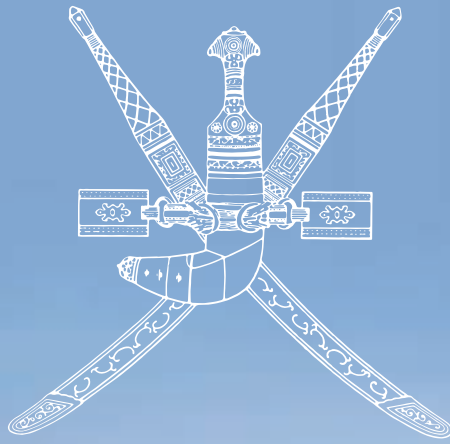


THE
JOURNAL
OF THE
SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES
ASSOCIATION



الحماية المتتقلة في خدمتكم



THE
JOURNAL
OF THE SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES ASSOCIATION

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www.oman.org.uk/journal

WELCOME TO YOUR 2023 JOURNAL

I HOPE THERE IS SOMETHING OF INTEREST FOR EVERYONE

I won't dwell on the momentous global events that are continuing to change our world, but the impact of Covid is still with us and the war in Ukraine shows no sign of ending soon. Financial instability surrounds us and here in UK three Prime Ministers in as many months and the sad death of our beloved **HM Queen Elizabeth II** have hit hard. However, your Association manages to survive and even thrive despite challenges and changes. The sad news of the death of our previous Chairman and Journal Editor, **Nigel Knocker**, has hit us all hard. This is reflected in the Chairman's notes and obituary. He was a true pillar of the association and oversaw the transformation of this Journal. I add my condolences to his widow **Angela**.

Mike Lobb has now stood down as Chairman having steered us through a challenging five years and has handed over to **Gordon Allen**. Both deliver messages in these pages. Our Vice-Chairman, **AVM Tony Nicholson** has also retired after 42 years on the Committee and other changes are shown on page 3; altogether the average age of your Committee has now dropped significantly! We also welcome **Allan Malcolm** who has volunteered to be our PR/Advertising Manager bringing extensive knowledge and experience of both SAF and commercial business in Oman.

We were delighted again to welcome our President, COSSAF, **Vice-Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis Al Raisi**, to our Annual Dinner in London in November and also to welcome **Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Johns**, a former CAS and Constable of Windsor Castle. In his role as an Honorary Air Commodore of the RAF Regiment, Sir Richard presented COSSAF with a splendid painting "*The Defence of RAF Salalah*" which commemorates the deployments of RAF Regiment units and personnel to Oman during the Dhofar conflict. He also told us of his days flying Hawker Hunter single seat fighters from Aden to Oman in those early days and of the RAF's subsequent support to Oman which continues today. As ever, the Army and Navy Club did us proud with an excellent dinner; a full report is included.

Also herein, we report on the highlight of the year – the Association visit to Oman. As you know, this was delayed due to Covid but took place from 3rd to 12th December and was a huge success. We are most grateful to **HM Sultan Haitham** who sanctioned the visit and kindly invited us to His Armed Forces Day Dinner at the Al-Alam Palace Garden overlooking Muscat Harbour which was a truly fantastic and memorable event. COSSAF sponsored the visit whilst **Ameed Rukn Hassan bin Ali Al Mujaini** and **Mqm (Retd) Ian Buttenshaw** worked tirelessly to ensure all the details were thoroughly co-ordinated.

This issue contains the penultimate chapter of Ian Buttenshaw's book tracing the History of SAF. We also present the first of a two-part article on *Op Simba* by **Ian Gordon**. You may recall that an earlier Journal covered the *Air Bridge to Simba* and this now covers the long period of ground operations. Ian is well placed to comment on these having served at Sarfait with MR in 1972 (when he was wounded during Op Shidda) and again, later, operating successfully with MR and Firqat.

Sadly, we have rather more obituaries than usual but have welcomed quite a few new members including our guest speaker at the last Dinner – Sir Richard Johns has now joined us as an honorary member.

Our planned events for 2022 suffered some changes due to Covid, but overall we did not fare too badly. We welcomed new members and received a steady flow of contributions for the Journal. Some have had to be delayed until next time as printing production and postal charges all rise and limit the size of the Journal. We have made economies on paper too but do not wish to prejudice quality.

I hope you enjoy your Journal and look forward to seeing you at some of the events.

Tim Jones, Editor

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Front Cover: Omani soldiers in training (photo credit: DVIDS and Cpl April Price)

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ASSOCIATION FUTURE EVENTS

PLEASE ALSO MONITOR THE WEBSITE

A forecast of Association events in 2023 is shown below. All of these events have now been confirmed. In addition to this list in the Journal, further details of these events are contained on the Association website.


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

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




NOTES FOR YOUR DIARY!

MONDAY 27 MARCH • NORTHERN LUNCH • THE PRINCIPAL HOTEL, YORK
Contact: Geoff Hill • SAFANorth19@outlook.com



THURSDAY 4 MAY • "TIGER" WRIGHT COMMEMORATIVE AND SOUTH EAST CURRY LUNCH
ROYAL ENGINEER HQ MESS AND RE MUSEUM, CHATHAM
Contact: Nick Larkin • nicklarkin1@aol.com




THURSDAY 11 MAY • SCOTTISH REGIONAL ASSOCIATION DINNER
DOUNESIDE HOUSE, TARLAND, AB34 4UL

Accommodation at Douneside House should be booked directly with manager@dounesidehouse.co.uk or by calling 013398 81230
Contact: Jonathan Forbes • jonathan_forbes@hotmail.com




THURSDAY 15 JUNE • SAF CURRY LUNCH • THE RAG
Contact: Neil Fawcett • neil.fawcett@btinternet.com



SUNDAY 9 JULY • SON/RNO REUNION LUNCH • START LUNCHTIME
PRINCESS ROYAL GALLERY, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE ROYAL NAVY, PORTSMOUTH
Contact: Robin Gainsford • robingainsford@hotmail.com



SATURDAY 15 JULY • THE WESSEX LUNCH • START 12.00 HRS • SHERBORNE GOLF CLUB
Contact: John Kirkham • johnkirkham@uwclub.net



THURSDAY 7 SEPTEMBER • EAST ANGLIA REGIONAL LUNCH
HINTLESHAM GOLF CLUB, IPSWICH, IP8 3JG
Contact: Tresham Gregg • treshamgregg@hotmail.com



TUESDAY 12 SEPTEMBER • OMAN GUNNER REUNION • 12.00 for 13.00
HONOURABLE ARTILLERY COMPANY
Contact: Jimmy Garnier • jimmygarnier@aol.com or 07785 717879



SUNDAY 24 SEPTEMBER • THE NEW FOREST REGIONAL LUNCHEON
SOUTH LAWN HOTEL, LYMINGTON, SO41 0RF
Contact for booking and payments: Mike Lobb • safassn@outlook.com



FRIDAY 24 NOVEMBER • SAF ANNUAL DINNER • THE RAG
Contact: Neil Fawcett • neil.fawcett@btinternet.com

(PAST) CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

by Mike Lobb



I stepped down as Chairman (and from the Committee) on 21 December to appoint younger members to the Committee to meet our commitment to engage with the next generation. Our President, **Vice-Admiral Abdullah Khamis Al Raisi**, has ratified the appointment of **Gordon Allen** to succeed me. Your Committee has embraced this change and with the advancing years of current members, has asked two new and much younger members to join the Committee, **Matt Wright** and **Greg Blunden**. You will find their details elsewhere in this Journal. **Tony Nicholson** retired on the day of the Annual Dinner, 25 November 2022, having completed 42 years of sterling service on the Committee for which we are all very grateful. I am pleased to report that **Captain Said Al Shabibi**, the Assistant Military Attaché, has joined the Association and I have co-opted him to assist the Committee with liaising with the

ten Omani Loan Service officers attached to units in this country.

I will take the opportunity to thank you all for supporting the Association throughout my tenure. I have found it challenging from the succession of Sultans, the uncertainty of our finances and frustrations from COVID. Nevertheless, I consider that, whilst maintaining the membership numbers, progress has been made with establishing regional events and increasing the number of presentations on our collective experiences.

The highlight of the year was undoubtedly the Association visit to Oman which took place in December 2022 for 30 veterans of the Association and **Siobhan Barnes** the daughter of **Johnny Braddell-Smith** who was killed in action supporting the Iranians in 1974. That visit is reported upon elsewhere in this Journal.

The regional and unit events were almost back to normal. The Committee finally managed to say farewell to our last President, **Fareeq Ahmed Harith Al Nabhani** at the Cavalry and Guards Club on 18 October 2022, where he was presented with a gift from the Committee. We have been most grateful for his patronage and wish him and his family a happy and well deserved retirement.

The flagship dinner returned to its more familiar format taking place on the last Friday in November. Vice-Admiral Abdullah Khamis Al Raisi attended for the second year in succession. The guest of honour was **Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Johns** who presented our President with a fine print commemorating the RAF Regiment in defence of the Joint Air Base at Salalah. You will find the event written up elsewhere in this Journal.

Unit and regional events were well attended. 2022 saw two additional events, the visit of *Shabab Oman II* to London and Portsmouth where members of the Association were invited aboard at both locations. The Association was back at Shrivenham again, supporting the Advanced Command and Staff Course.

The Association has much to look forward to in 2023 under Gordon's chairmanship. I am sure that you will give him the same support as you have given me. ■

FAREWELL TO THE LAST PRESIDENT LT GENERAL (RETD) AHMED HARITH AL NABHANI

General Ahmed was on a private visit to UK in October 2022. Our President from 2003 to 2020 we were denied the opportunity to say farewell to him on his departure from office due to COVID travel restrictions. The Committee was therefore delighted to be invited by him to meet in the Cavalry and Guards Club in Piccadilly for a farewell luncheon on 18th October. The Chairman, **Mike Lobb** presented General Ahmed with an inscribed china plate marking the years of his presidency. In response General Ahmed produced Omani halwa for coffee after the lunch and a plaque. I am pleased to report that General Ahmed was looking well in retirement and embarking on a tour around UK with his sons from London to Durham, Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff and Exeter. We look forward to seeing him again in Oman. In attendance were **The Lord Stirrup, Mike Lobb, Matt Wright, Keith Ryde, Neil Fawcett, Kieron Shaw, Tim Jones** and **John McKeown**.



MCL

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

by Gordon Allen



Nigel Knocker was Chairman when I joined the Committee in 2016, and it was with great sadness that we learnt of his death on 21 February. You will find his obituary later in this edition.

Mike Lobb's preceding notes conclude nearly six years at the helm. His customary modesty understates both the challenges the Association faced and the progress that has been made under his leadership. The reviews he initiated were central to identifying the issues to be addressed around funding, recruitment and continuity.

Despite the odds that Covid stacked against us, regional events have thrived and relationships in Oman and at home – with the Omani Embassy, RCDS and Shrivvenham – are healthy. The Association is deeply in Mike's debt for his commitment and perseverance.

I am fortunate to be supported by a very experienced Committee dedicated to maintaining the traditional service to the members. But, in addition to the daily business, we now face the challenge of passing on the ethos and traditions of the Association to the next

generation. Much hangs on our ability to recruit both Omani officers and their British counterparts.

We made good headway in Oman during the recent visit. **Major General Felix Gedney**, the SBLSO, has very helpfully appointed **Colonel Dave Pardy** as the loan service link to the Association. As Adviser to the Joint Command and Staff College, Dave is ideally placed to influence new arrivals in-country.

Subsequently, in February, I also met with **COSSAF** in London and asked for his help in strengthening Omani recruitment. He is very supportive of the initiative. It will take time to build momentum, but we are laying the groundwork to bridge the generation gap.

Captain Said Al Shabibi RNO has attended his first Committee meeting and his enthusiasm for his new role is very welcome. To spread the load a little, **Kieron Shaw** has taken over as Membership Secretary from **Neil Fawcett** who continues (after more than 40 years!) to act as Secretary and Treasurer.

The Journal and website are in excellent shape under **Tim Jones** and **Keith Ryde** respectively; and **John McKeown** is organising joint events with the Anglo-Omani Society. We have Association speakers for this year and next year, and details will be on the website.

Matt Wright has recently taken up a commercial role in Salalah. He is well-placed to support **Ian Buttenshaw** who remains staunchly engaged as our link to COSSAF's staff, as the success of the recent visit bears out so well. **Greg Blunden** is driving a busy desk at Northwood and connecting us with serving officers with a direct military interest in Oman.

It is sometimes too easy to forget that the Committee members are volunteers and I am very grateful for their enduring commitment. I ask only for your support as we commend the Association to the next generation and encourage their membership. It is they who will keep alive the unique legacy created so many years ago.

I started these notes by acknowledging Nigel's death – but fate has also claimed others very close to us over the last year. They are all remembered here.

So, let's continue doing what we do so well – getting together and enjoying each other's company. I look forward very much to my time in the chair and the opportunity to meet as many members as possible at both regional and London events. ■



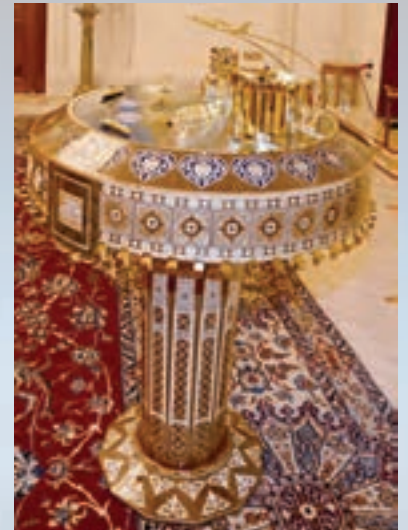
Before the Annual Dinner, COSSAF attended the Association Committee.

Left to right: Tim Jones, Neil Fawcett, John McKeown, Kieron Shaw, Hassan Al Mujaini, Ahmed Ambu-Saidi, COSSAF – Vice-Admiral Abdullah Khamis Al Raisi, Mike Lobb, Khalid Al Tobi, Greg Blunden, Said Al Shabibi, Keith Ryde and Gordon Allen.

52ND NATIONAL DAY

On the 18 November, **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**, the Supreme Commander, presided over a military parade staged at Al Nasr Square in the Governorate of Dhofar on the occasion of the 52nd Glorious National Day. The event saw the participation of 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), ground and mounted military music bands, as well as Firqa Forces.





ARMED FORCES DAY

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

The ceremony comes as an honour from 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.





ROYAL VISIT TO THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE



On 16 March, **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq**, the Supreme Commander, visited the Ministry of Defence and the headquarters of Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) at Al Murtafa'a Garrison. His Majesty the Sultan was received by **His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq bin Taimur Al Said**, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, and **Dr Mohammed Nasser Ali al Zaabi**, Secretary General of the Ministry of Defence.

His Majesty the Sultan was briefed about SAF's units by **COSSAF, Vice-Admiral Abdullah Khamis al Raisi**.



ROYAL VISIT TO THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE



During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan also posed for commemorative photos with senior officials and commanders in the Ministry of Defence and SAF and was presented with a gift by His Highness Sayyid Shihab. Later, His Majesty the Sultan visited the Joint Operations Centre (JOC) at the SAF headquarters.

Upon his arrival there, His Majesty the Sultan received a military salute from a guard of honour and heard a briefing about the facilities and capabilities of the JOC, as well as the tasks entrusted to it. The briefing was delivered by **Brigadier Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Mantheri**, SAF Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan heard a briefing about the Maritime Security Centre (MSC) and the tasks and responsibilities entrusted to it. The briefing was delivered by **Commodore Mohammed Hamoud Al Zedjali**, Commander of MSC.

During his visits to the JOC and MSC, His Majesty the Sultan posed for commemorative photos with senior officers of the headquarters, divisions of SAF and other administrative units of the Ministry of Defence.



ROYAL VISIT TO THE UNITED KINGDOM

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik offers his condolences on the death of Queen Elizabeth II and congratulates King Charles.



On 18 September, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik – may Allah preserve him – offered his condolences on the death of Queen Elizabeth II to **His Majesty King Charles III**, King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Head of the Commonwealth, and to **Camilla**, Queen Consort and members of the British Royal Family, when His Majesty was received at Buckingham Palace in London.

His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy following the death of Queen Elizabeth II, and gave his affirmation that the Sultanate of Oman stood by the United Kingdom at this sad time of national grief and mourning.

Thereafter, he offered his congratulations and best wishes to His Majesty The King on his accession to the throne, wishing him success in leading the nation of Britain.

His Majesty King Charles III in turn expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan for the sincerity of his feelings and wished him continued good health and wellbeing and continued progress and development for the people of Oman.

His Majesty the Sultan was accompanied during the offering of condolences by **Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal bin Saud Al Busaidi**, Minister of the Diwan of The Royal Court.



ROYAL VISIT TO ROYAL MILITARY ACADEMY SANDHURST

***His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik** patronised the graduation ceremony of the 222nd course of officers of Britain's Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst.*

On 23 July, **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik** was the Royal Guest at the Passing Out Parade for Commissioning Course Short 222 at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, UK.

His Majesty inspected the parade. His son, **His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said**, was one of the officer cadets graduating, seen below exchanging a smile with his father.

On his arrival at the Academy's headquarters, His Majesty the Sultan was received by **Major General Duncan Capps**, the Academy's Commandant.

At the parade ground, His Majesty the Sultan took the salute, accompanied by Major General Capps.

His Majesty the Sultan praised the high level of skills the officer cadets had acquired during their training at the Academy, calling on them to renew their determination and continue their efforts to achieve more for their countries.

His Majesty the Sultan also met the Omani officers studying in the Academy, and congratulated them on graduating. He stressed the importance of continuing to develop their skills, wishing them success in their future endeavours.



ROYAL MILITARY ACADEMY

His Majesty the Sultan presented a commemorative gift to Major General Capps, and, in turn, accepted a gift from the Commandant.

The graduation ceremony was also attended by **Her Highness The Honourable Lady**, the spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, **His Highness Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said** and the Ambassador of Oman to the United Kingdom.

Concluding his visit to the Academy, His Majesty wrote a message in its Visitors Book.



SAF ASSOCIATION DINNER

The Annual Dinner was held on 25 November 2022 at the Army and Navy Club in London. Eighty-four members and guests attended – despite the threat of a rail strike – to enjoy an excellent meal in the usual great style of “The RAG”!

We were delighted that our President, **Vice-Admiral Abdullah Khamis Al Raisi** was able to attend along with our Vice President **MRAF Lord Jock Stirrup**. They welcomed official guests including the newly arrived Omani Ambassador, **HE Badr Al Mantheri**, **ACM Sir Richard Johns** (former Chief of Air Staff and Hon Air Commodore of the RAF Regiment). Also, **Brigadier Richard Lyne** who liaises with SAF on behalf of UK MOD. It was good to also welcome Omani students currently attending RCDS in UK (**Hassan Al Balushi**, **Fahad Al Kindi** and **Masoud Al Riyami**). Importantly, we were delighted to welcome **Brigadier Hassan Al Mujaini** who is the Association’s key contact in COSSAF’s office and a valued friend working closely with our Committee member in Oman, **Ian Buttenshaw**.

As always we were pleased to welcome the Omani Defence team from the Embassy in London, **Brigadier Ahmed Ambu-Said** and **Captain Said Al Shabibi**. Also **Commanders Hamed Al Jabri**, **Ibrahim Al Saadi** and COSSAF’s **Flag Lieutenant Khalid Al Tobi**. It was indeed a real pleasure to welcome so many Omani friends to the dinner this year.



Sir Richard speaking and top table, Mike Lobb, COSSAF, Richard Lyne, HE Badr Al Mantheri, Ibrahim Al Saidi, Ahmed Ambu-Saidi and Tony Nicholson.

L-R Ahmed Ambu-Saidi, Ibrahim Al Saadi, Tony Nicholson, Sir Richard Johns and Lord Jock Stirrup.



