arrived'. His calculations showed the need for 300lb of gelignite, so he laid 1,000lb. The fort, he recalled, 'literally vanished'.

However, disillusioned by what he saw as obstructionism by the British officer corps, Downie returned to London in 1974, though he felt vindicated when his irregulars mutinied with the aim of having him brought back as their leader. Downie then went to film Peshmerga guerrillas, launching his career as a freelance cameraman.

His first serious attempt at filming behind the lines was in 1975 when he and the reporter **Gwynne Roberts** walked from the Sudanese border to Asmara to cover the Eritrean War. Their 30-minute documentary was shown on Thames Television.

Downie won other RTS awards for programmes about the guerrilla war between the Polisario Front and the Kingdom of Morocco over control of the Western Sahara and about the Bush War in Rhodesia, where he spent six months on the front line in 1978, to produce a TV Eye documentary. Tragically, **Lord Richard Cecil**, the freelance journalist who accompanied him on this expedition, lost his life when he encountered one of **Robert Mugabe's** Zanla fighters who shot and killed him at close range. Downie finally 'retired' from war zones in 1991, at age 45, apart from a very brief skirmish in Iraq in 2003 (when he was an embedded cameraman for the US military).

Nick Downie married **Hilary Payne** in 1977. The marriage was dissolved in 1992 and he is survived by their two daughters.

Excerpt from Daily Telegraph 20 May 2021

Colonel David Houlton MBE

It is with deep sadness that we have learned of the death of **David Houlton** in Lymington on Wednesday 2 June. David, a Royal Fusilier, served as Brigade Major in Dhofar Brigade in the closing stages of the Dhofar War in 1975-77. He was immensely loyal to the brigade and a steady support to **Brigadier John Akehurst**, at a time of considerable pressures.

Alan Abbott, who served alongside him writes:

My period on the staff of HQ DHOFAR Brigade coincided almost exactly with that of David Houlton. During the final offensive operations against the *adoo* in Autumn 1975, David was always a calm and dedicated Brigade Major. He was an 'old school' officer who believed in carrying out his duties in a very serious, responsible and methodical way. He never cut corners. He was the consummate gentleman, always being kind, courteous and highly principled. He believed in facilitating the work of the combat units as smoothly as possible and was totally committed to their well-being in peace and their success in war. He was immensely loyal to the brigade, and



personally to the Akehursts with whom he had a very good relationship. Above all, he was conscious that we were living in formative times and doing important work, and so he was determined that everyone should rise to the occasion. This led to an abiding commitment to Oman, which later manifested itself in a deep affection for the work of the SAF Association. He will be greatly missed by us all.

Colonel the Honourable Alastair James Calthrop Campbell

6 January 1952 – 24 August 2021



Alastair was an infantry officer (Queen's Own Highlanders) for 34 years with operational tours in Northern Ireland, Bosnia and the Gulf. It was while he was with the QOH that General Ali Rashid Al Kilbani arrived for his command attachment. Alastair had studied Arabic at Oxford so the two hit it off immediately. Alastair's Loan Service in Oman was from 1978-80 where he served as 2IC Jebel

REMEMBERING...

Regiment to Lt Col (subsequently General) Khamis Al Kilbani. His staff appointments comprised planning for the future size and shape of the army in the MOD in the mid-1980s; and in NATO HQ in Brussels in the early 1990s where he ran the Yugoslavia desk for the UK Delegation. As an Arabic and French speaker he spent the last phase of his military career in diplomacy as Defence Attaché in Qatar, Kuwait, Cairo and Baghdad.



On leaving the Army he joined UNHCR as Senior Security Adviser based in Amman. He was subsequently appointed Director of the British 'Think Tank', RUSI, in Qatar where he was a frequent commentator on Al Jazeera and the BBC covering Middle East events. He returned to Iraq in 2009 where he directed security for a US reconstruction project followed by a year in Basra as liaison officer with the Oil and Gas Sector.

Alastair worked for the Aga Khan Foundation concentrating on security and development in Pakistan and East Africa between 2011 and 2013. In 2014 he became Director North Africa for Salamanca Group with the main emphasis on Libya. From there he joined the FCO Stabilisation Unit and continued to work on Libyan issues such as reintegration of the militias and advice to the MOD and MOI. Most recently he has been advising UK's Joint Force HQ on joint planning and deployments and has just completed an appointment with NATO in Baghdad as a senior adviser to MOD.

He was educated at Eton, Oxford and Sandhurst and while at Staff College in Leavenworth USA he wrote a thesis on Islamic Fundamentalism. He has been a regular contributor to International Strategic and Defence Institutes both as a speaker and writer on the Middle East.



Mike Chandler writes:

I had the pleasure of serving alongside Alastair Campbell as the other senior (SSR) adviser with the NATO Mission to Iraq – we were part of the UK's Contribution (under PJHQ) to NMI – from Feb 2019 until Mar 2020. Although we had never served together or previously been in the same theatre at the same time, we had served in many of the same places. This gave us much to talk and laugh about during our time together, based in the British Embassy Baghdad (BEB)... not least of which was our time with SAF. Due to

security reasons, we had been temporarily relocated to NATO HQ in Brussels in Jan 2020 and in the end spent the rest of time there... where we were able to continue to enjoy one another's company both at work and afterwards.

Alastair and I kept in regular touch since finishing with NMI and it was he who rang to tell me of his illness. Before that we had been looking forward to a little reunion, once the Covid measures would allow and hopefully meeting at the November SAF Dinner... sadly our next reunion will have to wait a while. Alastair was a delightful person with a wicked but charming sense of humour and highly respected and liked by all our colleagues in NMI, the BEB and Stabilisation Unit. We all miss him very much.

Major Stephen Charles Cary

27 July 1944 – 16 September 2021



Steve sadly died on 16 September 2021 following a heart attack. He was born in the UK on 26 July 1944, and went to Southern Rhodesia with his family after the War. He was educated there and completed his compulsory National Service in the Royal Rhodesia Regiment. He returned to the UK in the early 1960s and completed a Short Service Commission with 3 Para.

Steve returned to Rhodesia in 1969 and joined the Rhodesian Light Infantry (RLI), and served as a Troop Commander in 2 Commando, then 2IC Support Group and finally as RSO. He was then sent to South Africa for artillery training. He returned to Rhodesia, initially as Adjutant and then Training Officer of the Rhodesian Artillery (RhA). His final posting before leaving the Army in 1979 was as OC 5(Independent) Company RR.