SAF ANNUAL DINNER

After dinner, toasts were proposed to **HM King Charles** and **HM Sultan Haitham**. Also to absent friends. **Mike Lobb** then addressed us reflecting on another difficult year affected by the war in Ukraine, continuing restrictions from COVID and economic constraints. Nevertheless, he reported that the Association had recruited new members and maintained a busy programme of social and military support events which will be reported in the Journal.

He thanked **AVM Tony Nicholson**, who was standing down after 43 years service to the Committee, and wished him well.

We were then delighted to be addressed by **COSSAF** who expressed his nation's sincere condolences on the sad death of **HM Queen Elizabeth** and reflected on the great impact she had made on the whole world and the close relationship she enjoyed with the late **Sultan Qaboos**. He was particularly pleased that HM Sultan Haitham had visited London and been able to meet the Queen before she died. He looked forward to the two countries continuing close co-operation under the reign of HM King Charles. **COSSAF** stated his appreciation of all who have supported Oman in past difficult days which they will never forget and endorsed his continuing support of the Association announcing that he would be paying the entire bill for our Dinner which was met with huge applause! He ended by

saying how much he and Oman were looking forward to the forthcoming visit by Association members. Not surprisingly, he was given a standing ovation.

Mike Lobb introduced **Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Johns** who would present a painting to **COSSAF**.

Sir Richard, a previous Chief of the RAF (and Constable of Windsor Castle) had served in Aden in the 1960s and had flown his Hawker Hunter single seater up to Salalah and Masirah helping to



police the border between Yemen and Oman. He spoke with humour, obvious affection as well as enthusiasm and even some Arabic recalling those days. He also reflected on visiting later and meeting His late Majesty, Sultan Qaboos and admired the huge progress that had been made.

He explained that the RAF Regiment were very proud of the role they had played defending RAF Salalah from 1965 to 1976 (when it was still an RAF base) and supporting SAF. They had commissioned a painting to commemorate this action and he was honoured to be asked to present a copy of the painting to COSSAF which was duly unveiled. A toast was proposed to the SAF Association.

Members and guests then adjourned to the bar in the usual way. From immediate feedback (and more later) it was a very successful dinner. Congratulations to **Neil Fawcett** and all involved for great work behind the scenes. ■



ASSOCIATION TOUR TO OMAN 2022

by Gordon Allen

Planning had just started in earnest for the 2020 tour. But then, as a very fine Scottish poet noted: *"the best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men Gang aft a-gley"*... Covid struck! Visit postponed.

Even with the vaccination programme in full swing there was still too much uncertainty about international travel during 2021 and the decision was taken to re-set the date for December 2022. Inevitably, some original participants withdrew and the Reserve List was drawn on until the last moment.

But, we made it! Notwithstanding strikes, everybody checked in at Heathrow for the overnight flight on Saturday 3 December.

Seeb's splendid new VIP reception area hosted the Oman Air flight's dawn arrival on Sunday. The group was met by **Ameed Rukn Hassan bin Ali Al Mujaini** and **Ian Buttenshaw**. With them was our RAFO Escort Officer, **Naqeeb (Jaw) Qais bin Khamis Al Qasmi**. Qais would accompany us throughout. He was the epitome of confidence and unruffled charm from the outset – we were in good hands.

The tour launched in grand style with lunch at the Shafaq Club hosted by **COSSAF, Fareeq Rukn (Bah) Abdullah bin Khamis Al Raisi**. Thoughtfully, the Club's suites had been made available, offering a welcome opportunity to relax and refresh as well as a preview of 'home' later in the week.

Lunch was in the Shafaq Hall, standing alone in the Club's grounds. It's magnificent – great for all manner of large fuddles!

COSSAF greeted everybody informally, offering a welcome chance to chat with our senior Omani hosts and each other.



COSSAF meets Peter Sichel and Martin Robb

It was also very good to meet up again with our previous President, **Fareeq Rukn Ahmed Harith Al Nabhani**. He looked happily relaxed in retirement – and very pleased to see us all.

The Single Services were represented by **CRAFO, Liwa Rukn (Tay) Khamis bin Hammad Al Ghafri** and **CRNO, Liwa Rukn (Bah) Saif bin Nasser Al Rahbi**. Both were in great spirits. CRAFO had recently returned from the UK where he had been the Reviewing Officer at the graduation of the King's Squadron at Cranwell in early November. **CRAO, Liwa Rukn Matar bin Salim Al Balushi** was not able to attend but was represented by his **PSO, Ameed Rukn Salim bin Abdullah Al Housani**.

Astonishingly fresh from both the Oman Air flight and the preceding flight to the UK from Brisbane, **Mike Shanley** (known globally as **'Shambles'**) decided this was the moment to brief CRAFO on the story of the baby girl born in his Skyvan in August 1974. More of this in due course. CRAFO took detailed notes, and she may yet be identified?

Lunch was a banquet! Some 60 guests seated and a hospitality ethos that would shame most of the world's hotels.

Mike Lobb and I had been in Oman for a few days prior to the group's arrival – rebuilding continuity lost during Covid and meeting with the Defence Staff from the British Embassy and senior members of the current Loan Service team. We'd already had a practice run – an informal Shafaq lunch – with Ameed Hassan a few days before – so were well prepared. However, for the majority, a six-course event was a memorable start to eight days of exceptional and very generous hospitality.

COSSAF concluded the reception with a short welcome speech which fully acknowledged the Association's heritage and its role in the development of SAF through the years. Mike Lobb responded on behalf of the guests and presented COSSAF and the Heads of Service each with the Association's 2022 Tour Commemorative Plate which **John McKeown** had procured from **Susan Rose China** in Northamptonshire.



Mike presents our Commemorative Plate to COSSAF

A scheduled RAFO Airbus saw us safely on our way to Salalah – with most of the group asleep before take-off. On arrival it was only a brief ride to the Crowne Plaza, the Association's traditional Salalah haunt and our sanctuary for three days.

The hotel was much the same except for one 'modernisation'. The informal beach bar has been replaced by a two-storey block with a terrace on both levels: a buffet restaurant at beach height and an Italian café and bar upstairs. The food was good, but at a price! With the Omani Rial at about £2.20, drinking and dining, in hotels at least, is not for the faint-hearted.



The Crowne Plaza's new beach restaurant

Monday dawned – far too quickly! Under command of our confident (he had the map) and cheerful (he'd not yet met us) 11 Infantry Brigade escort officer, **Naqeeb Abdul Aziz bin Matar Al Dhuhli**, the convoy of ten Landcruisers gathered, completely blocking the hotel's driveway – nothing changes!

At this point I should touch on the group's composition. Back in 2019, it was agreed that the visit should comprise 30 members from as many eras as possible as well as a good number who had not been on a tour before. This was balanced against the need for the soothsayers and anecdote providers that every visit demands, particularly in the Dhofar phase. It was a good mix.

We were, though, 31 visitors in total. At the dinner at the RAG in November 2019, absent friends were remembered. The (then) **Ambassador, His Excellency Abdulaziz Al Hinai** and COSSAF, General Ahmed Harith, were told of **Siobahn Barnes**, daughter of **Johnny Braddell-Smith**. Siobhan hardly knew her father when he was killed and had never visited Dhofar. Sharing a nod with General Ahmed, His Excellency insisted on the spot that Siobhan should be invited on the tour.

Thus, with Ian and the two escort officers, we were 34 in all. The more alert members of the group rapidly grasped the mathematics of ten Landcruisers between 34 passengers and were quick to seal themselves into vehicles in groups of three. However, some

rapid re-shuffling and firm direction eventually saw everybody seated – and we were off.

The first stop was Headquarters 11 Infantry Brigade, our hosts for the three days in Dhofar. We were welcomed by the **Brigade Commander, Ameer Rukn Hamid bin Abdullah Al Balushi** and given a short briefing on the Brigade's roles. It touched on a number of joint exercises with allies, emphasising those with the UK. It was then proudly announced that Brigade units had been the 'adoo' on *Exercise Saif Sareea 3...* and they'd won!

On behalf of the Association, John McKeown made a short speech thanking the Commander and his staff for what had been a superb introduction to Dhofar and for facilitating all the ground aspects of our three days there.

John's words were faithfully translated – up to the moment when, well into his stride, he expressed eternal bi-national bonding with: *"May the friendship of our two States remain 'unshook till the end of time', and till the sun and moon have finished their revolving career"...*

Not missing a beat, the translator smiled, took a deep breath, and said in charming Arabic *"we'll be friends for ever"...*

Then it was outside for coffee, dates and halwa, and a relaxed chat with the Brigade staff.

Day One in Dhofar is an excellent scene-setter for the early 1970s. The well-planned tour of key sites in the Central Area allows a comprehensive overview of those early years of the war and a nod to operations further West.

We drove first to Diana 1 where Ian Buttenshaw briefed on the significance of the Diana Line: established initially to counter the threat of RCL attacks against Salalah airfield in early 1973 and then providing forward bases for local operations on the jebel.



Commander 11 Brigade after the briefing

Ian Buttenshaw pointing out the sights



What makes any visit memorable – and always different from its predecessors – are the anecdotes. In mid-'73, **Tim Jones** and his JR Company had just redeployed to Salalah as Brigade reserve after three months of holding Yardarm on Sarfait.

He told us: *"I was immediately tasked with a night operation to picket two parallel ridge lines leading up from the Plain to Diana 1 by dawn, to secure a low-level heli resupply route for the following day. Lt Col Nigel Knocker, CO DR, then acting Brigade Commander, had ordered that we should multi-task by taking laden donkeys with us – to save valuable heli lifts."*

The wadi between the two picketed ridges was to be avoided due to the threat of mines. Silence would be vital, and this was no longer just a night picketing task! However, Tim knew his donkeys. They were prone to braying, especially heavily-laden and being coaxed up a slippery, muddy ridgeline at night in the monsoon drizzle! With a stroke of innovative genius he arranged for them to be fed bags of RAF NAAFI sugar as the move progressed – to occupy both their minds and their mouths.



Tim Jones in the rocks on Diana One

The plan worked! Braying was minimised – and silence would have been achieved had it not been for Murphy's law of equal and opposite effects. What goes in, comes out: in this case, reportedly, very noisily...

Tim's full account in the 2015 Journal is well worth re-reading: by any measure it was quite a night. **Ian Ventham** then picked up the theme for the Gunners. Diana 1 not only protected Salalah from further direct RCL attack, but it allowed artillery to be moved forward, well beyond the airfield perimeter.

For the first time, there was consistent and reliable artillery cover onto the jebel proper: and with Cracker Battery providing the FOO parties on the Dianas, limited Oman Artillery resources could be deployed elsewhere.

Mike Goodfellow shared reminiscences of the Central Area, having been collocated with Iranian troops a little further east at Jasmine 5. His experiences were a sharp reminder of the challenges of handling major differences in culture and training.

However, Iranian logistics – on which Mike relied – were very good, if slightly unpredictable. He wrote later: *"It was normal to wash clothing in petrol – which was more plentiful than water. And, on a special occasion, some rather splendid vodka materialised at breakfast."* A pragmatic approach to hygiene and an open mind were certainly the order of the day!

These insights really brought alive the significance of the Diana Line and had everybody focused on the realities of jebel warfare in the early days. Basic maps, poor communications, unreliable resupply, limited casevac, unpredictable allies, endless foot-slogging on jagged terrain – and an awful lot of luck.

Before we left, **Dick Allen** recalled a Mayday he'd sent, piloting his AB 205 heli to the Dianas in September '74 for a routine water burmail lift. In those days, with the European market in mind, the 205 was fitted with a 12v cigar lighter – for the co-pilot of course! Dick explained that it had an added gizmo (he thinks a 'dropper resistor') to make it work with the 24v aircraft system.

His co-pilot that day was **Steve Watson**, an ex-RM contract officer and cigarette smoker. There was little navigating to be done: the Dianas could be seen from Salalah airfield. So, at a couple of hundred feet, with nothing else to do, Steve decided to light up and pushed the lighter firmly home in the socket. With no warning the gizmo failed – and the lighter sizzled.

Incendiary events are never good in helis. Dick recalls the Mayday call: *"Mayday, Mayday, Chopper 715, emergency landing just north of the airfield... errr... my co-pilot's cigar lighter has caught fire!"* Perhaps unsurprisingly, this elicited the confused reply from Air Traffic: *"715, Roger... say again all after Mayday!"* Dick admitted it was one of his more embarrassing Mayday moments – and he's had a few!

As we were about to leave, a rather nonchalant camel came across to ask **Peter Sichel** a couple of difficult questions! They seemed to be speaking the same language...



We left for the next position, Jibjat. These days, the road trip across the jebel is about as confusing as it gets. We went through Hagaif – an infantry company base and gun position in early 1975 – and couldn't identify anything! Crossing later under the Midway Road, now a four-lane motorway, was a bit of a shock for those who hadn't been back for nearly 50 years.

At Jibjat, Ian Buttenshaw briefed on *Operation Jaguar* in October 1971 and Peter Sichel described the SAS-led action in detail. They painted a clear picture of this initial turning point of the war – the domination of the Eastern and Central Areas.

Jibjat had proved an effective airhead from where major operations were launched in and around the notorious Wadi Darbat, forcing the *adoo* off the high ground which they ceded to SAF. The subsequent establishment of the position at Madinat Al Haq (White City), just 14 kms to the south-west, was the first time that SAF had taken and held a position on the jebel.

But Madinat Al Haq was not only of major military significance: it was the first permanent centre for elementary government civil aid and services on the jebel. 'Hearts and Minds' had arrived. It was our next destination – the site of the old airstrip.

Enter **Martin Robb**, centre stage, who had not been back to Oman since he and **Jenny** left in 1984. History relates that by 1974 there was a keen sense of urgency behind the aspirations to deliver civil aid across the jebel on a broad scale. Martin was then 2i/c of Muscat Regiment.

He recalls: *"General Creasey asked me if I would be interested in being appointed to spearhead a Civil Government support initiative on the jebel. The subject was to be discussed with HM Sultan Qaboos with me in attendance."* No pressure then!

He continued: *"HM agreed to my appointment and to providing married accommodation..."* That clinched it! Martin then gave a riveting talk on how the civil aid development programme came into being, developing into the prime mover of winning over the jebalis and facilitating a lasting peace.



Martin and HE Wali Braik inspect plans in 1974

Delivery of civil aid had to be carefully coordinated with the military effort – not least for security. It was a highly sensitive potential game-changer for local beneficiaries. Jebel politics were key: so visibly fair (rather than logical) distribution was vital. Decades ahead of its time, it was a signally mature concept of customer service!

To that end, the 'Dhofar Development Committee' was formed; chaired by **HE Sheikh Braik**, Minister of State and Wali of Dhofar. The Committee met weekly and was attended by Commander Dhofar Brigade (then **John Akehurst**); Head of Dhofar Intelligence, **Bob Brown**; Commander Firqat Forces, **Colin McLean**; and Martin, as Head of the brand-new Civil Aid Department (CAD).

Martin's talk brought civil aid alive. The far-reaching programme ranged from tented camps to proper buildings, well-drilling, schools, health clinics, food distribution, animal welfare, and a huge logistic chain. By the end of 1975 there were 11 Government centres on the jebel. By 1978 CAD reached from Tawi Atair to Khadrafi, across the Negd and along the coastline as far as the Khuryia Muriya Islands. 63 centres, 64 wells and a dedicated airlift operation in support.



The Hagaif well drilling – 540 metres deep

Martin generously paid tribute to Peter Sichel, previously BATT and Firqat, who had joined CAD in April 1976 and conducted the first ever population census of the jebel. The analysis it offered was of major significance. He also spoke with great fondness of **Robin Huntingdon** whose 'patch' was the Negd; **Shaun Brogan**, also ex-BATT, who ran logistics; **Dr Catherine Brogan** with her Flying Doctor service; and **Paddy Hoon** who developed the services to the coastal villages.

Despite the overwhelming changes he was witnessing for the first time, and the intense emotion of seeing how much had been achieved from such humble origins, Martin gave a remarkable and unforgettable briefing under the trees next to the old airstrip. It was a rare privilege to hear the story of the origins of CAD from the man who led it from the outset and made it all happen.

White City was notable for other reasons. Peter Sichel told the story of the 'Flying Finger' – the firqa in the co-pilot's seat of a heli, tasked with identifying *adoo* hideouts from the air by the simple means of pointing. How well they could read a map is unknown. And were targets really *adoo*, or just a convenient means of settling a family squabble? Regardless: once identified, a pair of lurking Strikies would be called in to deliver retribution.

Before we left our picnic patch at the site of the old airstrip, Peter and **James Ayliffe** discovered how to take a 'Selfie'. They had last seen each other at Makinat Shihan in 1975.



"You haven't changed a bit"

Our route back to Salalah ran via Tawi Atair. We stopped for a short briefing about the water-hole and the pumping arrangements put in place to secure a permanent water supply.

Back at the Crowne Plaza, **Greg Blunden**, our newest Committee member, had volunteered a presentation on the Battle of Mirbat. The fort is arguably over-visited and in disrepair, and tours are no longer able to travel there to discuss the events of 19 July 1972 on the ground.

Greg's talk was fascinating: very well-researched and delivered fluently, it captivated the group. He concluded by sharing a glimpse of his upbringing as a PDO offspring. Presenting a bouquet of flowers to **Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II** during her visit to Oman in 1979 had been a childhood highlight.



Greg presents his bouquet

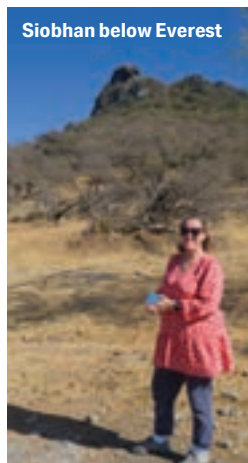
It was any five-year old's dream: a lovely photo – and a shame to have excluded it from this report!

The long haul to Sarfait saw a very early start on Tuesday 6 December. It doesn't seem to matter how many times one travels the route, it's still breath-taking. Magnificent terrain and incredible road engineering.

Our first stop was at Iraqi, a few miles short of Defa. It's a small community at the northern end of what was, in 1975, the Iranian-held Damavand Line. In December 1974, Mike Lobb and Johnny Braddell-Smith had spearheaded the Iranian advance to the south, each leading their Firqas.

Now, Mike and Siobhan, accompanied by their own armed escort vehicle, headed south to Azar (Everest). At the time, this was a major Iranian-held feature that dominated the track to the south, down a series of scarps, to Raykhut on the coast.

They took the route south from Everest, down the steep face to the site below, where Johnny had been killed on 25 December 1974 – and very near where Mike had been wounded the following day. That private, very personal visit is not for this article, save to say that Siobhan at last has closure, in that she has seen where her father fell. And after nearly 50 years, Mike has honoured his friend.



Siobhan below Everest

The main group pressed on to Defa. Ian Buttenshaw talked through various operations – dating from the late 1960s – for which Defa had served as start-line, gun position and haven. Those operations are well-documented: but perhaps less well-known is the account of the loss of Heli 713 that fell victim to a surface-to-air missile, a SAM 7b, on 31 October 1975.

Kieron Shaw had subsequently been tasked to head the Board of Inquiry, with Dick Allen as the other member, and he picked up the story.

The arrival of the SAM 7 had been a huge concern: not just in terms of the direct threat to aircraft but also because of the implications for air support for the imminent post-monsoon ground operations.

It's first use on 19 August 1975 forced **Roger Furlong**, flying a Strikemaster, to eject near Sherishitti. He was extracted in an incident of some bravery by **David Long**, flying an AB 205 heli that was fortunately close to hand. On 29 September, another Strikemaster, flown by **Robin Russell**, was hit, but he just managed to land the damaged aircraft at Manston.



Kieron at Defa

The atmosphere at SOAF Salalah became rapidly creative! Much thought was given to reducing aircraft vulnerability by modifications and the adoption of different operational tactics. Particularly, under new procedures, a heli was deployed each time the Strikies went up – to effect a quick rescue if required.

Kieron explained that on 31 October, **Flight Lieutenants John Heathcote** and **Roger Boyce** and their Omani crewman, **Mohammed Jaber**, were on standby at Salalah. They launched in the afternoon in heli 713 in support of two Strikemasters scrambled to deal with incoming RCL fire in the western area. When the incident was over, they turned towards Raykhut intending to land and refuel.

There was some uncertainty over the operational performance of the SAM 7 missiles, so they flew at what had been estimated to be a safe altitude of some 11,000 feet above ground level. About 4 kms south-east of Gunlines, several missiles were fired at the aircraft, downing it. The crash site was not reachable by ground troops at that time, but helicopters were flown close to the wreckage in an attempt to ascertain whether any of the crew had survived: it was apparent that they had not.

Dick commented that, although it had taken until mid-December eventually to recover the bodies, all were buried with full military honours. Mohammed Jaber at Umm al Gwarif; and John and Roger at the PDO Cemetery in Muscat.

At about that time, a significant member of the *adoo* surrendered. He was one of the newly-trained SAM operators and had stored several missiles in a cave near Defa. They were recovered and subjected to technical analysis. It was only then that it was discovered that they were not the conventional SAM 7a missiles, but an up-rated version, subsequently designated SAM 7b. It was no wonder that the missile performance had surpassed anything that had initially been anticipated.

The story does not quite finish there. Kieron continued: *"Many years later, working at a large foundation of independent schools, I was invited to lunch following an inspection of one of the schools by the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference. Talking with one of the visitors, the conversation moved to an ongoing terrorist hijacking at Stansted Airport. The visitor mentioned that his brother-in-law had been a military officer and had died in Oman. The visitor was John Heathcote's brother-in-law."*

As the family members were unsure about the circumstances and had never visited the grave, Kieron, former members of 3 Squadron, SOAF, and Ian Buttenshaw had been able to explain the events.

But the coincidences don't end there, either. On that fateful day, 31 October 1975, Kieron needed to travel to Manston. He'd been to the heli crew room: Roger and John had said that they were on standby and might be able to go in an hour once they had handed over. They would let him know.

Much to his frustration, just 40 minutes later he heard the unmistakable whine of the 205 taking off, leaving him behind. They'd been scrambled in support of the Strikies and hadn't had time to allow Kieron to board. He told us: *"I was really fuming at them for about 30 minutes... and then I heard the radio..."*

It was the first time I had heard Kieron speak of this: not just the loss of three colleagues and friends, but of his own very sobering experience. It emphasised the very fine margins that were so often experienced in Dhofar. Whether by design or chance, his commit-

ment and sense of purpose in these later years reflect deep gratitude for a thread unsevered.

It served as yet another example on the visit of important links that had not been widely shared. And, in that vein, **Grania Howard** (daughter of **Lt Col Peter Thwaites**, CO MR 1967) sent me a photograph after the visit: *"On Defa, walking in my father's footsteps after 55 years. Quite emotional really..."* Another reminder that Oman means so much to so many.

Grania at Defa – a special moment



The group then drove the short distance to Stonehenge. We arrived on the edge, overlooking... just about everything!

Stonehenge and the adjacent Point 980 had been key positions along the route (AKA massive spur) that hosted mopping up operations directed at Sherishitti and the Darra Ridge at the very end of the war. Stonehenge offers a grandstand view (that the *adoo* also enjoyed!) of the terrain directly to the south of Sherishitti towards the Shirawaz Ridge and the sea beyond.

The latter ridge, just east of the Wadi Sayq and Dhalqut, was the LZ for *Operation Said*, the Iranian Brigade's helicopter-borne assault on 17 October 1975. Ian had asked me to talk about this. I had been the SAF FOO/FAC for the first five days of the operation, having spent several months with the Iranians at Iraqi and Everest prior to and during the monsoon that year.

It was difficult to frame the realities of that rather uncomfortable landing, and what followed, while gazing over the peaceful grassland, roads and settlements of 2022. Not *surreal* – an over-used word if ever there was one – but just a bit awkward.

So, instead, I briefly told the story of the Iranian naval gunfire support team who had flown in hours before the main assault, woken up the Sherishitti *adoo*, and unhelpfully sacrificed any possible element of surprise that we might have enjoyed. I summed up *"...by the time we flew in, it was clear that the adoo were quite cross,"* and left it at that.

It was now late morning and we had to press on to Sarfait. We were met by CO NFR, **Mqm Rukn Waleed bin Musabah Al Subaihi**. Our first stop was the old Mainbrace position. Ian briefed on the original occupation of Sarfait, Operation Simba, by DR in April 1972. Tim Jones had been there with JR, initially on Yardarm in 1973. He gave a fascinating account of routine contacts and the ever-present mortar and RCL threat.

Perhaps the most compelling memory was Dick Allen sharing the desperate moment when the heli he was piloting crashed in the wadi next to the airstrip with jammed flight controls on 28 August

1973 at 1315 (the time his watch stopped!). He regained consciousness being freed from the wreckage by members of JR who raced down the wadi side to the rescue; and was carried, shattered leg and all, back up the side of the wadi for treatment and casevac. Only three of the five crew survived the crash: Dick walks unevenly to this day.

It was quite something to see Dick together with Tim (who was commanding Mainbrace that day and part of the rescue) – both re-living not so much a bad dream *"we thought Dick was dead"* but just quietly enjoying each other's company at the scene almost 50 years later. *Alhamdulillah!*

A Sarfait reunion – Tim and Dick



After a short drive across the plateau, we called in for a quick look around the Museum and then moved to the cliffside terrace and Officers' Mess – on the site of what had previously been the command post at Black 1. It is still a dramatic setting, with the main building and terrace almost directly overlooking Capstan – and then tens of miles of Dhofar to the east and the Yemen border to the west.

Ian Buttenshaw talked through the post-monsoon operations of 1975, when MR had successfully taken and held positions around Capstan and, after being reinforced by companies from KJ and FF, down to the sea. The Brigade diversionary plan – *Operation Kahoof* – became the main effort, effectively sealing the border.

In very large part, the success of *Kahoof* lay in MR's confidence that a descent from the top of Sarfait, by night, down cliffs and mined wadis, was actually feasible. This had been gained through exploratory patrols during the earlier part of the year (in May and June) when company-level ambush operations had been conducted to disrupt not just *adoo* supplies but their sense of domination of the area below the cliffs.

We were fortunate to have **John Paxman** with us. I'd last been with John on Sarfait in 2010. He kept his thoughts very much to himself then, merely musing (as we reported in the 2011 article) on his reflections over the 35 years since he'd last gazed over the cliff edge wondering what the next 24 hours would bring as he prepared to make the very dangerous night descent.

On this occasion, though, John shared the very personal accounts of the mine casualties those earlier exploratory patrols had suffered. A member of the firqa and, on a subsequent patrol, an MR soldier. MR had proved beyond doubt that the descents were possible – and thereby paved the way for the success of *Operation Kahoof* – but at great cost.

At the end of October, shortly after the Iranian operation, I had flown to Capstan to support C Company MR at the nearby Deem waterhole. **Ian Gordon**, essentially the author of the Capstan plan, was the company commander, and John his 2ic.

ASSOCIATION TOUR TO OMAN

Deem Waterhole – John, Gordon and Steve Lewis



I had felt in good hands straight away (always nice for a Gunner!) but knew little of what had gone before. It is only now, while writing this, that I begin to grasp the immense courage they shrugged off as everyday professionalism and how incredibly modest they both were – and are still.

Ian holds John in the highest esteem. He wrote to me recently: *"I was lucky to have John as my 2ic. He was operationally enterprising and eager to engage with the adoo. A less determined man might have given weight to my own fears and concerns for my new and untested company and counselled too much caution. Happily, John and I complemented each other well."*

David Bills, commander of the rapidly imported KJ company, recalled that within 24 hours of landing they had taken four positions between Capstan and the sea. The speed and success of the operation surprised everybody – not least the *adoo*, who didn't react during that vital first day of consolidation.

There was a bitter-sweet moment, too, remembering that gathered there in 2010, **Knobby Reid**, humble and modest as ever, had quietly and undramatically explained the mine-clearing process. It was a vital element of so many operations and fitting to mention again here as a tribute to all those incredibly brave SAF Engineers, sometimes unsung but never forgotten. Knobby's obituary, in the 2012 Journal, says it all.

It was time for lunch. Since we last saw the Mess area in 2015, Omani ingenuity has extended the cliff-top terrace to create a new outside dining area under a camouflage canopy! It's spectacular. Seating for at least 50 and an unequalled view.



Qais and his flock relaxing on Sarfait

After lunch, Tim Jones thanked the CO and it was time for the next excitement. The journey back to Salalah was to be in a pair of RAFO NH 90 helis. They arrived on time – one landing on the pad across the road from the mess and the other on the road itself. Almost up to 3 Sqn standards!



NH 90 landing at (on?) the Mess!

Our return flight over tracts of barren jebel was spectacular. We dropped in as planned at Ashoq, one of the southern positions of the Hornbeam Line about 5 miles north of Mughsayl.

Ian attempted to brief here but one of our helis was playing up: its u/s auxiliary power unit meant it could not shut down. It was all too apparent that even Ian's voice couldn't win that battle, so we settled for a quick walk round the command bayt – still there!

Dick Allen provided an unplanned but irresistible photo opportunity: walking away from a landing without a bent aircraft in sight! The photographer: Tim Jones! All in all, it had been a long day. We were happy to call it quits and remount for the last leg to Salalah and our hotel.



At Ashoq: Dick walking away from a heli!

Our final day in Dhofar arrived all too quickly. We were to visit Taqah and Wadi Darbat before having lunch at RAFO Salalah and taking the onward flight to Musandam. The fort at Taqah is in good repair and open for tourism. We took over the outside balcony and enjoyed an excellent briefing from Ian Buttenshaw on the town's significance back in 1972.

Peter Sichel discussed early days there with BATT, and Ian Ventham described his gun position just forward of the beach. Impossible to see nowadays despite the splendid view over the area from the fort, but still so easy to picture.

The group at Taqah



Ian caused considerable mirth describing a tricky situation he found himself in – a conflict of urgent pressures – caused by the requirement to conduct an immediate fire mission while suffering from dysentery – with a very upset tum. He wrote to me after the visit: *"I was actually seriously ill and lost 3 stone in as many weeks. In another time or place I'd have been in hospital, but there was no relief – in either sense!"*

Standing waist-deep in the sea with a radio was pure innovation, if a touch anti-social! But it was hardly a tourist beach then, so no harm done – and it's all part of our unique history.

And the latter is so important. Recording that history, with all its quirks, remains an enduring priority. If we, the Association, don't do this, nobody else will: at least not accurately.

Back in the UK, I googled Taqah Fort. A rather simplified entry in August 2019 from **'hulagirlSurrey'** on TripAdvisor ran: *"Taqah Castle was built in the 19th century. It is now a museum. There are lots of exhibits to see. Small fee to enter".*

It re-emphasised for me how crucially important it is that visits like this are followed up with articles, and the anecdotes captured. Amusing and unembellished as they are, they're all part of our legacy. So, we shall continue to record history faithfully: beach-side command posts, runny Gunners and all!

Before we left, **Bill de Bass**, as dryly amusing as ever, gave a short talk on a subject he'd been reviewing recently.

His theme was battlefield medical behaviour being driven by the 'Golden Hour' concept – and the implications especially for risky aerial casevac from LZs still under fire. His firm view being that the argument hangs not, in fact, on time – but on blood.

Bill de Bass at Taqah Fort



Of 100 battle casualties treated at 55 FST, almost all were treated well outside that hour. He said: *"They had immediate simple care which generally involved first field dressings to stop haemorrhage, and all survived even though their surgery was delayed by up to thirty hours. This is exemplified by the cohort treated after the battle at Mirbat."*

Typically, Bill had reduced some highly technical medical considerations into simple concepts. And, as always when listening to him, you come away completely in awe!

We moved on to Wadi Darbat. It had been a particularly damp autumn and the jebel was still well dressed in green. As we drove to the far car park area we passed the wadi in flow above the Falls. It was simply beautiful.



Wadi Darbat in flow

Peter Sichel explained the area's significance with a light-hearted tease: *"In late 1971 / early 1972 the Wadi Darbat was an adoo hot-spot, and our visits to Shuheit during Op Jaguar were met with fierce resistance."*

"When a BATT patrol finally succeeded in walking from Shuheit down the Wadi Darbat and on down to Taqah, a wag in UAG sent out a signal. It stated that 'to commemorate the event, a special medal was being struck, made out of captured adoo weapons, and would only be awarded to those who had actually set foot in the wadi bottom'."

"This was generally treated with the contempt it deserved. However, one troop officer compiled a lengthy signal essentially stating that 'while he and his troop had not actually set foot in the wadi bottom, those who had would not have been able to, had he and his troop not picketed the sides of the wadi. Therefore, he and his troop deserved a medal'."

"This was pinned up on the squadron notice board to everyone's delight."

Nick Ofield recalled the same period. He spoke of *Operation Cyclops* during the first week of March '72. A night move of 2 Company JR across the Darbat to secure the eastern bank, enabling 3 Company JR and the Firqa then to search the wadi.

The quantity of food, ammunition, medical supplies, mines etc recovered was the largest haul so far found by SAF, and a severe blow to the *adoo*.

Before we left for Salalah, we took the opportunity to thank our 11 Brigade escort officer, Naqeeb Abdul Aziz, and the drivers who had looked after us so well for our three days in the South. The group had brought out small presents for the drivers for the occasion and these were greatly appreciated.

We arrived in good time at RAFO Salalah and were met by the acting station commander, **Mqm Rukn (Tay) Matar Al Balushi** on behalf of the station commander **Ameed Rukn Saud bin Hamid Al Maouli**.

The briefing on the history and roles of RAFO Salalah was short, sharp and full of information and humour. It was delivered by **Raaid (Tay) Haitham Al Balushi** who had been one of our NH 90 pilots the day before.

Older SOAF hands will not be surprised that 3 Sqn still has most of the helis (apart from the NH 90) – now Bell 406, and the 429 for advanced training; 5 Sqn operates air transport – mainly Airbus and C-130; and 17 Sqn operates the NH 90.

ASSOCIATION TOUR TO OMAN 2022

There was a striking similarity to the 11 Brigade briefing on the previous Monday in the way services to the civilian community were described. Search and rescue and medical evacuation featured on both occasions – and disaster relief (particularly after cyclones) anywhere South of Latitude 20° N.

This theme would be echoed at HQ Musandam later that day. Throughout the tour, civilian support was presented as a cultural commitment – no red tape procedures to be gone through: just a simple, straightforward 'this is what we do'.

Raaid Haitham explained that he was compiling a history of Salah Station and would be grateful for photographs, documents or any other information to help the project. His briefing started with a photograph of a Fairy III in 1930!

He suggested that initial contact by email would be best, if members feel they can contribute: hythm.blch@gmail.com

Haitham has stayed in touch and I'm delighted to report that he was promoted to Mqm (Tay) on 11 December. Congratulations!

Lunch was welcome – a superb buffet in a cathedral-like new dining hall that had only been open for four days. **Allan McLoughlin** made a short speech and presentation to the station commander, both well-received. There's no doubt that RAFO Salah did us proud and we were very grateful for everything they did to support the Association's visit.



Allan McLoughlin and Mqm Matar Al Balushi

Instead of a direct flight to Khasab, a slight change of plan saw us return to Muscat on the scheduled Airbus and change there for the regular C-130 flight to Musandam.

The three days in Salah had flown by. Much had been seen, and much talked about. Tales of both good luck and misfortune; amazing sights and experiences, especially for those who had not been back to Oman previously; memories re-lived; the CAD programme brought alive for the first time; and a very special moment for Siobhan and Mike at Everest. *Allah kareem.*

It was dark by the time we landed at Khasab. We were surprised that our two-minibus convoy had a head and tail armed vehicle escort and police blocks at road junctions – blue lights flashing – all to get us to the hotel. But, we were running late...

Checking in to the Atana hotel saw a quick turnaround and we were immediately off again to Headquarters Musandam Sector (HQ MS). Our host, the Commander of HQ MS, **Aqeed Rukn Mohammed bin Said Al Kindi** was an old friend of Ian Buttenshaw's, and this set the tone for a most pleasant, informal evening.

The short joint land/air briefing on the sector's military

responsibilities echoed much of what we had heard in Salah. There was significant focus on working with other agencies in support of civilian services, as well as a synopsis of a very recent series of exercises with UK forces.

I'd forgotten what an eye-catching setting the Officers' Mess enjoys. Dinner was a buffet and we sat under the stars.



The buffet under attack

Our appreciation was expressed by Peter Sichel who made a short speech – in perfect Arabic (he said!) – and presented the commemorative plate to the Commander. And so to bed.

Thursday dawned, sunny and windless. Breakfast was laid on a terrace overlooking the bay – another superb vista. Tempting just to linger at the Atana... for the whole morning!

The early bus ride took us to Khasab Port where the armed support vessel *RNOV Al Mubshir* was waiting for us to embark. Her commander, **Raaid (Bah) Hassan Salim Al Bahri** (the perfect name for a sailor) greeted us before leaving us in the capable hands of his newly-joined Logistics Officer **Naqeeb (Bah) Ali Al Sabaa Al Jabri** and the crew, to settle us in the forward saloon and on the foredeck.



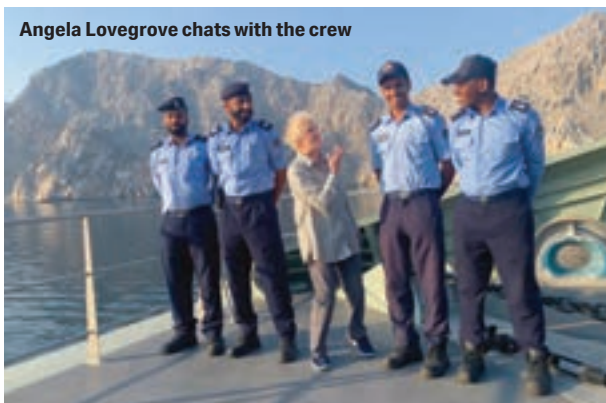
Embarking 'Al Mubshir' at Khasab

Our mini-cruise was to be via Telegraph Island, just round the corner from Khasab Port in the adjacent Khawr A'Shamm, and then onwards up the west coast to Goat Island, the north-western most tip of Oman. After visiting the RNO's Ra's Musandam base there we would sail back to Khasab: a round trip of some 35 nautical miles but in easy stages.

Standing at the rail with **Penny Lobb** as we approached Telegraph Island, she reminded me of the origins of the expression *'going round the bend'* as we looked at this lifeless 130-metre-long rock lying bare under the intense sun.

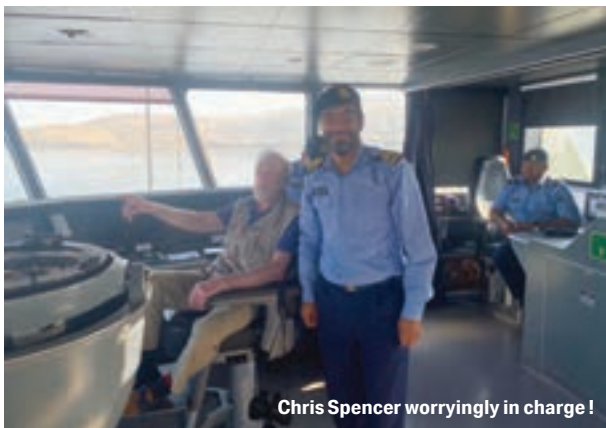
I knew the story, but not the sequel – that unfortunate (by then deranged) telegraph operators were shipped off to a hospital in India at Deolali near Bombay. It had served as a British medical facility in the late 19th century, particularly for those suffering mental illnesses as a result of contracting some unspeakable fever. Hence *'gone doolally'*. Penny took great care to explain it to me. Was she trying to tell me something?

Al Mubshir turned gracefully away and we set our course for Goat Island. Time to tour the boat and chill. The crew went out of their way to look after us and were fascinated by **Angela Lovegrove's** tales of the 1980s and '90s.