After a short spell in civilian life, he moved his family to South Africa, before joining SAF in early 1983. He initially served as OC Support Company KJ, then as a Chief Instructor at Aydim Training Centre, before going north as CI SAFTR. His final post in SAF was back at Aydim as CI Support Weapons Wing. He left SAF in 1987, but returned to Oman in 1988 and joined SSF, initially as Training Officer and latterly as 2IC 1SSF before leaving in 1998. During his time in SSF he was awarded The Sultan's Commendation Medal.

Steve returned to South Africa and established a successful Roofing Business in Cape Town. He retired in 2016 and returned to UK. He was well respected by all that served with him. He is survived by his wife **Erina** and his two sons **Adam** and **Paul**.

IB

Lt Col Alan John Abbott, MBE



Alan was born in Herne Bay, Kent in 1948 and attended Kings School, Canterbury where he discovered an interest in languages. This developed into a passion for Arabic which was to last all of his life. He studied at the School of Oriental and African Studies gaining an Honours Degree before attending a summer Arabic course in 1968 at MECAS in Shemlan (Beirut) which he found inspirational. He returned there on a Foreign Office Scholarship in 1970-71.

Having spent several years in the Intelligence Section of the London University OTC, Alan then joined the Intelligence Corps becoming a platoon commander in 1 STAFFS based in Bahrain and then Sharjah, participating in deployments in the Trucial States. He also spent a month with SAF at Sayq, Jebel Akhdar, during which time he learned about the escalating conflict in Dhofar and resolved to serve there. However, this was delayed due to the pressures of Northern Ireland. Eventually, in 1974, he was seconded to SAF as Intelligence Staff officer for Dhofar Brigade.

Tony Nicholson writes: Alan was dropped into the very tough role of trying to make sense of an intelligence jigsaw where there were always lots of pieces missing but having to come up with advice

that was vital to the planning and conduct of operations. The stakes couldn't have been much higher! He didn't grandstand but was always approachable and certainly respected. I suspect it was also a bit lonely at times – knowing things that the rest of us didn't yet!"

Alan was awarded an MBE for his work in Oman and returned to postings with GCHQ and Cyprus before attending Staff College followed by tours in UK and Germany. His last tour was as a Lt Col, DS at Staff College. As a civilian, Alan obtained an MSc and an MBA, becoming an IT Project Manager in the NHS.

Alan met his second wife, **Jill**, while serving in Germany and they lived in Buckinghamshire for 30 years. He was diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis in 2018 and died peacefully in the John Radcliffe Hospital on 10 October 2021 with Jill at his side.

TPFJ

Andy Dunsire

Andy Dunsire was a long term employee of Airwork Services in Salalah who maintained a wide portfolio of interests outside his day job. Andy died on 30 September 2021.

He is principally remembered for his photography, about which more to follow, but had a broad interest in a number of scientific disciplines. He spent a great deal of time, for instance, exploring the sink hole and flooded caves at Tawi Atair and in the early '80s a new species of fish, *Garra Dunsirei*, discovered in the caves was named after him.

Alan Abbott, who has also recently passed away (see separate report) commented:

Andy Dunsire was one of the Airwork Ltd (Bournemouth) support staff based at Salalah whose official role involved the servicing of SOAF aircraft. However, he also eventually acquired another unofficial role which greatly helped the war effort. This began because Andy was a very low key, self-effacing yet amiable character who was quite happy paddling his own canoe through life, seemingly without any great ambitions or goals. His great passion was photography, and he came to everyone's notice as being very good at it, especially when his photos were taken in-flight from SOAF aircraft.

As Brigade Intelligence Officer I was always on the lookout for any way of acquiring more information about what the *adoo* were doing just across the border in PDRY. So, I sought Andy out and asked if he would be willing to turn his camera towards the PDRY the next time that he was doing a job for SAF anywhere in the vicinity.

At that point we had an interesting discussion. I was at pains to reassure him that no retasking of aircraft would be involved, and that HMG's rules about not overflying the border area would always be strictly adhered to. Andy, on the other hand, was more concerned with trying to assess how much this extra work might disrupt his planned next artistic portfolio.

However, being the affable chap that he was, he agreed to 'give it a go'. There then followed an intermittent, but very helpful, stream of aerial photos. These culminated in some superb photos of the huge 130mm artillery pieces used by the PDRY for the cross-border shelling of Sarfait.

In his shy and modest way, Andy would be amused to think that he might have made a small, but noteworthy, contribution to winning the war. But he did, and it deserves to be remembered.

TPFJ

Colonel John R Wooddiss



John Wooddiss was commissioned into the Sherwood Foresters on National Service and served with the 1st Bn in Derna, Libya. On converting to a regular commission he joined The Royal Lincolnshire Regiment with whom he served towards the end of the Malay Emergency and then, following amalgamation, in the Royal Anglian Regiment. It was as a Royal Anglian that he came to Oman with SAF between 1964-5 and served as a company commander in the Northern Frontier Regiment which at the time had a number of Royal Anglian officers including the CO, **Lt Col Dougie Dalgleish**.

Most of John's time in Oman was spent on or near the Jebel Akhdar with A Coy, first at Saiq and then at Rostaq. His affinity with remote mountainous terrain influenced his decision to live in retirement high up above Ullswater on the side of a Cumbrian Fell. One definitely needed an eight figure grid reference and SATNAV to locate the house.

John died on the 18 October following a short illness and to **Ann**, John's wife of 52 years and to all his family we offer our deepest sympathies. He was buried at St Peter's Church, Alstonefield, Derbyshire on 8 November at 2pm. A number of SAF Association members attended the funeral.

TPFJ

Peter Ash

8 July 1931 – 17 November 2021

Peter Ash was born 8 July 1931, died 17 November 2021, Royal Air Force pilot/instructor, Royal Saudi Air Force flying instructor, SOAF/RAFO pilot/instructor 1983-1992, served on 5 Squadron (Salalah) and 2 Squadron (Seeb) on Defenders, Skyvans and Seavans. OC squadrons for some time. A highly skilled pilot/instructor, well liked and respected by both Omani and ex-pat aircrew. He had the dubious distinction of being fired at by an Iranian F-4 whilst flying a maritime Seavan patrol in the Mussandam/ Straight of Hormuz region in 1990 but evaded damage! Retired to the Isle of Wight with his wife Edna for a much quieter life! Sadly missed.