Angela Lovegrove chats with the crew

Nowhere aboard was off-limits but it was a slight concern to see that Hassan had allowed **Chris Spencer** on the bridge and he appeared to be in command as we approached the naval base!



Chris Spencer worryingly in charge!

We docked at Goat Island at 1030. Ashore we were met by the base commander, **Ameed Rukn (Bah) Abdullah bin Sultan Al Jabri** and his staff. After breakfast we visited the compact operations centre where we were briefed by the duty officer, **Naqeeb Abdul Aziz Mohammed Al Alawi**. A graduate of Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth in 2014, his English was excellent and the briefing fascinating.

He talked through the roles and responsibilities of RNO in that highly sensitive and narrow waterway at the extreme end of Oman's 1,700 nautical miles of coastline. While ready for anything, most RNO response activity seemed to be triggered by commercial vessels trying to shortcut the Traffic Separation Scheme in the Strait of Hormuz. Better than pirates!

Before we left the base, **David Bell** thanked Ameed Abdullah on our behalf. RNO's hospitality had set the bar very high indeed. After presenting our plate, David was given a splendid, framed model of a dhow.



A very happy David Bell

All too soon, we re-embarked, seen off by the immaculately turned-out figure of **Master-At-Arms, Wkl Rashid Ahmed Al Malki**. He had overseen our docking procedure earlier – pace-stick bristling and clearly not a man to be taken lightly!

Here he makes sure that David really does leave the premises!



"Just making sure you're really leaving, Sir"

The return voyage was yet another very pleasant sojourn – marked by a light lunch (yes, more food!) after which **Neil Fawcett** made a short speech in appreciation and presented our plate to the captain. We docked at Khasab, all genuinely sorry to say farewell to Al Mubshir and her superb crew.

We had been privileged to enjoy such a memorable and very generous visit with the Royal Navy of Oman. It had been an exceptional day. I try to avoid

hackneyed expressions such as *'they really pushed the boat out'*, but they did!

On the bus from the harbour, John McKeown claimed a medical first: *"I took two Stugeron tablets before we embarked, and nobody was sick!"*

We paid a brief visit to the fort before moving to the airport for our flight back to Muscat. The C-130s are based at Musanah, near Rustaq, so our flight ended there and we were driven – at some speed – by bus to Seeb.



Hearts and Minds on the C-130...

The Shafaq staff were there in force, many having stayed late so that our check-in went as smoothly as possible – a gesture greatly appreciated by all after another eventful day.

Friday 9 December, juma, was a touring day and an opportunity to visit the Sultan of Oman's Artillery (SOA) at Izki and then the Jebel Akhdar Battle Training Centre (JABTC) at Saiq.

At Izki, we were met by the SO1 Artillery from Army HQ at Muaskar Al Murtafa (MAM), **Mqm Zahir Al Shereiqi**, standing in for the commander. He gave an interesting briefing on Oman's artillery and unit titles through the ages, then led us to the Officers' Mess garden for breakfast in a charming setting.

Ian Ventham thanked Mqm Zahir for hosting us and presented him with his own original Oman Artillery shoulder slides, complete with the original jaysh rank insignia. These were accompanied by some prints of Ian's original photographs of guns in Dhofar. It was a lovely personal gesture and greatly appreciated by both hosts and visitors.



Ian – and a very generous gesture

As we were leaving, Angela Lovegrove remembered that she'd established the original Izki Medical Centre. This was an opportunity not to be missed and she was whisked away on a quick private tour! She wrote after the visit: *"In 1992 there were 24 external married quarters for Omani families about 3 kms from the camp. A weekly well-attended clinic was held in a portacabin adjacent to the medical centre. In those days the medical centre had an office, small ward, a treatment room and waiting area. At 9 am, the kitchen would send us a huge breakfast dish of meat and rice which we left in the waiting area for the local families including some from Jebel Akhdar. This, I felt, was the main attendance attraction, particularly for the families from the surrounding area!"*

"My visit to the 'new' medical centre on the trip was amazing. The MO was on his day off, but I was escorted by a wonderful medical assistant. The tour was very brief but very impressive. The medical centre had modern equipment and facilities including a 5-bed ward, a 'special' ward, pharmacy, MO office and treatment rooms."

An unexpected highlight – happy memories indeed.

It was time to move on and climb the long, winding Jabal Akhdar road to Saiq. We visited Wadi Bani Habib and saw the old village. Ian gave a short brief on the SAS approach route to Saiq during their assault in January 1959. You can't help but wonder: basic maps, just a compass, pitch black and treacherous mountain terrain – how on earth?

From here we drove back past Suleyman's Cave to the Venom crash site area and saw the grave of **Flt Lt Owen Watkinson** and the remains of his aircraft which crashed on 28 August 1958. We then headed to 'Diana's View', next to the new Anantara Hotel, which overlooks the Wadi Salut and the Terraces.

The formidable terrain of Jabal Akhdar



Mike Shanley shared an emotional account of dropping down from Saiq to Firk, at the foot of Jabal Akhdar, in his Skyvan overloaded with a last-minute medical emergency: a young woman in labour and most of her attendant family. Shambles swears that his flying was not the cause, but halfway down the flightpath the baby, a girl, was born.

No further spoilers though: Mike's own account appears in a separate article later in this edition. It is truly a story of the gift of life.

From here it was only a 5-minute drive to JABTC where the duty officer escorted us straight to the terrace for lunch. It being juma, the camp was minimally manned, but the buffet was magnificent, with an eye-catching goat centrepiece.



Super-hygienic fuddle...

The occasional gust of icy wind was a reminder that we were 2,000 metres above sea-level, and lunch was not a prolonged affair. **Tim Purdon** thanked the mess staff for looking after us so well and we made our farewells.

We had planned to host a party for as many of the loan service team who might be available. However, our programme meant that the juma evening was the only possible opportunity. Despite it

clashing with their own long-planned events, the Senior British Loan Service Officer (SBLSO) **Major General Felix Gedney** very kindly adjusted timings to enable us to offer early evening drinks at the Shafaq Club.



Peter Booker, Ed Roffe-Silvester (LS), Peter Sichel and Tim Purdon

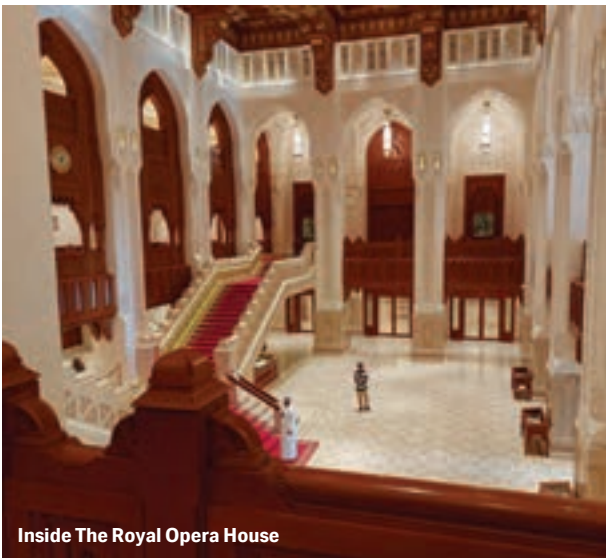
It was a lively gathering and we greatly appreciated General Felix's brief address about the Association's enduring relevance in Oman and to those currently on loan service. It sparked some fresh membership enquiries and we look forward to welcoming the new generation to the fold.

For the following day, Saturday 10 December, Ian had planned something completely new. We were to visit the Ruwi and PDO cemeteries later in the day, as is our tradition, but he had first arranged a private guided tour of the Royal Opera House (ROH) followed by the National Museum.

We were waiting at the gates of the ROH at Shati Al Qurum at 0830 sharp and had the place to ourselves. I'm no architect, and tastes differ, but, for me, the building is simply beautiful.

Our guide's presentation was alive with detail – and particularly around the technology that allows the stage to change shape and position, and its variable acoustics. That aside, the sheer magnificence of the interior has to be witnessed at first hand.

For those who have never seen it and are interested, there are numerous websites that describe the building, the stage and its acoustic technologies. The latter are impressive – if almost incomprehensible to the layman!



Inside The Royal Opera House

Our private tour also included showcases of musical instruments that had been collected and gifted by HM Sultan Qaboos, all unique. It is a truly inspiring building.

Mid-morning saw us at The National Museum, sited at the southern end of the ceremonial boulevard leading to Al Alam Palace. Opened to the public in 2016 it is packed with exhibits in 14 permanent galleries showcasing Oman's heritage.

We were free to wander for a couple of hours and there was something for everybody. Again, words can't begin to do justice to this majestic building with its historic treasures: and the website really is worth a look.



Reconstruction of a traditional 19c fishing dhow

<https://www.nm.gov.om/en/about-the-museum>

As we started to flag, the coffee shop became increasingly popular: but our early start had been well justified. By 1130 the museum was buzzing with visitors and it was time to move on.

We first visited Ruwi Cemetery, started by the SAS in February 1959 to bury Troopers **Bembridge** and **Carter** who were killed in a grenade explosion during the SAS assault on the Jabal Akhdar on 26 January 1959.

Previously, Christian burials had had to take place in Cemetery Bay near Muscat – which could only be accessed by boat. In November 1958, during the burial of **Cpl Swindells MM**, the coffin was nearly lost overboard due to rough seas. It was decided by **Johnny Watts** that any further casualties should be buried ashore in a new cemetery: thus, Ruwi was created.

The Cemetery was used by SAF and others from then until 1973, when the PDO Cemetery was opened. It contains the graves of those killed in the early days of the Dhofar War as well as memorial plaques for some whose graves are elsewhere (e.g. Flt Lt Owen Watkinson, buried on Jabal Akhdar).

We moved on to Ras Al Hamra, to the PDO cemetery. Despite being in an urban setting it is still a peaceful place to walk among the graves and spend a while thinking about old friends.

Mike took Siobhan to her father's grave. Poppies were laid and the group gathered round as Mike paid tribute to both Johnny and all our fallen comrades buried there. He had chosen and slightly abbreviated a quotation from Kemal Ataturk after Gallipoli, repeated here: *"Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives... you are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore, rest in peace. There is no difference between us, where they lie here in this country of ours... You, the mothers who sent their sons from far away countries, wipe away your tears. Your sons are now*

ASSOCIATION TOUR TO OMAN 2022

lying in our bosom and are in peace. After having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as well."

Before we left, we spent time at the two newest Association graves set across the other side of the cemetery, added since our last visit in 2015. **Nick Moulton-Thomas** died in October 2018, and **Mikey Wilson** in April 2020.



Mikey and Nick. Rest In Peace.

The headstones say it all. They lived their lives for their families, the Association, for Oman and to the full.

A mid-afternoon finish to the formal activities allowed time for some recreational indulgence. Ian had arranged transport to the Souq at Muttrah and for other private excursions. The evening in the Shafaq bar became a lively affair, with many expatriate friends gathering to spend time with the visitors. Additionally, some caught up by visiting Omani friends in town.

The Gunners had arranged a particularly poignant rendez-vous. In 2010, **Mohammed Salim Ali Al-Owaisi**, known universally as 'MSA' had died. He had joined the Oman Artillery in 1971 and was the first Omani Gunner officer. Ian Ventham picks up the thread: "I served with him in B Battery from 1972 to 1974. MSA, as he was affectionately known, was my right-hand man throughout that time."

MSA went on to be promoted to Raa'id in due course and was an instructor at SAFTR. In 2018 his daughter, **Teeba**, made contact with **Ian Gardiner**, wanting to learn more of the father she barely knew and of his service in the Oman Artillery. Ian continued: "Mike Lobb coordinated a response from various of us who had served with MSA. I started an email conversation with Teeba which led to a meeting with her and her family at the Shafaq Club at the end of our visit to Oman."



In the picture are, from left to right, Teeba, her sister **Tofool**, her mother **Maryam** and Penny Lobb. Behind are Teeba's brother **Taher**, Ian Ventham, Mike Lobb, Mike Goodfellow and her brother, **Talal**. After the Shafaq meeting, Ian was very honoured to be invited to join the family for supper at their home in Seeb.

And then, far too soon, it was Sunday 11 December – our last day. This year, the Armed Forces Day Parade took place at the parade ground and exercise area to the rear of MAM.

It was certainly a day for old friends. We arrived to be met by the longest line of Omani veterans that any of us had seen before. So tight were timings, though, that we were ushered to our seats before we could complete our greetings.

The use of cameras was not encouraged, so the event is not recorded in any detail. However, it was a well-rehearsed mix of music, dancing, singing, riding, tent-pegging and, of course, a tactical battle executed across our front as a fiery *adoo* made the *jaysh* pay heavily for every yard they won.

Massed machine gun fire from the APCs, some very loud simulated artillery – scarily on target, and a tank advance finally won the day. It was fun to watch and suitably noisy and smoky.

The event was concluded by a drive past of RAO equipment, combined with a very fine display of fan-driven, smoke-trailing parachutists. Nothing conventional about them: they cruised, swooped and climbed with style and *great* precision – almost scraping the sand at the bottom of the curve and causing some sharp intakes of breath amongst the crowd.



A traditional fuddle was on offer after the parade, and we all got suitably messy delving for the best pieces! The Armed Forces Day Parade is always impressive: fun, noisy and a great social event – and 2022 honoured the tradition.

We were back at the Shafaq in good time for an afternoon siesta before re-mounting. This time we were dressed formally for the highlight of the visit, the evening at Qasr Al Alam at the kind invitation of **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said**.

The Royal Palace Garden was a magnificent setting – overlooking Muscat Bay on a warm, calm evening.

His Majesty arrived at 2000 to the Royal Fanfare and the National Anthem, and dinner started immediately. The first of the six Royal Bands in attendance launched into tune. With an estimated 1,000 guests, the buffet arrangements had been planned with great care: queues became social events and moved quickly, and the choice of food was overwhelming.

Towards the end of dinner, the Pipes and Drums patrolled the central tables with a haunting mix of Omani and Scottish tunes. This was the prelude to the Water Show and Firework Music – which crashed onto the evening tableau in a dazzling, almost blinding laser dance followed by a sky lit bright with endless streaks, colours, flashes and explosions. It was an awesome firework display that stunned the senses.

We were privileged to have been invited to share this incredible evening with His Majesty and other guests. It was truly memorable. Back at the Shafaq, we dispersed quietly (the bar was closed!) to mull over an amazing last day and an unforgettable evening.

As our flight on Monday 12 December was scheduled to leave at 1415, there was no rush – a real first! So, after leisurely packing, we settled our mess bills – satisfyingly inexpensive in comparison with the hotels, and another well-organised process by the Shafaq management – and boarded our buses.



Early morning at the Shafaq Club

At this point, on behalf of all the visitors, I should like to express our appreciation for the warmth of welcome from the Shafaq Club's Director, **Aqeed Saif Said Rashid Al-Hatmi** and his staff. We got to know them well. They went to every effort to care for us and made us feel completely at home.

At the airport, the VIP area offered a comfortable setting to bid our hosts farewell. Mike Lobb spoke on behalf of us all and presented plates to Ameer Hassan, Ian Buttenshaw and Qais. They had planned an outstanding visit and we had been looked after superbly. And thus, we departed.



Mike says farewell to Ameer Hassan

Back in England, I recalled the thoughts I'd had initially in 2010, my first visit to Oman after I'd left in 1977. As well as being cathartic, there'd been a sense of pilgrimage. And so it was no real surprise, but very humbling, to hear from Siobhan just after Christmas. She wrote this to all of us: *"From a very young age I have known of*

Oman. Its location, always a source of pride, yet painful memories. I was nearly five when my father died, my recollections of him are few. So, to have been given this opportunity to go and find out more about him was a most generous gift.

"Throughout my time I have avidly read about what occurred in those years, but it has not been until now that I am finally able to fully understand. I went out with a need to find out more about the man and I had envisaged stories of the antics that he got up to. I now realise that knowing about the country, what and why he was fighting, and feeling the genuine friendship and camaraderie amongst his colleagues, has helped me more than anything.

"Being able to travel with some of those who had worked with him, listen to the stories of what life was like, has helped me to be able to build up an image of his experiences there, at that time, and consequently what sort of man he would have been.

"There were many special moments on this trip. I will always hold dear going to Everest where he died. Mike gently guiding me through the lead up to that devastating day, helping me understand what had happened. At the same time, seeing all about me, the beauty of the location of his death generating a sense of peace and pride of how he was able to contribute to the future of a country that has proved so worthy of his family's loss.

"Throughout the trip I was able to feel the goodwill and kindness of those who knew my story. I have felt humbled in receiving the long-lasting thanks for my sacrifice from those who count this amazing country as their own. Unforgettable is the sense of pride of the military community of the past and the present in what they are doing and how they are supporting a safe future for the people of Oman.

"It is in awe that I notice the obvious rapid development and improved standard of living in this beautiful country; this is a pleasure to see, making all my personal sacrifices worthwhile. I would like to thank all those who organised this trip and who made this possible for me to take part: a heart-felt thanks, and hope for a long and successful future for the Association."

There was one last twist on the 'plane home. In Mike Lobb's words: *"It started at the Dinner with Abdul Aziz – and finished with him on the return flight!*

"Siobhan's visit had been suggested by His Excellency Sheik Abdulaziz Al Hinai at the SAF Dinner some three years ago. On the return flight I saw His Excellency on the aircraft. He was going to London for three days. I told him that Siobhan was on board, and he asked to meet her. I introduced them – which gave Siobhan the opportunity to thank His Excellency personally. I felt that events had come full circle."

I should like to record our sincere thanks to COSSAF, the Royal Army of Oman, the Royal Air Force of Oman and the Royal Navy of Oman for hosting our 2022 visit with such consideration, generosity and kindness.

I should also like to thank Ameer Hassan, Ian Buttenshaw and Qais Khamis for the immense amount of work that went into the preparation and conduct of the tour: and not forgetting the visitors themselves – who brought the visit alive with anecdotes and humour and provided much of the material for this article.

And, finally, a word of appreciation for **Gill Sabine** at **Oman Travel** who supported us all, despite many changes, over the three years of planning.

Without all of you, it simply could not have happened. ■

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE



On 6 March, **His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimur Al Said**, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafa'a, **Admiral Sir Benjamin Key**, Chief of Naval Staff of the United Kingdom. They reviewed aspects of the existing military cooperation between the two countries. The meeting was also attended by **Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser bin Mohsen Al Rahbi**, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), and the British Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman.



On 8 March, **Dr Mohammed Nasser Ali al Zaabi**, Secretary General at the Ministry of Defence, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafa'a, **Lord Astor of Hever**, Advisor to the British Minister of Defence, the British Prime Minister's Trade Envoy. They exchanged views on the interests of the defence ministries of both countries.



On 17 March, **His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimur Al Said**, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received at his office in Al Murtafa'a Garrison, **Admiral Sir Timothy Fraser**, British Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff and his accompanying delegation. They reviewed fields of military cooperation between the two nations and means of enhancing them.



On 15 June, **His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimur Al Said**, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received at his office in Al Murtafa'a Garrison, **Air Marshal Martin Sampson**, UK Defence Senior Advisor to the Middle East and North Africa. They reviewed areas of military cooperation between the two nations and means of enhancing them, and discussed several matters of common interest.

ACADEMY FOR STRATEGIC AND DEFENCE STUDIES

On 6 November, **Air Vice-Marshal Saleh bin Yahya bin Masoud Al Maskari**, Head of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies, received at Muaskar Bait Al Falaj, **Air Marshal Martin Sampson**, UK Defence Senior Advisor to the Middle East and North Africa. During the meeting, they exchanged views on a number of military matters of mutual interest.



ROYAL OFFICE



On 6 March, **General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani**, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafa'a, **Admiral Sir Benjamin Key**, Chief of Naval Staff of the United Kingdom and his accompanying delegation. The British guest expressed his appreciation for Oman's efforts in promoting cooperation to achieve the joint interests between the two countries. The Minister and CNS reviewed the development of historic relations between Oman and the UK. They also discussed several matters of common interest. Admiral Sir Benjamin Key was on a two-day visit to the Sultanate of Oman.



On 14 June, **General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani**, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafa'a, **General Gwyn Jenkins**, Commander of the British Special Forces and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, they reviewed the existing areas of military cooperation between the two friendly countries, and views were exchanged on a number of issues and matters of interest.



On 30 March, **General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani**, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafa'a, **Elizabeth Truss**, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs of the United Kingdom. General Al Numani welcomed the British guest, who expressed her pride and appreciation for the cooperation and the role played by the Sultanate of Oman in various political and security spheres, particularly the efforts made to release British citizens detained in some countries. She also commended the strong historic relationship binding the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom. General Al Numani thanked the British guest for her efforts in enhancing the existing relations between the two countries.



On 14 June, **General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani**, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafa'a, **Air Marshal Martin Sampson**, UK Defence Senior Advisor to the Middle East and North Africa. They discussed the latest regional and international developments, reviewed the scope of cooperation between Oman and the UK, and explored ways of enhancing coordination.



On 29 November, **General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani**, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafa'a, **Lieutenant General Sir Patrick Sanders**, Chief of the General Staff of the British Army. The meeting involved reviewing the historic relations between the two friendly countries, in addition to discussing a number of matters of common military interest.



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 9 March, **COSSAF** received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Garrison, **Lord Astor of Hever**, Advisor to the British Minister of Defence, the British Prime Minister's Trade Envoy. They reviewed areas of military cooperation between the two countries.



On 14 June, **COSSAF** received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Garrison, **Air Marshal Martin Sampson**, UK Defence Senior Advisor to the Middle East and North Africa. They reviewed areas of military cooperation between the two countries and means of enhancing them.



On 17 March, **COSSAF** received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Garrison, **Admiral Sir Timothy Fraser**, British Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff and his accompanying delegation. They reviewed areas of military cooperation between the two countries.



On 7 November, **COSSAF** met at his office in Al Murtafa'a Garrison, the UK Defence Senior Advisor to the Middle East and North Africa, **Air Marshal Martin Sampson**, and his delegation. During the meeting they exchanged views on a range of military matters of common interest.



On 13 June, **COSSAF** received in his office at Al-Murtafa'a Garrison, **General Gwyn Jenkins**, Commander of the British Special Forces. During the meeting, views were exchanged and a number of military issues of common interest were discussed.



On 29 November, **COSSAF** received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Garrison, **General Sir Patrick Sanders**, Chief of the General Staff of the British Army. They reviewed areas of military cooperation between both countries. They also exchanged views on several matters of mutual interest.

COSSAF on official visit to the United Kingdom



On 23-27 May, **COSSAF** and the accompanying military delegation paid an official visit to the United Kingdom.

COSSAF participated in the meeting of the Dragon Group, which was held at the headquarters of the Royal Military College, Sandhurst.

On 26 May, COSSAF met with the British Defence Secretary **Ben Wallace**. During the meeting they reviewed the good military relations existing between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom and ways to develop and strengthen them in order to achieve the common interests of the two friendly countries.

During the visit COSSAF and **Admiral Sir Tony Radakin**, Chief of the British Defence Staff, signed the executive order of the joint defence agreement between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.





THE SON/RNO AND SAF ASSOCIATION VISIT TO RNOV SHABAB OMAN II IN PORTSMOUTH ON 12 AUGUST 2022

We were invited to visit RNOV Shabab Oman II in Portsmouth Harbour on her return from participating in sail training with other international ships in the North Sea. The ship and crew were awarded the Friendship Prize for the fourth time. We enjoyed a tour of the ship, an excellent curry lunch and entertainment in traditional Omani National Dress. A brilliant and magical day was enjoyed by all. The ship was magnificent and under command of **Commander Issa Al Jahwari** RNO with 26 crew with 55 trainees as a Sail Training Craft. The trainees came from the Navy, Military, Scouts, University so was all embracing of Shabab (Youth) of Oman. The ship spent 12 days in Portsmouth taking another complement of trainees to sail back to Muscat where she arrived in October.



RNOV SHABAB OMAN II VISIT



The following people attended **Rear Admiral John** and **Jane Gunning**, **Robin** and **Kate Gainsford**, **Brian Tyekiff**, **Jez** and **Rebecca Millard**, **Gary Pettitt**, **Jeff Short**, **Stephen** and **Annie Bennett**, **Alec** and **Pat Johnston**, **Jolyon** and **Sue Hunt**, **Sheila Balfour**, **Catherine Cosby**, **Louise Balfour Goodman**, **David** and **Sally Smale**, **David Ewing**, **Gordon Allen**, **Mike** and **Penny Lobb**, **Bill** and **Marian de Bass**, **Neil Fawcett**, **David Sandifer**, **Peter Isaacs**, **Tom Hammon**, **Marcia Vivian**, **Mike Ridley-Martin**, **Chris** and **Susanne Spencer**, **Dr Jane Hanley** and **David Bell**. ■



REFLECTIONS UPON A RECENT TOUR OF DUTY IN DHOFAR

by *Matthew Wright*



Matthew and Eliza Wright (niece of Jeremy Phipps – former SBSLO) with son, Monty and Saluki dog, Saleh.

Having returned from Salalah last year, I thought there might be a degree of interest among the Association about contemporary service in Dhofar. I therefore include some thoughts and reflections about modern-day Dhofar and the immense pleasure which I derived through living in Southern Oman, advising at KSQA in Aidem – in the Waliyat of Rakhyut, and commanding the small Loan Service team.

On arriving in Muscat in 2017 to attend the Staff Course in Beit Al-Falaj, **General Charlie Fattorini**, SBLSO(O) 2014-2017, decided that I would be a 'good fit for Dhofar'. As such, once I concluded my year in Muscat, I packed up the family and drove down to Salalah to commence what would prove to be the most rewarding, adventurous and deeply satisfying chapter of my life. I arrived to meet the small team: there were two other officers – **Captain Al Cunningham**, a Late Entry Officer from the Royal Regiment of Scotland, and **Captain Rich Macey**, an Irish contract officer who had served in the Parachute Regiment before being wounded in Afghanistan – and two warrant officers, another Para (**WO2 Sutton**) and a sniper from the Rifles (**WO2 Martin**). These were tough, independent men who relished the freedoms and possibilities of working a thousand kilometres from the remainder of the Loan Service community in Muscat.

We agreed that, in many ways, our success in Dhofar would be premised on representing the very best of the modern British Army while also reflecting the character, ethos and fraternal spirit of our forebears from the 1960s and 1970s. That is what we tried to do and for which, I hope, we had a degree of success. Later in the tour, following a reorganisation, the team was cut down to two. Rather than feeling isolated or lonely, this dynamic brought some great benefits. Invariably, I was the sole Briton west of Salalah, happily spending my working days amongst brother RAO officers in Aidem before fishing in the afternoons off Dhalkut or walking with the family on the Qara mountains... Simple and blissfully happy days.

My suspicion is that, despite the immense developments in



recent decades, much in Dhofari life would be instantly recognisable to members of the Association. Dhofar has retained its immense linguistic and cultural diversity, and the tempo and traditions of rural life: the Hakali continue to accompany their camel herds off the mountains as the Khareef approaches, sardines continue to be netted along the beaches in the late Autumn, and Dhofari men continue to take part in the Habot tribal processions during Eid. For obvious reasons, Dhofaris have a particular admiration for, and memories of, Loan Servicemen. I fondly recall speaking to an aged Dhofari who informed me that he knew a Briton who spoke outstanding Arabic and Shahri. I explained that I would like to meet this British linguist. The Dhofari looked at me peculiarly before he explained that the Briton had lived in Salalah in "19...68!" a mere 50 years before!

REFLECTIONS UPON A RECENT TOUR OF DUTY IN DHOFAR



A particular feature of SAF service in Dhofar is that the great majority of officers are from Northern Oman meaning that they live in barracks for 3-4 weeks at a time before returning home on leave. This means that the Messes are extremely social allowing brother officers to grow even closer. I was deeply fortunate that many of my best friends from Staff College were also colleagues at KSQA – and that we were commanded by **Brigadier Mohamed bin Rashid Al-Husni**, a wonderful man of large physical stature from whom I learnt much. While the Loan Service team lived with one

branch of the Al-Rowas family in Salalah, KSQA was in many ways a 'home away from home' up on Oman's Southern border.

Clearly, there was more to life than Loan Service duties. Living in Southern Oman provided immense freedoms for me and my young family. We would spend weekends up past Shisr (Ubar) and Hashman in the Sands, or out on the ocean marlin fishing, or watching sunsets upon the mountains. Undoubtedly, my fondest memories are of my young boy exploring an altogether different milieu from that which he would have experienced in the West. He would clamber through the dunes, or watch on as

camels walked the beaches in Sarfayt, or listen to Omanis chattering away in Arabic. In essence, my tour in Salalah was the most magical and enchanting of experiences. I was working in a language that I had spent years developing, amongst people who became friends in the fullest sense of the word, in an environment that I treasured and came to call home.

I remain immensely grateful for the opportunity to serve within the Sultan's Armed Forces in Dhofar; it was a singular privilege and joy. ■

OMAN GUNNER LUNCH 2022

Tuesday 13 September 2022

The annual Gunner lunch was held at the Honourable Artillery Company on Tuesday 13 September 2022. Although the event was planned before the death of **Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II**, we decided to meet in order to pay our respects in memory of our late Queen Elizabeth II, Captain General, Royal Artillery and to affirm our allegiance to **HM the King Charles III** and **HM Sultan Haitham, Sultan of Oman**.

During lunch we were entertained by a brief presentation by **Sultana Al-Qu'aiti**, the wife of **His Highness The Sultan Ghalib Bin 'Awadh Al-Qu'aiti**, the last Sultan of the Hadhramaut who was deposed by the communist regime in 1967. She covered memories of her time in Mukalla and Habrut and the

ongoing charitable work of the Friends of Hadhramaut.

The attendees were **Chris Long-Price**, **Gordon Allen**, **Graham Smith**, **Harry Beaves** (Cracker Battery), **Ian Ventham**, **Jerry Yeoman**, **John Kirkham**, **Mike Goodfellow**, **Mike Hardy**, **Mike Lobb**, **Miles Thomson**, **Mort Burdick**, **Rod Baker**, **Tom Brembridge** and **Will Cook**. **Jimmy Garnier** presided. Sadly, **Patrick Dunn** 'dropped short' at the eleventh hour as his train failed to start.

Hugh Colley, **David Gordon**, **David McFadden**, **Douglas Maclaine**, **George Correa**, **John Lewis**, **Norrie Wallace**, **Richard Morley**, **Saoud Al-Habsi** and **Tony Smith** were unable to attend but we hope to see them next year.

Next Reunion: 1200 for 1300 on Tuesday 12 September 2023 at the Honourable Artillery Company, London EC1Y 2BQ

BABY “SKYVAN”

This is a story of life...

On 21 August 1974 I was tasked to fly Skyvan 905 from Muscat to Saiq to begin the daily Saiq/Firq shuttles with just myself and the loadmaster. This was normally a routine task as there was no road up to Saiq then and the high altitude of Saiq at 6,100 feet meant helicopter loads were impractical due to the thin air. The heat in August also limited cargo lifting capacity.

We normally took enough fuel from Muscat for 4-5 shuttles as refueling by hand from a drum up to the wing at Firq or Saiq was difficult and time consuming in the heat.

Everything was normal until about the second shuttle when the SAF Brigadier ran on board while we were loading at Saiq and told me they had a medical emergency. A Saiq lady was having labour difficulties and the opinion was that unless she was quickly flown down to Saiq near the Nizwah hospital she and the baby could die. While he was shouting above the engine noise, a flurry of ladies and men helped the pregnant woman on board so I quickly prepared for take off. Doors closed and a rapid taxi to the far end of Saiq near the mountains, then a quick U turn to line up. A quick glance told me there were too many people, I was overweight and no one was strapped in as everyone was attending to the lady seated in the front row about two metres behind my seat.

Full power and down the gravel runway we went. Lift off was sluggish so I kept the nose down until the edge of the cliff at the end of the runway then dropped over the cliff so that I could pick up some speed, which is always handy in an aircraft.

At about this point as we were hurtling down the cliff face towards Firq, I became aware of a flurry of movement and chatter behind me as the sisters and friends of the pregnant lady crowded around her to help, while she remained sitting upright in her seat. I turned around at the noise, having long abandoned any hope of anyone wearing a seat belt, in time to see a wet, purple baby's head emerge like a magician's conjuring trick from the sea of blankets and shawls that covered the lady. She looked directly at me for a few seconds and didn't flinch or utter one sound during the entire birth, which took less than a minute.

I have since been accused of inducing the mother's birth with my flying, but I think this is most unkind.

At Firq we were met by an ambulance from Nizwah and as the lady was stretchered away, I unclipped my SOAF cloth pilot's wings and gave them to the father for his new daughter.

After the ambulance left, an unexpected emotion hit me and I felt a wave of elation, happiness and awe that I have never experienced before or since. I clearly remember sitting in the shade under the wing for an hour before I was capable of flying again. Strangely too, the waiting passengers kept away from me and were very quiet.

On reaching Muscat at the end of the day there was an Army message from the Brigadier waiting for me at the Squadron which read: *"Skyvan bint Braik born on Skyvan 905 today. Mother, baby, father and Shambles all doing well."*

Shambles? That's another story.



Mike Shanley in 'Jet fighter mode', RAusAF pre-Vietnam and Skyvans in Dhofar.

WESSEX LUNCH 2022

The 2022 Wessex Lunch was, as usual, held at the Sherborne Golf Club on Sunday, 31st July, 2022, with some 49 members and guests attending.

The club kitchens produced their usual excellent selection of curries with trimmings and an impressive choice of desserts.

Those attending were:

Kevin and Carol Smith, Mandy West, Eyre Maunsell, George and Venice Correa, Nick and Mary Holbrook, John and Jenny Kirkham, April Browell, Chris Griffiths, Andrew and Jackie Collins, Peggy Woodiwiss, Alan and Vanessa Howard, Ian Buttenshaw, Squish Harris, Brodie and Fauzia Galbraith, Lionel and Lorraine King, Chris and Suzanne Spencer, Mike and Dee Goodfellow, Keith Ryde, John and Victoria Tulloch, Mike and Penny Lobb, Robin and Kate Gainsford, Suzie Quinn, Nick Mylne and Dawn Chatty, Peter Ward, Patrick and Penny Dunn, Russ Peart, Marcia Vivian, Steve Gruner, Tony and Nell Nicholson, Nick and Penny Knollys, Don and Pearl Hargreaves. ■



Peggy Woodiwiss and Carol Smith

WESSEX LUNCH 2023

Due to staff leave and clashing events, the 2023 Wessex Lunch will be held earlier than usual, on Saturday 15th July 2023 – same time, same place. Please make a note in your diaries. We have been able to hold the price for next year at £25 per head for both members and guests. These details will be shown on the Association website in due course.



Dee Goodfellow and April Browell



Nick Mylne and Mike Goodfellow



NEW FOREST CURRY LUNCHEON

The fourth New Forest Curry Luncheon was held at the South Lawn Hotel, Milford on Sea on Sunday, 25 September, 2022.



The day dawned and the day was grumpy – oh dear! However, it was just the Forest teasing us and lol, as ordered, at 11am the sun burst through and we were ready for another New Forest luncheon in all its autumnal glory.

Fast forward to 11.30, South Lawn Country House Hotel, flag hung; seating allocated; guests due to arrive. Apart that is from **Clive** and **Helen Ward** (FF) and **Peter Isaacs** (FF) who had been forced to take the early ferry from the Island thanks to yet another strike. They were coffeed up and raring to go by the time the rest of us arrived.

We all appeared to be of an age when more tales and photographs of beloved dogs were exchanged than of amazingly talented grandchildren!

Reassuring for everyone was the fact that FMS was well represented by **Nick Cooper**, **Bobby Foxtton**, **Jane Hanley**, **Grania Howard**, **Angela Lovegrove**, with the makings of a back up FST and **Penny Lobb** to do the paperwork.

We were also safe in the knowledge that there were enough Gunners to frighten off any opposition (at least before lunch) in the shape of **Hugh Colley & Grace**, **Ken Brown & Doe**, **Robin Lewin & Wyn**, **George Correa & Venice**, **Nigel Lang**, **Michael Halliwell**, **Miles Thomson & Jean** and **Mort Burdick & Mary**.

Our air defences were safe in the hands of **Russ Peart** (SOAF) and **Colin Lovegrove** (SOAF) and the marine side of things was handled by **Mike Ridley Martin** (a lifetime and a half in SON), **David McAllister** (FTR) & **Pauline**, **Mike Farquharson** (OG) & **Rose**, **Ian**

Penny (Signals) & **Janet**, **John Wooldridge**, **Mike Watson** (SAFTR) & **Nikki** and **John Knopp** (FF) & **Alison** were all present and correct to ensure that a good time was had by all.

We were also delighted to see **Carole Barnett** and **Janet Hughes**, both loyal supporters of the event. I must, of course, mention our Chairman, **Mike Lobb** (Firgat, SAFTR, HQSOLF) without whom none of this would have happened.

Just remains to say, don't forget to book for next year, when we shall all reconvene dv. Same place, same time, on Sunday 24th September. ■



The Chairman, Mike Lobb



Venice Correa, Nigel Lang and Hugh Colley



Mike Watson and John Knopp



Penny Lobb, Jane Hanley, Bobby Foxton and Nick Cooper



Janet Hughes, David and Pauline McAllister



Angela and Colin Lovegrove

THE NEW FOREST REGIONAL LUNCHEON 2023

The fifth 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 24th September 2023. Those wishing to attend should contact Mike Lobb (safassn@outlook.com). The price will be £33 for members and £37 for guests, a modest increase which includes an introductory glass of house white as well as wine with the two course meal followed by coffee. Other beverages may be purchased from the bar. Please see the Association website www.oman.org.uk for any changes nearer the date.

Bookings should be made to: Mike Lobb, 28 Richmond Court, Park Lane, Milford on Sea, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 0PT together with a cheque payable to Mike Lobb. BACS details will be provided on request. Please indicate if you have any special dietary requirements or require a table for easy access. If you are going to stay at South Lawn, please mention that you are attending the event for a modest discount.



INAUGURAL EAST ANGLIA CURRY LUNCH



Left-right: Chris Rodgers, Sarah & Peter Haldane, Tresham Gregg, Mary Rodgers, Michael Gurney, Marion & Kieron Shaw, Bill Prince, Howard & Anna Gill, Bill & Marion de Bass, Will & Rosemary Cook, John Micklem, Nick Fathers and Kate Jackson.

Well, finally, we made it, after a couple of false starts due to the dreaded Covid! We gathered in a private room overlooking the First Tee at the Hintlesham Golf Club on the 8th September for a particularly convivial lunch that was enjoyed by all. Few of us knew many of the others, but, as always on these occasions, there were many mutual connections and the stories flowed...!



EAST ANGLIA CURRY LUNCH

We have a pretty wide patch in East Anglia and it was great to see guests coming from near and far – Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex and Bedfordshire were represented, with **Keiron** (SOAF 74-76) and **Marion Shaw** coming all the way from Leicestershire. Thank you all for making the effort, with the only casualties being **Penny** and **Mike Lobb**; the latter, quite rightly, giving a very short-notice NHS appointment priority, having been sitting in a queue for over a year. They were, of course, much missed. The oldest on parade, at least in terms of SAF service, was **Bill Prince** (NFR 66-68), who was accompanied by his delightful daughter, **Kate Jackson**, as his guest, with the youngest being **Nick Fathers** (MOD 91-97), between us spanning 31 years in theatre. The other guests were **Bill** (FST 72) and **Marian de Bass, Will** (OA 73-75) and **Rosemary Cook, Howard** (RAO 82-90) and **Anna** (ROP 82-87) **Gill, Tresham Gregg** (NFR 71-73), **Michael Gurney** (ACS 79-80, Oman Tank Force 80-81), **Peter** (NFR 74-76) and **Sarah Haldane, John Micklem** (ACS 78-80), **Chris** (OG 77-79, MOD 82-86) and **Mary Rodgers**.