Muqaddam Nick Mander

23 April 1929 – 3 January 2022

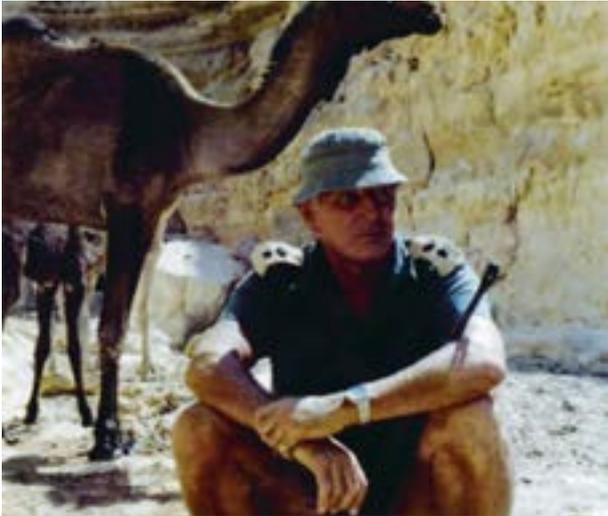


Following a career in the British Army serving with the Green Howards and Parachute Regiment, **Nick Mander** arrived in Oman in June 1971. He was initially deployed as a bodyguard to **HM Sultan Qaboos**. He subsequently joined OG (later OCR) in Northern Oman and served in various roles in OG until 1978. In the earlier years in particular he also undertook a number of detachments to Dhofar including as a Liaison Officer with the Imperial Iranian Task Force. **Mike Lobb** writes: "I have particular reason to be grateful to Nick. As mentioned, Nick was the SAF Liaison Officer between HQ SAF and the Imperial Iranian Task Force Damavand in December 1974. Not an easy task but when Nick said he would fix things, they got fixed. He was the right man to have covering for you and I will always be grateful to him. He will be greatly missed."

Significantly, in the late '70s Nick, as 2ic of the regiment, was responsible for overseeing the transformation of OG from a Gendarmerie comprising six squadrons stationed from Khasab in the Musandam, to Sur in the Sharqiya into the fifth Omani Infantry Battalion, the Oman Coast Regiment. Two young Omani officers developing under Nick's leadership, **Nasib Hamed Al Ruwaih** and **Said Nassir Al Salmi**, went on to become Commanders of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO).

Nick met his wife, **Lena**, in Oman in 1973 while she was working as a midwife in Nizwa and Rostaq. They went on to marry in March 1979 and have two children, **Adam** and **Kristina**. The family lived together in Oman for many years and had a wide circle of friends. Despite having a reputation for maintaining robust opinions and firm discipline in his military life (to many he was known as 'Biffo'), Nick was a devoted family man. **Nicky Quinlan** tells of the

frequent rounders matches that Nick used to arrange for their children and those of **Tony** and **Lottie Higgins** behind their house in MAM. Nicky also tells of how she was fairly frequently pulled over by Colonel Nick for speeding in MAM camp as she drove to her work in the offices of the CDS. She does not mention the consequences but they are likely to have been somewhat less than severe. Nick also has three children, **Brian**, **Suzanne** and **Julian**, from a previous marriage.



In 1978 he was promoted to Muqaddam and assumed command of WFR in Thumrait and then in 1980 he became Commander of MAM Garrison. He remained in this post until he handed over to his Omani successor at the end of 1987. He then continued to support his successor as Deputy Commander until he finally left Oman in 1989.

Nick and Lena retired to Salisbury and he enjoyed many years of retirement while Lena continued to work in the UK – which, she assures me was very much her choice. She eventually retired herself not long ago at the age of 73.

Nick suffered from deteriorating health towards the end of his life but maintained a circle of friends in and around Salisbury. He died in hospital on the 3 of January 2022 following a fall at home a few days earlier. He was 92 years old. Details of the funeral arrangements have been published separately.

Our thoughts are with Lena, Adam and Kristina and with Nick's extended family at this difficult time.

LAPSED MEMBERSHIP

Michael Morley	RAO	1985-87
Gareth Oliver-Abell	SAF Sigs	2017-20
Dick Fox	DR/JR	1970-72
Eddie Sims	RNO	1985-05
Jonathan Hacon	SOA	1985-89
CJ Frazier	OG	
Richard Cawthorne	Dhofar Bde	1976-78

DEATHS

The following deaths have been recorded since the last Journal:

Feb 20	William Strong Cracker Bty 1972
June 20	David Houlton BM Dhofar Bde 1975-76
July 20	Patrick Ellwood HQ N OMAN BDE 1978-79
Oct 20	Lilian Malcolm QARANC & FMS <i>(see obit)</i>
2020	Sandy Leitch SON 1975-78
Feb 21	Nick Roberts MR 1966-68, MOD 1977-79 & SON '80s
Mar 21	Jeremy Phipps BATT & SBLSO 1970-72 & 1993-97 <i>(see obit)</i>
Apr 21	Phil Raper RNO 1986-92
May 21	Nick Downie Firqat Forces 1972-74 <i>(see obit)</i>
Jun 21	David Houlton MBE Dhofar Brigade 1975-77 <i>(see obit)</i>
Aug 21	Alastair Campbell JR 1978-80
Sep 21	Barry Leeming RAF Salalah 1967-71
Sep 21	Andy Dunsire Airworks 1970-99 <i>(see obit)</i>
Sep 21	Steve Cary KJ RAO 1983-87 <i>(see obit)</i>
Oct 21	Alan Abbott Dhofar Bde 1975-77 <i>(see obit)</i>
Oct 21	John Wooddisse NFR JR 1964-65 <i>(see obit)</i>
Nov 21	Peter Ash SOAF 2 Sqn & 5 Sqn 19683-92 <i>(see obit)</i>
2021	Chrisopher Hinton SOLF 1963-65
2021	Richard Cawthorne Dhofar Bde 1976-78
Jan 22	Ian McLucas OA 1974-75
Jan 22	Nick Mander RAO 1971-89
Jan 22	Reg Millard OA 1980-83
Feb 22	Air Marshal Sir Erik Bennett WO KBE CB CVO SOAF/RAFO 1974-91 <i>(letter from COSSAF included with full obituary)</i>
Feb 22	Alex "Lex" Brown AFC MBE, Sqn SOAF 1977-79 <i>(full obituary will be published in next year's Journal)</i>

NEWLY JOINED MEMBERS

Berlinda Jobst	FBH	1979-82
Sarah Roberts	Joint Staff	1977-81
Bob Bailey	RAFO	2017 - present
Richard Hickson	WFR	1984-86
Linda Cairney	RNO Training Advisor	2019
Colin Howard	BATT/NFR	
Steve Denniston	RNO	2014 - present
Denis James	SBLSO (A)	
James Crowe	RAFO	2019 - present
Richard Ansley	Airwork	1976-02
Richard Osborn	SO2 Exercises	
Ian Ross-Harding	SAFTR	1979-85

NEVER TOO LATE TO REMEMBER!