Tresham Gregg brought his photograph album to the lunch, with photos suitably annotated, showing his Oman tour with B Coy NFR between 1971-73, and which included Bidbid, the early stages of

the occupation of SIMBA, CAPSTAN, the mobile HORNBEAM Line, Plains Company and Op SYCAMORE in the Eastern Jebel, finishing up in Izki. It contained many well-known SAF characters, and evoked amusement and interest from those who had a look. Chris Rodgers nominated himself as the chief photographer and kindly sent his photos of the lunch to all those present. ■



THE SECOND EAST ANGLIA REGIONAL LUNCH 2023

The second East Anglia Regional Lunch will be held at the Hintlesham Golf Club, near Ipswich, IP8 3LG, from 1200 hrs onwards on Thursday 7th September 2023. Those wishing to attend should contact Tresham Gregg (treshamgregg@hotmail.com). The price will be no more than £32 for members and guests – a modest increase on this year. This will include an introductory drink (wine, beer or a soft drink) as well as wine with the two course meal, followed by coffee and mints. The Association website www.oman.org.uk and The SAF Association Journal will have the details. Tresham will also send a reminder email to all those Association members in the East Anglia area in March next year. Bookings should be made after 1st July 2023 to Tresham Gregg, Park House, Sherbourne Street, Edwardstone, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 5PD, (Tel: 01787 212320), together with a cheque made payable to Tresham Gregg. Please indicate if you have any special dietary requirements.

SCOTTISH DINNER 2022

SAF Association Scottish Reunion Dinner, Thursday, 19th May, 2022



Hugh Lockhart, Robin Hastie Smith, Pippa Lockhart and Lynne Copping

Twenty-five Association members, their partners and guests attended the dinner, on a beautiful sunny evening, at Douneside House and were able, before dinner, to enjoy its magnificent garden and views of Deeside.

Our complement would have been two more, had not **Sandy** and **Diana Blackett**, who had been at Douneside earlier in the day, regrettably for all, been lured away by the wild brown trout of Sutherland's lochs, rather than the delicious 'poached and roasted corn-fed chicken' and other courses served up by Douneside's chef. Those diners, who were able to toast both Her Majesty The Queen and His Majesty The Sultan, were: **Dorrie Anderson, Nicol & Vi Cameron, Lynne Copping with Jean Smith, Sandy & Lesley Dawson, Neil & Marjorie Fawcett with Olive Forrest, Jonathan & Nicky Forbes, Robin & Seonaid Hastie Smith, Neil & Margaret Lamb, Hugh & Pippa Lockhart, Martin & Jenny Robb, Valerie Robinson, Euan & Mollie Scroggie, Dave & Dawn Tennant.**

Seonaid Hastie Smith paid tribute to the memory of two regular



Martin Robb, Neil Lamb and Sandy Dawson



Nicol Cameron, Robin Hastie Smith and Euan Scroggie



Jonathan Forbes, Valerie Robinson and Neil Fawcett



Seonaid Hastie Smith and Neil Lamb

attendees of the reunion, **Reg Millard & Fiona Warton**, both of whom sadly had been lost from within our ranks in recent months.

Through their motivation and efforts, Fiona, together with her late husband, **Keith**, successfully started up the Scottish Branch of the SAF Association in 1985.

Most staying at Douneside gathered next day for lunch at the home of Jonathan and Nicky Forbes. Being 50 years on from when MR were on Sarfait in Dhofar, in 1972, there was much reminiscing by Messrs Forbes, Hastie Smith, Lockhart and Robb about their many months on that spectacularly beautiful location adjacent to the Yemen border, with its rich variety of birdlife (despite, on occasions, the delightfully aerobic Fan-Tailed Ravens causing consternation when their free-fall tactics replicated passing unfriendly projectiles!) and other interesting, often unexpected, wildlife and flora. Established by DR, with considerable assistance from NFR, in mid-April, MR, commanded by **Bill Kerr** and ably supported by an element of OA under the expertise of, amongst others, **John Dean, Johnny Kirkham** and **Ian Ventham**, took over the Sarfait area in late May, until the end of January 1973. Later, in October 1975, MR were back at Sarfait and not least through the efforts of Ian Gordon, a regular attendee at our Scottish reunions, were instrumental in enabling the Dhofar conflict to be brought to a speedier conclusion than, probably, had been anticipated. ■



1972-73 MR contingent



Sarfait 50 years on: Lockhart, Hastie Smith, Robb and Forbes.



Euan Scroggie, Robin Hastie Smith and Neil Lamb

ACS / SOAR LUNCHEON 2022

HOSTED BY FAREEQ AHMED HARITH



On the 17 October 2022 **Fareeq Ahmed Harith** hosted a lunch at the Cavalry and Guards Club for his old friends from the Armoured Car Squadron and its successors the Oman Tank Force and the Sultan of Oman's Armoured Regiment. Ahmed regularly attends Armoured Squadron Dinner Club reunions and has extremely close relations with the Armoured formation which he originally joined and continued to serve with throughout his early years in The Sultan's Armed Forces. He spoke of his deep affection for those early days of his military career and his wish that the close ties between Oman and the United Kingdom should be continued through younger generations. Major General Robin Searby spoke in reply and thanked Ahmed for his generosity and commented on the deep affection that those British officers who had served, had for Oman and the wider Arab world.

Those ex-loan service officers who attended included (and I include their Regiments at the time of attachment): **Robin Searby** (9/12 L), **Michael Malyon** (RH), **Charles Thwaites** (4/7 DG), **Robin Amooore** (17/21 L), **Antony Norton** (13/18 H), **Miles TEMPLER** (17/21 L), **Michael Gurney** (RHG/D), **John Hunter** (17/21 L), **John Micklem** (14/20 H), **Eyre Maunsell** (RTR), **John Hick** (QDG), **Toby**

Left to right: Charles Thwaites, Michael Malyon, Toby Browne, Michael Gurney and John Hick.



Browne (RHG/D), **Rupert Wise** (14/20 H), **James Cushnir** (Scots DG), **Jeremy Thorman** (QRIH), **Robin Clifford** (4/7 DG), **Giles Stibbe** (LG), **Jonathan Howard** (RH) and **Howard Elston** (Scots DG). ■

The following is the account of some action I saw during my time in Oman. It was while working for Airwork Services, who were contracted to service aircraft of the original Sultan of Oman's Air Force, better known as SOAF. At that time our little air force consisted of only nine aircraft. De Havilland Beavers and Hunting Percival Provosts. Both were great aircraft suitable for the tasks that they were asked to perform. I was an engine 'wallah' whose primary task was to service and maintain the engines of these wonderful aircraft. As an RAF trained aircraft engine mechanic I was very much at home working for Airwork Services and SOAF. Most of my time was spent at Bait Al Falaj, but I also did two tours in Salalah. It was at Salalah where the following episode occurred. I must confess that I was too stupid to keep any kind of journal, so I shall have to avoid trying to put any date to the following account... just some time in 1968... I think! I'm 83 years old what do you expect?!

SCRIMBLE SCRIMBLE!

by *Lionel F. (Dag) Saunders*

Anyone familiar with the RAF and World War 2 will know that the call 'Scramble scramble' was to tell aircrew and ground crew to get their fighter aircraft into the air ASAP. It is a term that is still used to this day as it was in my days in Oman.

I was on my second tour in Salalah, in Southern Oman. It was here that the Sultan lived, and also close to where the war was going on in the Dhofar region.

Our airfield also housed an RAF base which, in order to be allowed to stay there, maintained the airstrip and helped our little air force whenever and wherever it could.

One morning **Tommy Thompson**, an armorer, and I were on our way for breakfast at the RAF's NCO's mess. I think Tommy and I both jumped out of our skins when a large explosion went off nearby. We thought it was the Sultan's army doing some target practice, despite the fact that they usually did that further afield. However, when another, closer, explosion took place we realised something was not right. We made a beeline to the SOAF base just in time to hear our radio operator singing out 'Scrimble scrimble'. His English wasn't too good, but we all knew what he meant. It would seem that we were under attack!

We headed straight for our Provosts to get them ready. My job was to start the engines so that they'd be warmed up by the time the pilots arrived. That didn't take me too long so I then helped Tommy who had to be sure there was enough ammo for the machine guns and secure the bombs and/or rockets if they were going to be needed. Tommy had to add ammo so I sat on the wing and fed the rounds to him.



Tommy Thompson servicing a Browning machine gun.

In due course the pilots arrived and, after a very brief pre-flight inspection, taxied off to the runway and took off. We then awaited their return when we would re-fuel and reload as needed. Often the pilots didn't even exit the aircraft.

On one sortie, one of the Provosts, piloted by **Don Angus** aka '**Jock**', took several rounds from *Adoo* ground-fire. He had a hard time controlling the aircraft because one of the rounds had jammed his elevator control. In fact he came close to bailing out because of the jammed elevator, but at the last moment his knee knocked the control column and he was then able to get some movement of the elevator. Another round had struck one of the engine's external push-rod covers. It had caused a lot more damage than expected, and caused the engine to run very erratically with frequent backfires. That wasn't the only damage, although it was bad enough! Another round had struck the propeller causing the engine to vibrate badly.

Jock had to use the engine throttle in order to maintain straight and level flight, and that was difficult with a wonky engine. His skill led to a hard but successful landing, and he was able to taxi back to our flight-line.



Don 'Jock' Angus'... one of our older pilots, but very skillful.

SCRIMBLE SCRIMBLE!

A sight the *Adoo* dreaded.



Each morning we'd head back to Salalah in order to resupply with ammo, rockets etc. This went on for about two weeks before it was declared that the Sultan's Forces were victorious.

Because of the risk to the RAF base we had to move our operations up-country. My understanding was that if any RAF personnel or equipment were killed or damaged it would become an international situation with the UK and that was not politically acceptable.

So, to draw attention away from the RAF base, off we went. We packed tents and supplies into the Beavers and headed somewhere into the middle of nowhere!

the bent push-rod had caused one of the valves to jam in the open position. This resulted in damage to the piston as it hit top dead centre and struck the jammed valve. The propeller was considered a write off, so I cut the tip off one of the blades.

I decided to keep the piston, one of the valves and the prop tip in order to fashion an ashtray designed specifically for my pipes. (I was a pipe smoker in those days). I would use the propeller tip as a background for the ashtray.

The damaged piston.



Showing the back, untouched, propeller tip.



Each morning we'd head back to Salalah in order to resupply with ammo, rockets etc. This went on for about two weeks before it was declared that the Sultan's Forces were victorious.

Our little air force had played a significant role in that victory and subsequently a few others, and I myself, received a medal from the Sultan. My understanding was that only a handful of civilians ever got that medal. Naturally, I still have it.

During this stressful time I had not written to my fiancée **Hazel**, and that bothered me. She probably thought I had gotten cold feet. She accepted my explanation, but then started worrying about the (her) perceived danger I was in. Women!! God love 'em.

Later, when I stripped the damaged Provost engine, I found that



For a wooden base I 'stole' a piece of a packing crate that was used for returning engines to the UK for rebuilding. Our stock-keeper was **Bill Stewart** and he went ballistic when he discovered someone had 'buggered up' his crate! He was my best friend, but I just couldn't confess... until sometime in 2018, but by then he didn't recall the incident!

I didn't get around to making my pipe ashtray until I was back at Bait Al Falaj.

This ashtray, although unemployed, still sits on an end-table in my living room, as a conversation piece. It is a fitting memory jogger to the day when Don 'Jock' Angus nearly bailed out of his damaged Provost. ■

Left: My pipe ashtray.



ROYAL ARMY OF OMAN



*On 21 December, The Royal Army of Oman celebrated the graduation of the candidate officers course from the Sultan Qaboos Military College under the auspices of **His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimur Al Said**, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, at the military parade field in Al Murtafa'a Garrison.*



ROYAL ARMY OF OMAN





On 10 May, **Major General Mattar bin Salim Al Balushi**, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafa'a Garrison, **Major General Stephen McMahon**, head of the delegation from the British Royal College of Defence Studies. They reviewed a number of military topics and exchanged views on several matters of mutual interest.



On 19 June, **Major General Mattar bin Salim Al Balushi**, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafa'a Garrison, **Major General Duncan Capps**, Commandant of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS). They discussed several military matters in academic and training fields and means of enhancing them.

The Royal Army of Oman participates in the joint Omani-British exercise (Apollo Cyber) in the United Kingdom

During 20-24 July, the Royal Army of Oman, represented by a squadron from the "Al Sahraa" or "The Desert" Regiment of the 23rd Infantry Brigade, with the support of the Sultan of Oman's Artillery and the Sultan's Armed Forces Engineers, participated in the joint Omani-British exercise (Apollo Cyber) in the United Kingdom.



The joint exercise (Apollo Cyber) lies within the framework of the joint military training plan that the Royal Army of Oman is implementing with brotherly and friendly countries. The exercise included many challenges and tests, joint training on weapons, equipment and field work, transporting forces by helicopters and working within a single team.





From 3-10 September, the Royal Army of Oman, represented by the Sustainment Directorate, took part in the British drill "Army Sustainer". Sustainment units of different armies participated in this international exercise.



On 7 November, **Major General Mattar bin Salim Al Balushi**, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafa'a Garrison, **Air Marshal Martin Sampson**, the UK Defence Senior Advisor to the Middle East and North Africa. During the meeting they exchanged views on a range of military matters of common interest.

The Royal Army of Oman concludes the Practical Demonstration of the Joint Omani-British Military Exercise (Khanjar Oman 2022)

On 10 November in Al Wusta province, the practical demonstration day of the joint Omani-British military exercise (Khanjar Oman 2022) took place. Units from the Western Border Security Force and British Forces had taken part in the exercise between 31 October - 10 November. The exercise was concluded under the auspices of **Major General Mattar bin Salim Al Balushi**, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman. This was in the presence of **Lieutenant General Ralph Wooddisse**, Commander of the British Field Army.



The event started with a briefing that reviewed the various stages of the exercise, the practical demonstration, and the training objectives of the exercise.

Chris Bushell, Director General (Land) from the UK's Defence Equipment and Support Group also attended the practical demonstration along with a number of senior officers from the British Armed Forces.



On 10 November, **Major General Mattar bin Salim Al Balushi**, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman received **Lieutenant General Ralph Wooddise**, Commander of the British Field Army. The guest was visiting the Sultanate of Oman to attend the practical demonstration of the joint Oman-UK military exercise "Khanjar Oman 2022". During the meeting, they discussed several military matters of common interest.



On 29 November, **Major General Mattar bin Salim Al Balushi**, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafa'a Garrison, **General Sir Patrick Sanders**, Chief of the General Staff of the British Army. They exchanged views on several military matters of mutual interest.

The Royal Army of Oman concludes the Activities of the Omani-British Joint Military Exercise (Musandam Fort 2022)

On 10 November, the exercise was concluded in the Musandam Governorate. Various units of the armed forces of Oman and Britain took part. This exercise was held under the auspices of **Major General Musalam bin Muhammed bin Taman Jaaboub**, Commander of the Sultan's Special Force. The Omani-British military exercise aimed at exchanging experiences and gaining military skills in diverse geographical terrains and amphibious landings. Musandam Fort 2022 is part of the annual training plan pursued by the Sultan's Armed Forces. The Sultan's Armed Forces carry out a series of joint military exercises with other countries to enhance efficiency and battle readiness.





ROYAL AIR FORCE OF OMAN



*On 7 December, the Royal Air Force of Oman celebrated the graduation of a new intake of Pilot Officers, Basic Candidate Officers, Limited Service Officers and University Officers. This was under the patronage of **His Highness Sayyid Taimur bin Asaad bin Tariq Al Said**, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman.*





ROYAL AIR FORCE OF OMAN



During the ceremony, the graduates performed a military parade at Ghala Base and Sultan Qaboos Air Academy. This parade reflects the basics of military training and the extent of field skills enjoyed by members of the Royal Air Force of Oman.



The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) participated in the International Airshow at Fairford Air Base in UK

During 15-17 July, the Royal Air Force of Oman participated in the International Airshow which was being held at Fairford Air Force Base in the United Kingdom. The comprehensive RAFO display showed the modernisation of the service and also highlighted the long standing close co-operation between the Air Forces of Oman and UK. It also celebrated the rich heritage and history of Oman with a model of a typical desert tent.

On 16 July, **Air Vice-Marshal Khamis bin Hammad Al Ghafri**, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman, visited the International Airshow in order to see the latest developments in the aviation industry.





On 15 June, **Air Commodore Zahran Nasser Ambusaidi**, acting Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman, received **Air Marshal Martin Sampson**, UK Defence Senior Advisor to the Middle East and North Africa. They exchanged cordial talks and discussed several matters of common interest.



On 7 November, **Air Vice-Marshal Khamis bin Hammad Al Ghafri**, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman, received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Garrison, **Air Marshal Martin Sampson**, UK Defence Senior Advisor to the Middle East and North Africa. During the meeting they exchanged views on a range of military matters of common interest.

CRAFO Reviews Graduation Parade and presents prizes at RAF College, Cranwell

On 4 November, CRAFO, **Air Vice-Marshal Khamis bin Hammad Al Ghafri**, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman, was the Reviewing Officer at a Graduation Parade at the RAF College, Cranwell. Royal Air Force of Oman officers won top prizes and are photographed here. He presented the Sword of Honour to **Lieutenant Humaid bin Mohammed Al Wahaibi** and the prize for best International Student to **Lieutenant Qais bin Matar Al Subhi**.





ROYAL NAVY OF OMAN

*On 3 November, The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) celebrated its Annual Day. It is taking positive steps towards further modernisation, developing armament, equipment and human competencies, in order to enhance its capabilities in implementing the important national responsibilities of the Royal Navy of Oman, under the wise leadership of **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**, the Supreme Commander, may Allah protect and preserve him.*



The ceremony was held at Said Bin Sultan Naval Base under the auspices of **Dr Mohammed bin Nasser bin Ali Al Zaabi**, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defence. The ceremony witnessed the graduation of an intake of naval ratings and the presentation of various military performances that reflected the skill, competence and ability of the Royal Navy of Oman, confirming the noble interest and generous care of the Royal Navy of Oman from His Majesty the Supreme Commander.



ROYAL NAVY OF OMAN



The Royal Navy of Oman holds a Dinner on its Annual Day

On 3 November, the Royal Navy of Oman held an evening party to celebrate its Annual Day under the auspices of Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser bin Mohsen al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman.



The Royal Navy of Oman organises a symposium entitled (the ship is the Youth of Oman: a cultural role and a civilisational dimension)

On 9 November, in preparation for registering the vessel under the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, The Royal Navy of Oman organised a symposium at the Centre for the History of Science at the German University of Technology, and in cooperation with Oman's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. The symposium was titled "The ship is the Youth of Oman: a cultural role and a civilisational dimension". Application has been made to register "Youth of Oman" under UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The symposium was under the auspices of His Excellency Salem bin Mohammed Al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.



The Royal Navy of Oman celebrates the graduation of two intakes of nominated officers and recruits

On 20 June, the Royal Navy of Oman celebrated the graduation of a new intake of University officers and ratings under the auspices of **Major General Salim bin Ali Al Hosni**, Commander of Royal Guard of Oman. The graduation is a continuation of the national efforts made by the Royal Navy of Oman, along with the Sultan's Armed Forces and other departments of the Ministry of Defence and in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, in accommodating citizens aspiring to take part in military service.





On 27 January, **Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser bin Mohsen al Rahbi**, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman, received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Garrison, **Rear Admiral Rhett Hatcher**, Director of Data Acquisition and Defence in the UK Hydrographic Office. They exchanged cordial talks and reviewed areas of military cooperation.



On 6 March, **Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser bin Mohsen al Rahbi**, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman, received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Garrison, **Admiral Sir Timothy Fraser**, British Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff. On arrival, the British guest was saluted by an honour guard. Admiral Fraser expressed his happiness at visiting the Sultanate of Oman and witnessing its evident progress and prosperity.

Oman participates in the International Maritime Exercise 2022



From 12-18 February, the Royal Navy of Oman participated in the International Maritime Exercise 2022 (IMX 22) conducted in the Omani maritime area (Strait of Hormuz, Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea). The Sultanate's Maritime Security Centre assumed command and control of IMX22 in the second area. This saw the participation of a number of vessels of the Royal Navy of Oman and naval vessels from other friendly countries including the United States of America, the United Kingdom, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and South Korea, with air support from planes from the Royal Air Force of Oman.



On 15 June, **Commodore Tarik bin Issa Al Raisi**, Acting Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman, received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Garrison, **Air Marshal Martin Sampson**, UK Defence Senior Advisor to the Middle East and North Africa. They exchanged cordial talks and discussed several matters of common interest.



On 30 June, **Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser bin Mohsen al Rahbi**, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman, received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Garrison, **Commodore Adrian Fryer**, Commander of the United Kingdom Maritime Component Command. They discussed several matters of mutual Naval interest.

Maritime Security Centre Visits

On 19 June, **Major General Duncan Capps**, Commandant of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS), visited the Maritime Security Centre. He was greeted upon his arrival at the centre by the Acting Head of the MSC.



On 29 June, A British delegation headed by **Commodore Adrian Fryer** visited the Maritime Security Centre. He was greeted upon his arrival at the centre by the deputy chairman of the MSC. The guest and members of the visiting delegation were briefed on the roles and tasks carried out by the centre in maintaining the safety of the maritime environment. They also toured the centre's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies that are used in carrying out its national duties.



Shabab Oman II wins International Friendship Cup in Denmark



On 5 August, The Royal Navy of Oman Vessel, *Shabab Oman II*, won the International Friendship Cup for Tall Ships for the year 2022, which is the highest award won by a sailing ship in the long-distance sailing races. This came during the announcement of the results of the Long Dhow Sailing Race, during the closing festival of the Long Sailing Race 2022 in Aalborg, Kingdom of Denmark.



Royal Naval Staff, visited the ship and listened to a briefing about the ship, including the route of its sixth international voyage, '*Oman, the Land of Peace*'. He also learned about the ship's facilities, training programmes and the Sultanate of Oman's tourist attractions, in addition to the achievements accomplished by the ship during her passages.

The Royal Navy of Oman Vessel, *Shabab Oman II*, arrived at Portsmouth in the United Kingdom, having sailed from Aalborg in Denmark. The ship docked in Portsmouth for 13 days, opening its doors to visitors and offering them an opportunity to take a closer look at Oman's culture and history and highlighting the legacy of Oman's maritime history and artefacts.

On 15 August, **Admiral Sir Benjamin Key**, Chief of the British





RNO organises rousing reception for *Shabab Oman II* after International Voyage

On 23 October, the Royal Navy of Oman organised an official reception for the vessel, *Shabab Oman II*, at Port Sultan Qaboos, after the sail ship's return from an international tour during which it participated in races and festivals.

During the tour, *Shabab Oman II* visited many international ports and marinas as part of its sixth international voyage themed '*Oman, the Land of Peace*' to the European continent.

The voyage was authorised by the Royal Order of **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of **His Highness Sayyid Taimur bin Asaad Al Said**, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman .





ROYAL GUARD

*On 1 November, The Royal Guard of Oman (RGO) celebrated its Annual Day under the patronage of **His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said**, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.*



ROYAL GUARD





THE SULTAN'S SPECIAL FORCE

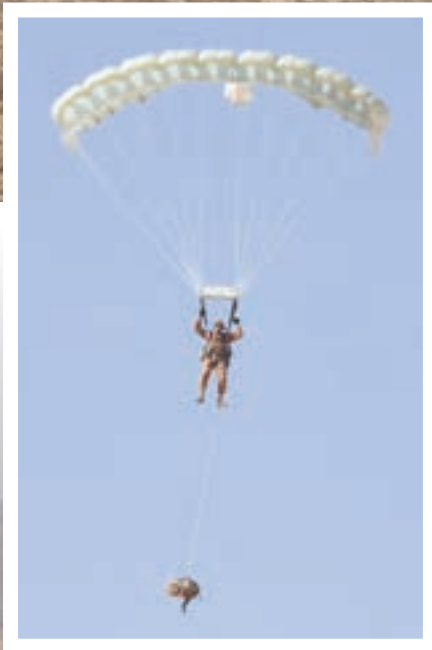
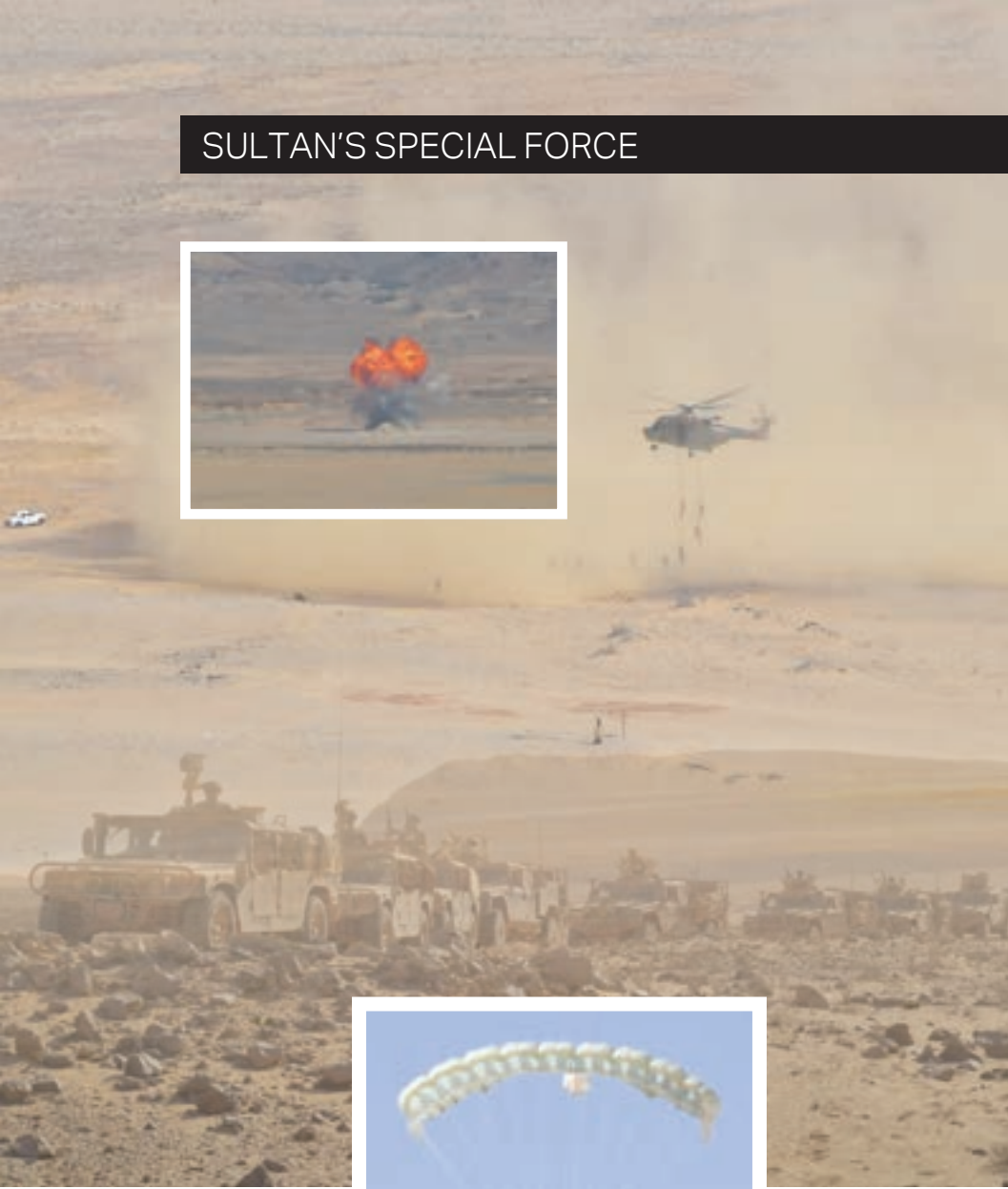
*On 15 March, The Sultan's Special Force (SSF) celebrated its Annual Day during a ceremony held under the patronage of **General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani**, Minister of the Royal Office, Head of the Office of the Supreme Commander.*



*Upon the chief guest's arrival at the military exercise site, General Al Numani was received by **Major General Musalam bin Mohammed bin Taman Jaaboub**, SSF Commander.*



SULTAN'S SPECIAL FORCE



SAF ASSOCIATION AT THE UK DEFENCE ACADEMY SHRIVENHAM



SAF Association Veterans at the UK Defence Academy. Standing: Ian Gordon and Angus Ramsay. Seated: Peter Sichel, Mike Lobb, Tim Jones and Tony Nicholson. Absent from photograph: Grania Howard and Peter Williams. COVID absentees: Gordon Allen and David Bills.

In July 2022 eight members of the Association attended the Realities of Conflict phase of the Advanced Command and Staff Course 25 at Shrivenham where veterans work with syndicates and relate their experiences. They were **Ian Gordon** (MR, SAFTR, FQ and FF), **Grania Howard** (FMS), **Tim Jones** (JR), **Mike Lobb** (FQ, SAFTR, HQ SOLF), **Tony Nicholson** (SOAF), **Angus Ramsay** (NFR), **Peter Sichel** (BATT, FQ, CAD) and **Peter Williams** (FF). Unfortunately, **Gordon Allen** (SOA) and **David Bills** (KJ), normally part of the team were smitten with COVID at the last minute.

The Association has had a presence at the Defence Academy for over 20 years in varying numbers. It gives members of the Association the opportunity to discuss (and analyse!) their time in Oman in an international environment where foreign countries send their brightest and best. We have established a routine with the coordinating staff, this year under **Cdr Tracy MacSephney** VR RN to assign each SAF veteran to a syndicate with an Omani student. We met with all the Omani students attending ACSC25 and also those on the pre-ACSC26 course for next year. **Issa Al**

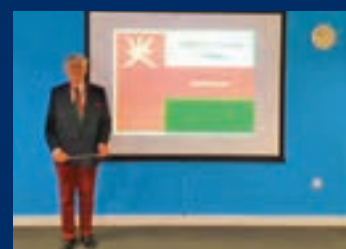
Aghbari had just finished a tour on Loan Service with the RAC in UK when he then spent another year here on the Advanced Command and Staff Course. ■



SAF Associations Veterans with Omani Students at the UK Defence Academy: Sqn Ldr Salem Nasser Al Hajri, Sqn Ldr Ahmad Al Habsi, Mike Lobb, Tim Jones, Major Mohammad Al Mughairi (SSF), Major Ishaq Al Mamari, Major Issa Al Aghbari and Tony Nicholson.

Sharing the Oman Experience with Directorate of Joint Warfare, UK Strategic Command

I was invited to speak at the Directorate of Joint Warfare, part of UK Strategic Command at Northwood on 16th November 2022. This presentation was on my experience of working with the Imperial Iranian Task Force whilst in SAF as this provided historic context with their role of Combined Operations specifically working with partner Forces. The audience comprised Rear Admiral Andrew Bretton and his staff with forty or so personnel in the auditorium and was joined by a further forty-five via video link. It was an excellent venue and much to my relief the technology working first time. Hopefully we have identified specific areas which will be expanded at a later date.



SIMBA

THE LONGEST OPERATION

by Ian Gordon

On 16 April 1972, from their base at 'Akoot', the Desert Regiment (DR), and companies of the Northern Frontier Regiment (NFR), launched the audacious *Op Simba*, flying 25km west to secure positions astride the Wadi Sarfait, close to the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) border. Why was Akoot abandoned in favour of the Sarfait area? Why did Simba become the longest SAF operation? How did Simba become the operation that finally enabled Dhofar to become secure for civil development. This account attempts to answer those questions and tell that story.

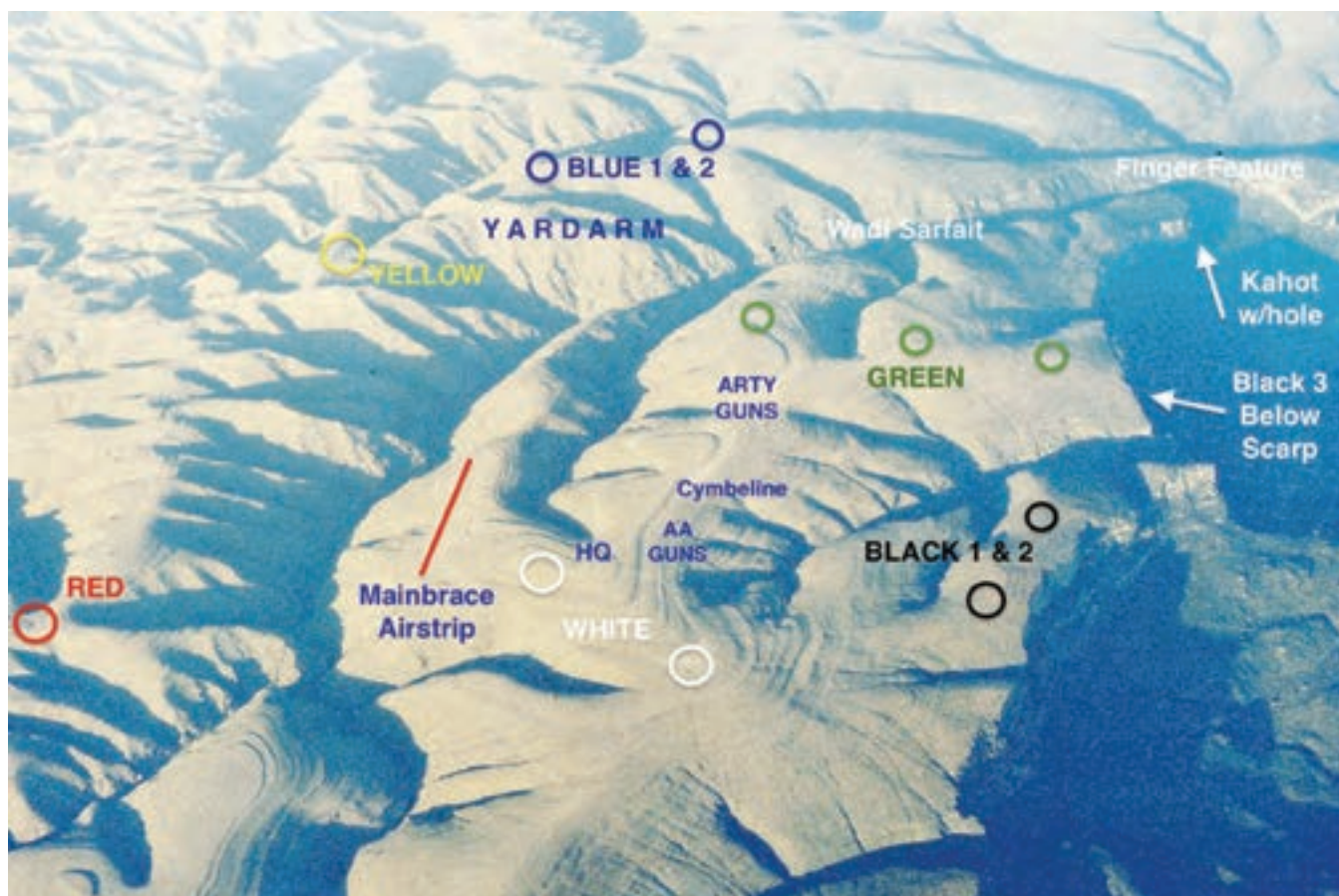
The Dhofar mountains feature two key landscapes. The 'Moon' country's bare, almost waterless, wadis run north to the Empty Quarter, supporting the Mahra nomads but providing few supply routes, all of which are vulnerable to view from the air. In contrast, the verdant, rugged wadis running south to the sea are cloaked with monsoon mist and cloud from June to September. This was the key terrain because the resultant rich vegetation supported the cattle herding Qara people of the mountains: the Jebalis. The dividing line between these two very different landscapes is the 'watershed' between the north flowing and south flowing wadis.

The attached map of the western area shows that between Akoot, on the watershed, and the sea lay 15km of dense Qara mountains providing a multitude of *adoo* main supply routes (MSRs), all tough to interdict. In contrast, at the border, the Qara

mountains tail away to just 5km between watershed and sea. This bottleneck provides only five practical MSRs from the PDRY border town of Hauf into Dhofar: one 4x4 vehicle track, and four animal paths.

Op Simba, was to be the last major operation of the outgoing Dhofar Area Commander, **Col. Mike Harvey** (known as OddJob both for his physique and his passion for karate). It was conceived and planned by CO Desert Regiment, **Lt Col Nigel Knocker**, after several careful recces which determined it could cut the *adoo* MSRs thus ending material support from communist PDRY and hopefully bring the war to a swift end. Despite the challenging terrain, and seriously stretching SAF resources (especially SOAF), CSAF approved the bold plan. This account attempts to explain why it took three and a half years to achieve that aim. It is a story of bluff and blunders balanced by luck and chance. It tells of the critical contribution of the Firqat and how land mines, terrain, water and boots shaped events.

Simba secured a 1,300m high hill-top that, in height and distance from the sea, matched Cape Town's Table Mountain. It sat between the Wadi Sarfait and, 2km south, a 300m high sheer escarpment. This 'scarp' extended from far to the east across the border into PDRY. On this hill-top DR cleared a 400m long dirt airstrip named "Mainbrace". This was Simba's vital lifeline and Achilles



heel because all supplies, even water, came by air. Mainbrace, the HQ, and a troop of 25 pounder artillery guns were protected by two companies on positions Black, White and Green. North of the Wadi Sarfait, a ridge named "Yardarm" was held by a company on positions Blue, Yellow and, closest to the border and exactly on the watershed, Red.

Yardarm overlooked and protected Mainbrace and blocked the fourth MSR along the watershed above the scarp. The main positions, in turn, overlooked and denied the use of the main *adoo* MSR, a vehicle track, immediately below the scarp. South of the vehicle track, and 1,200m from the scarp, was an 800m high ridge that overlooked and denied the second track, and some of the third track that ran between it and the sea. In keeping with the nautical naming theme this ridge with conical peak was called "Capstan". All of these tracks from Hauf converged on a verdant plateau, below the scarp east of the Wadi Sarfait, called "Khadraf" where a well-hidden *adoo* main storage cave was called "Sherishitti", confusingly the same name as a much larger store cave further east.

After some delay, exacerbated by terrible weather (causing the first operational fatality which was by lightning), DR secured Capstan, blocking four *adoo* MSRs from PDRY. But, unable to find the vitally needed water at Capstan, they relied on resupply via the helipad which the ferocious *adoo* retaliation made unusable. After only a few days, with the monsoon imminent, DR and NFR were forced off Capstan. This reopened the two *adoo* supply paths hidden below and south of Capstan. Op Simba hadn't brought the war to a quick end but it still blocked the best two of the five *adoo* cross-border MSRs, slowing significantly the supply of *adoo* weapons eastwards to the contested heart of Dhofar.

In response, the *adoo* blocked with anti-personnel (AP) mines the only three footpaths from Mainbrace back to Capstan: one in the Wadi Sarfait; the most direct in the Wadi Durup between Black and Green; and one down a small, precipitous, wadi west of Black. Our mine detectors couldn't detect these, mainly plastic, Chinese and Russian 'PMN' AP mines. Our attempts to use the paths caused many mine casualties. But, Simba still presented a huge threat to the *adoo*. Surely, they must have thought, Muscat Regiment (MR), having replaced DR in May 1972, would retake Capstan after the monsoon?

Sprawled over eight square kilometres and close to PDRY, Simba was a rich target for *adoo* indirect fire, ground attack and, even, possibly, air attack from PDRY, while being remote from immediate SAF support. But could SAF best be dislodged from our threatening position by direct attack or something more indirect?