Stuart Rae pictured centre.

At precisely 1900 hrs BST June 12, 2021, YO 34/35 batch mates around the globe raised a glass, to toast the memory of a fallen comrade **Stuart Rae** who was killed in action whilst seconded to the Sultan's Armed Forces 50 years ago.

Stuart was an old boy of King Alfred school, Portway, Wantage, with a taste for adventure. He started climbing at the age of 13 with 3rd King Alfred (Wantage) Scouts before becoming a member of the Oxford mountaineering club.



Stuart getting an award from the Group Scout leader Fram Farrington.

Therefore, it was no surprise that the young Stuart joined the Corps in 1966 with YO34. After initial training in 1968 he served in 41 Cdo. His closest friend/oppo **Jeff Parsons** remembers Stuart as a man who would "volunteer for anything that would add to his value as an officer... Parachute training, Resistance to Interrogation, Language courses – he did them all with enthusiasm. Early in his career he volunteered to train with elite Norwegian forces in arctic warfare."



Stuart Rae on patrol in Norway.

Stuart was posted to 42 Cdo. in Singapore where he made his mark as a lively member of the Mess and continued his thirst for adventure and professional knowledge becoming one of the first to attend the inaugural Long Range Patrol course at the Jungle Warfare School in Malaya. He made a favourable impression on the OC, now retired **Brigadier Jonathan Thomson** who recalls, "In 1970 I was running the Combat Tracking Wing at the Jungle Warfare School... I was asked to run a one month course on long patrols because skills we had learnt in Borneo during the '60s were being lost. I was to run three of these courses, the first for 42 Commando. Stuart was exceptional. If we'd had a more sensible Special Forces outfit in those days, he would have gone straight from 42 Commando to the joint selection course, and then probably into the SAS."



Stuart (front row, fourth from left) on the LRP Course.

During his time in the Far East, Stuart participated in two Royal Marine mountaineering expeditions, climbing the 12,349 ft Mount Cook in New Zealand and the notable first ascent of the Himalayan Mountain Menthosa 21,141 ft in November 1970.



Stuart (back row, first on left) with the Menthosa Group.

After a very successful Far East tour Stuart was successful in securing a posting on secondment to the Sultan's Armed Forces. He was promoted Local Captain on 11 Jan '71, when he started his colloquial Arabic course at Beaconsfield, and his 'Ready to Move' date to deploy to Oman was 1 Apr '71. Stuart joined the Northern Frontier Regiment and within a few short months was deployed on active operations in Dhofar.

Major Mike Lobb (Chairman, Sultan's Armed Forces Association) now takes up Stuart's story:

I was on one of the six Operation Vipers on 12 June 1971 in a sanger about 20m from Stuart when he was killed. I was part of a small team providing fire support for the Firqat, FTZ local to that area. We were attached to the Northern Frontier Regiment under **Karl Beale** which was running a series of battalion night ambushes to interdict known *adoo* routes. On the night of 11 June we moved south from Akoot, also known as Karlsberg NFR's tented base location close to Hokub Al Jadeerit, an abandoned jebeli 'village' of about four huts. The team moved through A Coy commanded by **Graham McKinley**. We made sangers from the rocky ground and waited for dawn to break on the morning of 12 June. An enemy patrol of 4-8 men approached the killing zone but stopped just short of it probably about 60m, sensing something was not right. Perhaps a smell, perhaps a sound, perhaps new sangers – we will never know. The lead *adoo* fired a single shot from his AK47 in the air and Stuart, 2IC A Coy immediately put his head up to locate fire. The next single shot, whether from same *adoo* or a compatriot, hit Stuart in the throat. Everyone opened up in the direction of the *adoo*. Stuart died instantly. The *adoo* had no comms and operated in 4-8 man patrols. On hearing a firefight, they would fire a couple of shots and move towards the firefight and so on with the next patrol. By midday we had 30-40 enemy harassing us. A Coy was supposed to have withdrawn through C Coy commanded by **Graeme Smyth-Piggot** but ended up on an adjacent spur and most of the day was spent retreating back to base with, so far as I was aware, no further casualties.

Stuart had not been in NFR very long, between one and two months; consequently he was not well known. Stuart's parents,

Duncan and Audrey, came to Oman and were hosted by **Dr (subsequently Colonel) Medhi**, NFR's Indian RMO. They remained good friends up until their deaths. I met Duncan and Audrey at Sandhurst with Stuart's fiancée, **Judith**, when the Association dedicated a Memorial Book of those killed in the Dhofar War at the Chapel in Sandhurst.

Fast forward 34 years to 2005. I had finished 16 years as a contract officer in Oman. I met and married my wife, **Penny** (also serving in SAF) in Oman. She worked in the local vets at Towcester in Northamptonshire. There was a dispute about gerbils and jerboas in the small animals section and Penny took in her book on 'Small Mammals of Oman'. The vet, **Gareth Keevill**, spotted the title and asked about the Oman connection because his uncle had been killed there. In fact, he was named Gareth Stuart Kevill after his uncle. Gareth and his now wife, **Michelle** came to the National Arboretum for the dedication of the SAF Memorial there.

There were 38 British deaths in the Dhofar War (it pales in comparison with the 714 Iranian deaths). Just so sad that Stuart was one of them. It is small compensation but for what it is worth, Stuart did not die in vain (unlike Afghanistan and Iraq). His death was part of the price paid for Oman to be a free and stable country in a very unstable region of the world. The Omanis have not forgotten either. They regard it as a blood debt. The Association is invited back every few years with 30 or so veterans and Omanis always acknowledge that they could not have achieved what they have without us and that the British sacrifice was the price of building a society on firm foundations.



Presentation of Elizabeth Cross in Memory of Stuart Rae

Royal Marines Officer Captain, Stuart Rae, was killed in action whilst serving on loan to the Sultan's Armed Forces with NFR in Dhofar. In commemoration of his sacrifice, his sister, **Liz Keevill** (next of kin) was presented with the Elizabeth Cross at a special ceremony held at the Royal Albert Hall on 4 March 2022. The Elizabeth Cross is a unique form of recognition for the next of kin of British Servicemen/women who have been killed in action since WW Two. The award was presented by **Lieutenant General Charles Stickland** CB, OBE, RM – Chief of Joint Operations and a former Commandant General of the Royal Marines.



Background to The Elizabeth Cross

The Elizabeth Cross was launched in 2009 and is granted to the next of kin of Armed Forces personnel killed on operations or as a result of terrorism as a mark of national recognition for their loss.

Named the Elizabeth Cross, this is the first time since the George Cross was instituted in 1940 by King George VI that the name of a reigning monarch has been given to a new award. Prior to this, the Victoria Cross was introduced by Queen Victoria in 1856 for acts of gallantry by the Armed Forces.

The award is available to the families of those who died in conflicts dating back to 1948, including the Korean War, the Malayan Emergency, the Falklands conflict and operations in Northern Ireland as well as recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The award was inspired by precedents from the First and Second World Wars: a scroll and memorial plaque were presented to the families of those killed in World War One and a scroll was given to the families of those who died in World War Two and in the Korean War in the early 1950s.

Those receiving this honour receive two pinned sterling silver emblems, one full size for formal remembrance events and miniature version for less formal events. The reverse of the cross is engraved with the name of the person in whose memory it was granted. The emblems are accompanied by a memorial scroll.

In a message to Her Armed Forces, Her Majesty The Queen said:

"This seems to me a right and proper way of showing our enduring debt to those who are killed while actively protecting what is most dear to us all. The solemn dignity which we attach to the names of those who have fallen is deeply engrained in our national character. As a people, we accord this ultimate sacrifice the highest honour and respect."

"I greatly hope that the Elizabeth Cross will give further meaning to the nation's debt of gratitude to the families and loved ones of those who have died in the service of our country. We will remember them all."



The Elizabeth Cross is a unique form of recognition for the next of kin of British Servicemen/women who have been killed in action since World War Two.

TRANSFORMATION AND OMANISATION – PART II

1975-1990

Ian Buttenshaw

The War was officially over on 11 December 1975, although as has been seen from previous articles, some hard core elements continued their activities until the Final Contact in May 1980. However, it was now time to reorganise on a more peacetime basis, and particularly increase the pace of Omanisation.

Chronology

1975 January	First Omanis sent to Saudi Arabia for parachute training
1975 July 24	Sultan's Forces Women's Armed Corps (SFWAC) formed
1976 early	Dhofar Brigade redesignated Southern Oman Brigade.
1976 September 21	HQ Northern Oman becomes Northern Oman Brigade
1976 December	Western Frontier Regiment is formed at Thumrait
1977 April 1	SAF is split into three autonomous services, and the Army becomes the Sultan of Oman's Land Force (SOLF)
1977 December	SFE Squadron redesignated Sultans Armed Forces Engineers (SAFE) and continues expansion
1978 January	ACS is reformed into two squadrons and renamed Armoured Force of Oman (AFO)
1978 January	Oman Gendarmerie is re-formed as a normal infantry battalion becoming Oman Coast Regiment (OCR)
1978 early	HQ SOLF moves out of BAF and into a new HQ complex in MAM
1978 October	Operation Qatr mounted in the northern border areas
1978 December	Command Training Centre (CTC) formed in MAM for advanced officer training
1980 early	OA is renamed Sultan of Oman's Artillery (SOA)
1980 August	The first M60 A1 Tanks arrive and the Oman Tank Force (OTF) is formed
1980 September	Musandam Security Force (MSF) is established with its HQ at Bukha
1980 December	The Western Border Security Force (WBSF) is raised as an independent reconnaissance company under command of NOM Brigade and stationed at Qabil
1981 January	Officer Cadet Training is moved from SAFTR to Aydim

1981 January	The East Coast Security Force is raised in MAM as an independent reconnaissance company under command of NOM Brigade. It is later renamed Coastal Security Force (CSF) and stationed at Ibra
1981 April	SOA is split into two Regiments
1981 May 1	AFO and OTF are merged as the Sultan of Oman's Armoured Regiment (SOAR)
1981 May 25	The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is created with Oman as one of its six members
1981 August	The post of Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) is created
1981 Aug/Sep	The first joint SAF/USA 'Bright Star' Exercise is conducted in Oman
1982 August	SOLF acquires Milan Anti-Tank missiles, which are allocated to OPS
1982 October	First SOLF level Exercise Quwwa Jadeeda (New Force) held
1983 July	CTC closes in MAM and re-opens as the Officer Training School (MTD) at Bait Kashmir, Sohar
1983 October	First GCC 'Darra al Jazira' Exercise takes place in Abu Dhabi; Oman is represented by a JR Battlegroup
1984 mid	The Force Transport Regiment is split into two Regiments
1984 December	First Omani CSOLF takes command, and the last British CSOLF becomes CDS
1985 April	Royal Review of SOLF held in the field followed by Force level Exercise Ra'ad (Thunder)
1985 May	OPS is renamed Sultan of Oman's Parachute Regiment (SOPR)
1985 mid	The Signals Regiment is split into two Regiments
1985 mid	The Command and Staff College is established at BAF as a Joint Service Venture
1986 mid	FTR adopts the new title of SAF Transport (SAF Tpt) and moves from MAM to the Maabela and Seeb Camps
1986 November	SOLF and British Forces carry out a major joint exercise called 'Saif Sareea' (Swift Sword)
1987 March	Oman hosts GCC Exercise 'Darra al Jazira 3'
1987 March	The position of CDS is abolished and SAF reorganized with the post re-designated Chief of Staff Sultan's Armed Forces (COSSAF) and filled by an Omani Lieutenant General (Fareeq)
1987 October	Operation Saif mounted in the south as a result of border tension
1988 January	SOA forms its Medium Regiment (3 SOA)
1988 mid	Bait al Falaj Fort is opened as The SAF Museum
1989 May	ORF renamed Oman Reconnaissance Regiment (ORR)
1990 early	GCC Exercise 'Darra Al Jazira 4' held in Kuwait
1990 June 16	The titles of three SAF Services are redesignated and SOLF becomes the Royal Army of Oman (RAO)

OPERATIONS IN THE NORTH

Musandam - February 1978

A misunderstanding on the border erupted in February 1978 and two companies of MR plus the AFO TOW Troop were deployed there, but the problems were resolved peaceably and after a two-month deployment the extra troops were withdrawn.



Left: AFO TOW Troop in Wadi Bayah in support of MR during the Musandam deployment (CO MR speaks to the detachment)



Top: Commander NOM Bde is briefed by CO MR as to his deployment

Above: CO MR being briefed on the situation



Above: HM arrives in Musandam

Left: HM being briefed by OG Sqn Commander during his visit to Musandam

Operation Qatr - October 1978

Following a misunderstanding at the border in the area of Lekhwair oilfields, the Army deployed additional units along the border, including units from southern Oman and 300 Firqat. There was a stand-off between the forces either side of the border and the whole incident was resolved through diplomatic channels. However, it provided SOLF with good practice in rapid deployment of forces to react to a potential threat to the Sultanate.



Left and inset: Artillery deployed on Operation Qatr

Continued Deployment to the South

Two Omani Infantry Battalions continued to be deployed in the south on a yearly rotation. They were supported by SOA, SAFE and other supporting services. SOA were provided with a newly built camp at Sahalnawt, but continued to deploy batteries and troops to Sarfait, Habrut and Makinat Shihan, as well as a Locating Troop at Sarfait.

The Engineers who were based in the Salalah Airbase were everywhere; constructing roads, establishing water points, carrying out general construction tasks as well clearing many of the minefields laid during the war.



The new SOA camp at Sahalnawt



Makinat Shihan gun position

Top: preparing guns for porteeing at Sahalnawt camp
 Above right: Rebuilding the gun pits at Habrut
 Right: SAFE digging in Iranian guns at Sarfait



Cymbeline Radar at Sarfait



Saladins in the field



The Oman Peace Medal and Sultan's Operational Award

The medal was struck in 1979 for award to all those members of the Armed Forces and Police, including MOD civilians, except for those classed as 'domestics'. The conditions of award

were for one year's service from 1 July 1976, the day after the cessation of award of the General Service Medal with Clasp 'Dhofar'. However, the Operational Award, which is worn on the medal ribbon, was given under terms very similar to those for the General Service Medal, and went to anyone killed or injured as a result of enemy action, or given an award for bravery, in the Southern Province from the same date. The conditions of award were that soldiers must have served for thirty days on operational duty in the field.

The Operational Award ceased from 1 July 1984, and the medal ceased to be issued with effect 17 November 1985.

Improvement to Officer Training

With the acceleration of Omani Officer promotions there became an urgent requirement to run more advanced officer training courses, and not rely on sending students abroad. Local platoon and company commanders courses were conducted on an 'as required' basis by SAFTR and Brigade Headquarters, but this was an unsatisfactory arrangement.

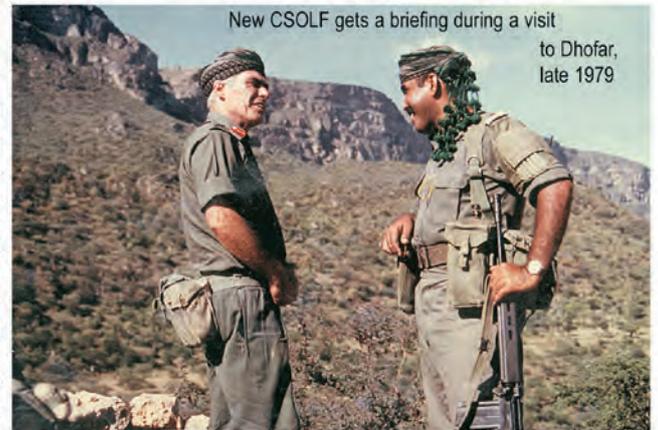
In June 1978 a small team was established in MAM, to commence planning, prepare study material and write exercises, as well as train future instructors to conduct more advanced officer training. By the end of 1978, this small organisation became known as the Command Training Centre (CTC), and its first course, a Company Commanders Course, commenced on 20 January 1979; this was followed later in the year by the first Platoon Commanders Course.

Change of CSOLF

The last British Commander arrived in April 1979, and found an Army of five Omani and three Baluch Infantry Battalions, organized in two Infantry Brigades supported by two Armoured Car Squadrons, one Regiment of Artillery, an Engineer Squadron and a Parachute Squadron with normal logistic support, albeit limited. In terms of operational concepts, tactical skills, equipment and barracks, it was little changed from the force that won the Dhofar War five years earlier. All key staff appointments and most senior posts in the arms and services were filled by British Officers and NCOs, the majority on contract and the rest on Loan Service, although the essential process of Omanisation was well underway.

He immediately set in motion a vigorous and comprehensive modernisation programme. He believed it critically important to speed up the pace of Omanisation and made the improvements of the training organisation, particularly the training of officers, a priority. This process was pursued vigorously and involved moving Officer Cadet Training to Aydim, and the opening of a new Officer Training School (MTD) at Bait Kashmir in Sohar in 1983, which was followed with the establishment of a Joint Service Staff College at BAF in 1985.

Simultaneously an extensive construction programme was begun, with new barracks being built and old camps being upgraded. At the same time major re-equipment and training programmes were initiated, aimed at converting the Army into a balanced force of all arms capable of motorised desert operations whilst retaining its counter-insurgency skills.



New CSOLF gets a briefing during a visit to Dhofar, late 1979

Armoured Expansion

In the years following the end of hostilities in Dhofar, more Saladin Armoured Cars were acquired and in January 1978 the ACS was renamed the Armoured Force of Oman (AFO) and divided into two Squadrons and a troop of Landrover mounted TOW, which had been inherited from OG in early 1976. One Squadron of Saladins was based in Thumrait and the other in MAM in the north. The TOW troop spent most of its time in border locations in the south.

It became apparent, with the changing threats to the region, that the Army would need a stronger armoured force that would be capable of deterring enemy that should threaten Oman. Thus, in August 1980, the Army acquired its first tanks, when six M60 A1 Tanks arrived in country and were stationed at the old Parachute Training School at Maabela, becoming known as the Oman Tank Force (OTF). In 1981, twelve of the more powerful Chieftain tanks were acquired from the British Army. A further fifteen Chieftain (Qaa'id al Ardh) tanks were ordered and arrived in batches between October 1984 and October 1985.

The OTF initially existed as a separate entity from AFO, but having two separate armoured organisations was not a practical option. Thus, in May 1981, both were grouped together to form the Sultan of Oman's Armoured Regiment (SOAR) and based at Maabela Camp, with the detached Saladin Squadron still at Thumrait.

The Formation of Oman Tank Force



The M60 A1s being moved to Maabela



Top left: M60 A1s arrive at Mina Qaboos
Above: The M60 A1 tanks during the National Day Parade, 1980

The first six M60 A1 Tanks at Maabela



The M60 A1 in the field

New arrival in 1981 - The Chieftain Tank (Qaa'id Al Ardh)



It became evident that there was a requirement for more up-to-date armoured reconnaissance vehicles to replace the ageing Saladins; thus, during 1983 the Scorpion Light Tank was gradually introduced into service. The last squadron of Saladins was finally phased out at a Parade attended by HM The Sultan in October 1983.

By 1985, the SOAR comprised seven squadrons: A, B and C Squadrons of Scorpions; D Sqn (a mix of M60 and Chieftains); E Sqn of Chieftains, plus a Training and HQ Squadron. This expansion, plus the practicalities of having to move the tanks to the training area in the interior, resulted in SOAR being transferred to a brand new custom-built barracks, called Sultan bin Saif Barracks, at Sha'afa, in April 1986, which was officially opened, after its completion, by HM The Sultan in March 1987.



Above and right: Training on the new Chieftains



Above and top: Washed out in Wadi Halfayn - the Saladins' final exercise in early 1983

Left: The Scorpion - replacement for the Saladin

Background picture: Saladins in Dhofar



Farewell to the Saladins, October 1983

Left and below right: HM the Sultan visits SOAR to say farewell to the Saladins

Below: Saladin Armoured Cars drive past HM for the last time before being de-commissioned and replaced by Scorpions



Formation of Force Transport Regiment

It became apparent with the expansion and motorisation of the teeth arms of SOLF that a parallel development in modern logistic support would be required. Thus, in 1980 the Sultan's Armed Forces Transport Regiment (FTR) was formed. This amalgamated the Armed Forces Motor Transport Organisation, which had been formed in 1975 and consisted of three semi-autonomous squadrons, together with the Armed Forces Movements Organisation, and for the first time the Army had a regimentally organised Transport and Movement Support with its own CO.

At its formation, FTR's equipment still mainly consisted of Bedford 4 Ton vehicles and Landrovers, with a few articulated 15 ton trucks, plus cars and buses. To meet the necessary support requirements, heavier equipment was needed, and during the period 1983-85 a major expansion took place, with the arrival of MAN 35 and 10 ton vehicles, Oshkosh Tank Transporters, Specialist Amplirole Fuel Tankers and modern buses.

In 1984, FTR was divided into two regiments and in 1986 the new title Sultan's Armed Forces Transport (SAF Tpt) was adopted. In the same year, SAF Tpt moved out of MAM into Seeb and Maabela barracks.

FTR moving Scorpions



Above and above right: Civil Aid - FTR delivering stores to remote vil-lages



SAF Transport convoy



Above: Recovering a Skyvan from Fahud



Left: A discussion with local Bedu during an exercise



Amplirole refuelling



Above: Army Transport old and new - FTR transporting donkeys up to Saiq for the SAF Donkey Platoon based there



Right: Tank Transporter training



CSOLF inspecting FTR, 1986



Part of a convoy in the desert



Above: 10 Tonner on exercise



Left: Transporting a Scorpion



DCSOLF visiting, 1986

Other Expansion

The army continued to increase in size and its effectiveness was improved with the introduction of more new equipment. In August 1982 Milan anti-tank weapons were accepted into service and were issued to the Oman Parachute Regiment (OPR), who had just expanded to Regimental size. The regiment now had the dual roles of Parachuting and Anti-Tank. This greatly increased the army's ability to defend against any enemy tank threat. In May 1985 OPR were



Milan with SOPR

Landcruisers in the desert



Right: HQ WBSF, Qabil, occupying the old OG fort
Left: CSF on patrol



New Security/Reconnaissance Forces

In 1978 when OG re-formed as a regular Infantry Battalion, it ceased to operate many of its smaller posts, and these were temporarily occupied by detachments from various Infantry Battalions. In line with the SOLF Policy of having permanent bases for individual units, and the need to expand, three small units were formed.

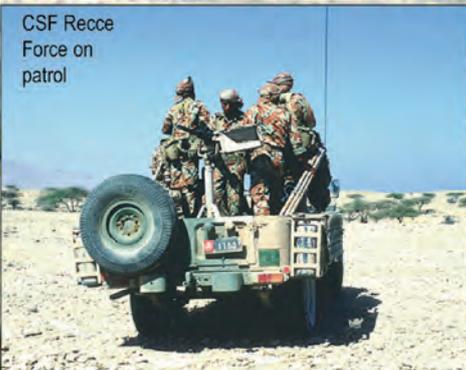
In the Musandam, during early 1980, recruiting from the local population commenced, to form a force in this strategically important Peninsula. It established its HQ and main camp at Bukha, and eventually occupied the former OG post at Bayah as well. It remains permanently based in the Musandam, and is known as the Musandam Security Force (MSF).

At the same time, a vehicle-borne Reconnaissance Force of company strength called the Western Border Security Force (WBSF) was started in December 1980, and based at Qabil.

Shortly afterwards, in January 1981, the East Coast Security Force formed up in MAM. It was renamed the Coastal Security Force in August 1981. It moved to the new Ahmed bin Said Barracks in Ibra with DR in April 1983. In January 1987, it moved to its permanent base in Sur, when the former OG Camp was vacated by the SON Training School.

Both WBSF and CSF have a role in the Screen Force in wartime, and in peacetime they have the task of patrolling the border and coastal areas in their area of responsibility, adding to local security and providing all types of assistance and medical aid to the local inhabitants.

Recce Landrovers



CSF Recce Force on patrol



WBSF Landcruiser in the desert



CSF on patrol along the coast in the Sharqiyah



WBSF Patrol in the desert

Redesigning Force Posture

By 1980, with the last rebel elements gone from Dhofar, it was time to reassess the force posture, which was still very counter-insurgency oriented. Oman is a country with long borders and large areas of desert. It was therefore apparent that the army would need to be fully mobile in order to move rapidly to any threatened location and then be able to engage in mobile operations to deal effectively with the enemy. The army would therefore have to be completely vehicle-borne; that is from the infantryman, whose role it is to close with and neutralise the enemy, to the logistic elements which re-supply the force. The days of lorried infantry being ferried to a point and then walking were over, and infantry sections required their own vehicles. Thus, a large-scale vehicle purchasing programme was put into effect for the 1980-85 period. By the end of it, the army could move rapidly and in strength anywhere in the country. SOLF was keeping pace with the advances in equipment and tactics occurring in the military world. The first infantry battalion to be motorised was the Muscat Regiment, which received the new 6x6 Pinzgauer section vehicles in 1982. Over the next 3-4 years the other Infantry Battalions, Brigade Headquarters and Supporting Services would also receive theirs.

Concurrent with this motorisation programme of the Army, the new Steyr 5.56 Rifle was introduced into service and has proved an excellent replacement for the FN Rifle.



Above: Infantry Soldier with the new Steyr 5.56 Assault Rifle, introduced into service to replace the FN Rifle in 1982

Left and below left: MR Pinzgauers on exercise - these section vehicles greatly enhanced the mobility of the Infantry Battalion



The new 6x6 Pinzgauer



Above and right: Soldiers on exercise using the new Steyr Rifle

Musandam Reinforcement Exercise (Lama'at Al Barq)

The Army had to be ready to protect all parts of the Sultanate. Thus in the early 1980s a joint service re-inforcement of the Musandam Peninsular was planned and practiced, which involved NOM Brigade units and supporting elements deploying by sea and air to Musandam to avert possible occupation by hostile forces.

Below and below left: Artillery being landed from the RNO vessel L1 during the Musandam Reinforcement Exercise



Bottom: Troops on patrol during the exercise

New Concept of Operations

The expansion and reorganisation of the army and its subsequent motorisation meant that there was a requirement to produce a new Concept of Operations. This then had to be thoroughly tested and practiced on exercises ranging from unit to force level. Putting this requirement into practice was to be one of the great achievements of the early 1980s.

The early exercises of the 1980s were notable because they were the first time that the army exercised the new conventional techniques and tactics, together with their new equipment. Two brigade exercises were carried out in 1982, one for each brigade. Each exercise was the first time that the Brigade had worked and trained together as one formation since coming into being. The first to be carried out was Exercise Dheeb al Sahra (Desert Fox) in January 1982. Northern Oman Brigade, together with supporting arms and a logistic Brigade Administration Area exercised in the area to the south and south-west of Adam. It was the first formation Field Training Exercise (FTX) in SOLF. Southern Oman Brigade carried out a similar exercise, Exercise Khat al Sahra (Desert Line), in February 1982 in the Marmul area to the east of Thumrait. Many good lessons were learnt and put into practice on the SOLF FTX, Exercise Quwwa Jadeeda (New Force) that followed and ran from 5-13 October 1982. The aim of the exercise was 'to practice the Force's new Concept of Operations in desert terrain, including aggressive defence, use of screen and covering forces, counter-penetration and counter-attack tasks'. Many 'firsts' were achieved on it: the first time that HQ SOLF deployed into the field; that aggressive defence had been practiced; that SOAR had exercised as a complete regiment; that Task Force and mine laying procedures had been practiced and that Milan and the new Jaguar V VHF radio had been used on exercise. Approximately 4,000 men were deployed on the exercise and it was deemed a great success. Exercise Quwaa Jadeeda was a landmark in the progress of the training of the army; it marked the emergence of SOLF as a modern army capable of carrying out advanced procedures - a tremendous change from the army of early 1970.

Exercise Quwwa Jadeeda - trying the new concept



Above: SOAR in action during Exercise Quwwa Jadeeda

Right: HM visiting Exercise Quwwa Jadeeda



Commander NOM Bde and CO JR with Sayyid Fahr, leaving JR Command Post



Above: Jundeeds on exercise

Below: The Bde Commander discusses the situation with one of his officers during a NOM Bde exercise



Below: Sayyid Fahr with the NOM Bde Commander visiting HQ JR during the Bde Exercise



Infantry in the Assault Exercise Quwwa Jadeeda

Jundeeds in a trench on exercise



Signals Expansion

The SAF Signals Regiment had been formed in 1973. By the end of the War in 1975, it had a squadron in Dhofar and two squadrons in the north, as well as detachments at various locations countrywide. It also had a small School and Telephone Workshops.

The period from 1975 was to see a vast expansion as more advanced communication systems were introduced; it took over responsibilities for line communications for all three Services and MOD, as well as cryptography and procurement of communications equipment for all of SOLF and advice to SOAF and SON.

The workload was too much, and, with the new Concept of Operations, better field communications were required. Thus, in 1985 the unit was split into two Regiments, one in the north and the other in the south, with a HQ based in MAM, supported by a Technical Equipment Depot and Repair Workshop, as well as an expanded School of Signals.

In the later half of the 1980s communications support to the Army developed apace. The latest frequency-hopping radios were already in service from the early 1980s, and additionally the latest static voice and telegraph systems, including microwave and tropospheric scatter bearers, as well as the latest advanced tactical trunk communications network in the field.

Left: Signaller in the field

Below: CSOLF visiting the Signals Regiment in the field and seeing the latest recharging equipment



Above: Signallers on exercise



Left: Technical Training; below: Signals Training; below left: Teleprinter Training



Above: A Signaller in the Operations Room



Left: Operating the new Radio



Above: CO 1 SR explains the new radio during a display of the latest RAO Signals equipment

Right: The new radio in use



First Omani CSOLF

The Army became the first service of SAF to Omanise its commander. In December 1984, the last British CSOLF handed over to Liwa Rukn Nassib bin Hamed Al Ruwahi.



Left: Signallers in the field
Below: Establishing a HQ in the field using the newly acquired Pinzgauer



Above: SAF Signals Troposcatter vehicle, used to enhance field communications

Left: A Commcen in the field

Below: Establishing a rebroadcast station in the



The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

In May 1981 the six monarchies of the Arabian Gulf grouped together to form the GCC. Within the framework of this council was a degree of military cooperation and joint security agreements.

A military committee was established and the GCC sought to create a joint strike force from the member states, and the Island Shield (Dara al Jazirah 1) joint exercise, held in Abu Dhabi in October 1983, was used to demonstrate the feasibility of developing the GCC's own rapid deployment force. The Jebel Regiment from Oman participated in this first exercise and performed exceptionally well.

A second exercise was held in Saudi Arabia in 1984 in the Hafar al Batin Area, which was attended by NFR from Oman. This led to the establishment of a Rapid Movement Force (RMF), called Island Shield Force, based at the King Khalid Military City in Saudi Arabia. Normally, the RAO has permanently stationed there only a combat group consisting of a single company plus supporting components (about 200 troops), but with a commitment to up this to a Battalion Group should the need arise. MR provided the first Omani troops for this force.

CARES FOR WHAT
MATTERS.



The Mercedes-Benz S-Class.