Enter a smart senior *adoo* commander – **Masoud Bakhait Bait Qatan** was commissioned in 1966 from Mons Officer Cadet School in UK into the Trucial Oman Scouts in Sharjah. In 1969, as a Captain, he deserted and joined the *adoo*. Understanding asymmetric warfare, he conceived a plan to capture the thinly defended eastern coastal town of Mirbat, hoping to force an overstretched SAF to withdraw Op Simba to reinforce all government held towns. By early July he had gathered over 400 fighters in the mountains above Mirbat. But many didn't trust him because of his British training. There was a schism. Masoud and nearly 200 of his supporters pulled out, halving *adoo* strength and delaying their assault until 19 July. That was doubly unlucky for the *adoo*: a second SAS Sqn had arrived in country the day before, and the monsoon cloud that day was

lighter than average allowing the defenders some air support. The reduced *adoo* force was defeated with heavy losses. Mirbat was the military turning point of the war. Op Simba hadn't entirely blocked *adoo* supplies but it had, by luck, precipitated a catastrophic *adoo* failure at Mirbat. Critically, Simba also demonstrated **His Majesty Sultan Qaboos'** resolve to secure his borders which won international respect and support for Oman and brought valuable financial aid from Saudi Arabia and military aid from Jordan and Iran.

Flights into Mainbrace were irregular, unpredictable and quickly turned around to reduce the risk from the *adoo* 75mm RCL that frequently fired at Mainbrace from across the border somewhere in the area of the abandoned Gants Hill airstrip. Losing an aircraft might make Mainbrace inoperable, cutting our supply line jugular as much as us securing Capstan would cut theirs. The newly arrived Dhofar Brigade commander, **Jack Fletcher**, was concerned so, on 05 Sep 1972, I took part in Op Shidda, a three-company operation to Gants Hill. We failed to find any RCL but lost five killed included my company officer **Lt Saif Hamed** and one of my platoon commanders, **Said Hadoob**. I was shot in the head and **Malcolm Vining**, the battalion second-in-command, was shot in the face and shoulder. We were among the nine seriously wounded. After that, major operations close to the border ceased, mainly to avoid goading PDRY into entering the war, but also due to the heavy *adoo* mining of the tracks out of the base. That must



Lt Saif Hamed WB. KIA on Op Shidda at Gants Hill on 05 Sep 1972.

SIMBA – THE LONGEST OPERATION

have made it seem, to the *adoo's* relief, that we'd given up on expansion at Simba: we'd failed to occupy both Capstan and, it would have appeared to them, Gants Hill too.

Brigadier Jack had indeed decided to reduce Simba to two companies, reducing resupply flights and releasing a company to further the key strategy to win hearts and minds by establishing and securing government centres across the populous parts of central and eastern Dhofar. To block *adoo* supplies he'd concentrate on Op Hornbeam which, based on Mughsayl on the coast and within vehicle reach of Salalah, did not rely entirely on air supply. So, a 35km wire and mine barrier was built from there, north to the watershed.

1973 JR HQ and one company were based at the secure air-base at "Manston", 50km east of Simba where they would try to interdict the *adoo* MSR, as DR had attempted a year earlier from nearby Akoot. The other two JR companies and a skeleton HQ (plus artillery) would occupy Simba with a newly recruited, inexperienced company of the Baluch Guard that had just been renamed Frontier Force (FF). On 17 January, shortly before MR handed over to JR, the British Ambassador, DA and Brigadier visited Simba. Did this, or all the additional flights involved in JR replacing MR, attract *adoo* attention?

On 4 February 1973, barely a week after JR took over from MR, a Caribou was hit on Mainbrace by a 75mm RCL fired from near Gants Hill. The feared event had happened. All fixed-wing flights to Mainbrace ceased. SOAF had too few helicopters to meet Simba's supply needs so plans were made to spike the guns and withdraw. Fortunately, Iran agreed to provide helicopters, otherwise Simba

may have been withdrawn. It was a close call. The "siege of Simba", described by **Tim Jones** in an earlier Journal, had begun.

On 6 February, two days after the loss of the Caribou, perhaps under pressure to do something to draw *adoo* attention away from Simba, **Paul Wright** mounted a company operation south of Manston. Sadly, he and one of his men was killed and over 25 soldiers wounded. To further reduce supply requirements at Simba its mission was downgraded to harassing the *adoo* MSR with artillery and mortar fire air strikes, absorbing enemy munitions, and holding Sultanate territory. Op Simba became a military backwater but no-one told the *adoo*! In 1973 the thinned-out Simba positions took five and a half thousand incomers and there were ferocious close night attacks on Yardarm positions.

This continued for two years until, in early 1975, **Captain Mike Wolfenden**, a Sapper officer in DR with many unconventional habits as well as unconventional ideas, decided he could clear the mined tracks by making improvised 'Bangalore torpedoes' using six-foot angle iron pickets packed with PE, lowering them onto a section of track and blowing up any mines below and about two feet either side of the explosion. Thus, he cleared a narrow path down the tracks each side of Black. But on 15 February 1975 on the precipitous track west of Black, in the dark, a DR Sergeant Major stepped on a mine and died. Rescue attempts led to more casualties and that track was again deemed unsafe.

The previous October, having transferred C Coy MR to KJ, I had to recruit and train a new C Coy to deploy in May 1975 for a nine-month tour in Dhofar. I persuaded the CO MR, **Lt Col Ian Christie**, MBE, MC., that the established teams in A and B Coys shouldn't be broken up to give C Coy a share of experienced soldiers as that would harm all three companies. Better that all my company be raw recruits as long as I had a fair share of decent NCOs and officers.

While MR HQ and two companies would be at Simba, Ian had planned to deploy my company to Salalah under command of NFR and, to help me, he transferred from B Coy to C Coy, **Mohammed Said Bait Qatan**, a former *adoo* and the second man to lead the first Firqat unit, the FSD. He was an outstanding and hugely brave and respected man. Mohammed knew Dhofar better than anyone in the army. It made sense as I knew the central area better than the other two company commanders. That was why I'd been sent to JR as battle casualty replacement for Op Husn, following the deaths in a helicopter crash on 8 March of **Nigel Marshall**, **Mike Shipley** and **Peter Davies**, MC, DFC WKhM. Ian may also have heard of my operational disagreements with CO JR, **Ted Ashley**, and may have wished to keep a troublesome subordinate at arms length! But Ian accepted my plea that, because every one of my soldiers was new, we needed initially to be in simple defence positions on Simba, not on complex mobile operations elsewhere. That rolled the dice in my favour: I ended up with the best Dhofari officer of all but in what seemed the wrong place for his talents and, instead, **Ali Patrick's** A Coy went under command of NFR.

On 18 May C Coy, less a platoon reinforcing Rakyut garrison, deployed to Mainbrace. B Coy (**Hamed Manah** and **Charlie Newton Dunn**) deployed on Yardarm. A troop of SAS and a new mortar locating radar, "Cymbeline", also deployed to Simba, both for the first time. Already present was an Imperial Iranian airforce anti-aircraft detachment with twin-barrel 21mm guns. These enhancements were to ensure we weren't driven off. The improved helicopter support availability and the budget increase from the oil



Mainbrace 17 January 1973. Above: Ambassador David Hawley, Major Malcolm Vinning, Colonel Richard Lea and Captain David Holt. Below: Mary Fletcher, Robin Wright, Ruth Hawley, David Holt and Jonathan Forbes.



price rise in 1974 made this possible. While there was no more talk of withdrawal from Simba, it was still considered an unsuitable place for major operations due to the mine threat and the risk of provoking intervention from PDRY.

My three-year contract was ending on 18 July. My second-in-command, **John Paxman**, Coldstream Guards, was more than capable of replacing me, but could I leave my raw company of new soldiers after only two months in Dhofar? On that chance journey in March to and from Salalah, via SAF HQ, I'd become attracted to the General's daughter. That gave me an emotional need to stay in Oman, but it all hinged on whether I could accept the risks of operating under my energetic and aggressive CO. So, I did nothing about renewing my contract. I'd see how operations developed.

Ian Christie's Op Order was more restrained than I'd feared, perhaps due to my company's inexperience or just the paucity of intelligence. He divided our time on Op Simba into three one-month phases:

In the first month, we were to secure Wolfenden's cleared track down the scarp and, with Firqat, to carry out recces west to Gants Hill and south below the scarp (avoiding Capstan), and also find a safe route below the scarp via the Wadi Sarfait. From 21 June, we were to gather intel and dominate the coy area of responsibility while conducting continuation training and preparing to clear a safe route down the precipitous western track. Finally, after 20 July, we were to conduct offensive operations.

After 20 June the area below the scarp would be in monsoon mist and rain for three months, making operations, where no one had done them before, impractical. So, I'd have to do 'offensive ops' before 20 June. For that I needed better intelligence. SAF Int relied heavily on SEPs but few reached Simba due to mines. Also, Simba was low priority for SAF, so, apart from estimated *adoo* strengths, detailed intel was woefully lacking. Enter the Firqat (FSM) located close to my HQ at Green 3. The firqat remembered I had been shot at nearby Gants Hill three years earlier. Some of them had helped carry me to the casevac helicopter. That I was back undeterred and still fighting for the Sultan's cause may have helped confirm that they were also fighting for the right cause. And Mohammed Said gave us credibility with the Firqat. But, illogically, I allocated Mohammed and 11 platoon to White instead of to Green with the Firqat and me. I was to regret this, but it would be lucky for two innocent children who might otherwise have died.

I enjoyed the company of the Firqat and trusted them. They were almost entirely former *adoo* and were 'irregular' troops; too irregular for many tidy military minds. They were free spirits, disinclined to obey orders they disliked, a trait I admired. 80 years earlier, in 1895, the traveller **Theodore Bent's**, description of the Qara people chimed with what many in SAF may have thought: "We never had to deal with wilder men... We found these wild men in most respects friendly during our wanderings, but of most independent spirit. They would not march longer than they liked; they would only take us where they wished, if we asked them not to sing at night and disturb our rest, they always set to work with greater vigour. Certainly they did well by us on the whole, but at first we doubted them greatly. They would chat pleasantly with us as we went along, but were ready at the slightest provocation to fly into wild incoherent rages, and the information they gave us about the country was never twice the same."

Ultimately, the war was all about them and their fellow Dhofaris. I'd always felt it wise to listen to their views and, where possible, do

things their way. With their deep knowledge of the ground they provided me the intelligence we lacked. Some of it was simple insights: cattle grazed on Capstan, so it wasn't mined and needn't be avoided.

With no time to waste, **Ted Wells, Lt Nasser Rashid, Cpl Mubarak Ali** and I checked Wolfenden's track, past where **Mike Rose** of KJ had lost his legs, to where the narrow track reached the base of the scarp. From there the *adoo* wouldn't waste mines on the many cattle paths meandering across the plateau. So, I deployed a section there and called it "Black 3". This achieved one of my tasks and secured the way to conduct recces to Capstan.

On 23 May, six nights after arriving at Mainbrace, John Paxman, Lt Mohd Said and I took a patrol via Black 3 to assess *adoo* usage of their MSR below Capstan. Our firm base was on the western end of Capstan, proving it wasn't mined. The recce became a snap ambush as camels and men were heard moving westwards on the track. Another group of camels and men were seen in the moonlight about a kilometre further west, confirming Firqat reports that the supply teams moved, for safety, in small groups, each about a kilometre apart. But, by firing, had we revealed our hand too soon?

Ian Christie now wanted deliberate ambushes. I refused: it risked harming the civilians who used the track, and the *adoo* might now expect an ambush. Instead, I took a 60-man patrol to attack the *adoo* platoon that defended the tracks. The Firqat had told me their



Black 3 track. 21 May 1975. Capt Ted Wells, Lt Nasser Rashid, and Cpl Mubarak Ali (where Mike Rose, KJ, lost both legs).

SIMBA – THE LONGEST OPERATION



exact position, in caves below a cliff west of Capstan. But I misjudged the difficulty of movement in the rocks and vegetation of the plateau after moon-set. After a terrible night of stumbling and falling, I aborted the operation well short of the objective. With my tail between my legs, I led my men back to Mainbrace via Black 3. As often happens in war, this turned out a fortunate failure. Success may have made the *adoo* reinforce the area rather than probably continuing to assume that we'd given up on Capstan.

Now the Firqat gave me a gem. Just west of Capstan, south of a small bend in the old motor track, there was a patch of greenery, clearly visible from Black, contrasting against the surrounding dry, pre-monsoon, vegetation. It was a big waterhole called "Deem". Surprisingly, given the importance of water, especially near Capstan, this hadn't been recorded anywhere. Excitedly, I told Ian Christie that after the monsoon ended in September, C Coy could achieve Op Simba's original purpose of cutting the *adoo* MSR by capturing and holding Capstan and Deem, making all of Op Simba self-sufficient for water, halving the need for resupply. With strong fire support on two flanks from Black and Green one company would be more than sufficient. In retrospect I should have suggested a bigger operation to secure a line to the sea but I thought my plan wouldn't be approved unless it used the minimum troops.

Now I wanted to renew my contract so that I could do the one operation that really was worth taking risks for and made all other operations seem pointless. But Ian Christie still wanted the track below Capstan ambushed before the monsoon arrived on about 20 June. He rejected my protest that ambushes might make the *adoo* reinforce Capstan, making it harder to secure later. But, as I'd just done a patrol, it was John's turn. In contrast to my big patrol he wanted to take only four men. I persuaded him to take backup. The patrol grew to 12 men. It may have avoided tragedy if it had

remained small. On the same track that 60 of us had walked up and down only two nights previously, and only ten metres below the last sentry sangar at Black 3, a firqat at the end of the line of men stepped on a mine, that all those in front had missed. After a hazardous evacuation we aborted John's patrol. But, again, what seemed a failure was to prove lucky. It goaded me to prove we could ambush the MSR, even though I thought it pointless and a risk to the bigger prize of holding Capstan. But how? The easy route and the precipitous western track were both now unsafe. And we didn't have the time to re-clear them of mines.

Luckily, the Firqat had the answer. Again, it was about water: there was a large waterhole called Kahot, nestled in the bed of the Wadi Sarfait at the foot of the scarp, east of Green. I later heard that this had long been known and was the site of a fierce fight on 16 April 1972 when **Sheikh Muhammed Hamad Al Ma'shani**, an uncle of the Sultan, was awarded a posthumous WSh. But again, like Deem, no one had bothered to tell us, or put it on the map. Extraordinary, considering how vital water is. It would be a magnet for thirsty animals, creating a myriad of well used tracks fanning south across the plateau that the animals would keep clear of mines. But, the Firqat warned, the sole animal track north from Kahot contoured along the steep western side of the wadi Sarfait and was mined. The many sentry reports, over the years, of mine explosions in that area confirmed that. The Firqat were sure that flash floods in the rocky wadi bed would dislodge and expose mines. So, could we move safely by day in the wadi bed, screened by the steep-sided wadi walls above? Learning from my aborted, moonless, patrol, I insisted on waiting until 14 June for better moonlight.

That would give me time for rehearsals and preparation but also enable me to use Cymbeline to thwart the expected annual *adoo* 'celebration' of their armed struggle anniversary on 09 June. Each

day they fired their mortars, to adjust them ready for the big day of fireworks. We declined to retaliate. Cymbeline just registered each baseplate with hitherto impossible accuracy: probably better than ten metres. On the big day we were ready for them. As each mortar fired, we responded with devastatingly accurate artillery and mortars. Instantly each *adoo* mortar, but one, fell silent. This had never happened to the *adoo* before. If they didn't already know that MR had arrived and did things differently, they were beginning to learn. And more was to follow.

Five nights later, in pre-dawn darkness to avoid the *adoo* OP in the west, we moved into the Wadi Sarfait. We lay-up until late afternoon before moving on down the wadi bed, arriving at Kahot just before dusk. After sunset, with a moon to help, **Sgt Ali Saad** of FSM led us at a brisk trot on meandering cattle tracks, with unerring accuracy, to my selected ambush position south-east of Capstan. I used Claymore mines that would sound like our usual mortar fire, hoping other *adoo* on the track wouldn't realise it was an ambush. While withdrawing we evaded an *adoo* ambush thanks entirely to Ali Saad smelling people. To avoid mines, we waited south of Kahot for dawn to retrace our steps to Green.

Ian Christie wanted another ambush that night. It was John's turn. Using the same route, he ambushed the same MSR track further west also using only Claymores. After moon-set it was too dark for us to discriminate between civilians and *adoo*. We couldn't even see the camels on the track 30 metres away, so we had to fire by ear. As I had feared, most of the casualties had been civilians, so I was relieved that Ian accepted that we shouldn't risk more ambushes. Having, in one month, achieved more than my company had been ordered to achieve in three months and more than had been achieved there in three years, and with the element of surprise now lost, it was sensible not to push our luck.

Perhaps because I had proved that, despite being a troublesome officer, I had some uses, Ian asked when my contract expired. Although we'd had disagreements, Ian was a good soldier and a commander that I was now happy to serve under. I told him that I hadn't been offered a new contract so, I assumed, I wasn't required. But, if SAF offered me a contract, I'd accept and carry out my offer to secure Capstan and Deem after the monsoon. Ian promised to recommend SAF renew my contract. On 17 July we mounted a heli-borne operation to the north-west of Blue to clear the ridge track of mines and search for *adoo* stores. The next day my contract expired. I no longer had legal rights.

But, luck continued to favour me. In July, nine civilian refugees walked up the Wadi Sarfait to Green 2, as did two *adoo* SEPs. The mine threat made refugees and SEPs very rare at Simba. Our forays and the tracks we left may have led to a belief that the Wadi Sarfait was now clear of mines. That could have caused the *adoo* to sow more mines in the Wadi Sarfait to keep us blocked in and civilians and SEPs out. But, on 6 August, we were helped by a chain of events started by a negligent discharge near my position on Green by a sentry at dawn. If I had allocated Green to Mohammed Said's platoon, as I logically should have done, this soldier would have been elsewhere and these events would not have happened. Instead, they led to a Firqat patrol finding, on that only animal track in the wadi Sarfait north of Kahot, two dead women and two, barely alive, children; **Miriam** and **Abdulmunim**. Sentry logs confirmed three explosions happening close together in that area ten days previously, matching the ladies three fatal mine injuries. A few yards

Miriam in Salalah in 2012.



from their bodies, and just above the wadi bed we'd scrambled along in June, I lifted three modern, Soviet-made, PMN mines. I saw over 20 animal carcasses further down the track; evidence and a warning, that this track was a choke-point and thoroughly mined.

The tragic news about the mine casualties in the Wadi Sarfait was broadcast on TV and radio. We received no more refugees or SEPs. It seemed each route to Capstan was again blocked by mines: the western one in February; Black 3 in June; now the Wadi Sarfait. We appeared bottled up again, so the *adoo* didn't need to bother about us.

In August Ian told me that Brigade had approved my Capstan operation but only as a three-day diversion before Op Hadaf. They were concerned about provoking PDRY fully into the war and could allocate no heli support except for casevac. With Deem for our water and a ropeway for supplies down the scarp to Black 3, I could manage without helis. Although scrimping on men and heli support was to come back to haunt me, I didn't think PDRY could dislodge us from Capstan or divert men and weapons from the area of Hadaf to Capstan in three days. They'd shell us heavily from PDRY but, it seemed to me, holding Capstan permanently would achieve Op Hadaf's intent with fewer troops and less casualties. So, with blithe confidence, I agreed to the caveats. I hoped that minds would change when they saw how easily Capstan was secured. Perhaps I should have realised that Brigade would take steps to try to encourage the *adoo* to divert to Capstan.

Having had no contract for seven weeks, upon agreeing to the Capstan plan, I immediately got my new three-year contract. I was really enjoying the free-thinking, problem solving required of war-time soldiering, and had begun to feel that I was becoming quite good at it. Even though I had narrowly avoided *adoo* mines, counter ambushes, and had 85mm and 122mm shells miss me by only a few feet, I felt invincible and was strangely pleased at the prospect of another three years of more of the same. I failed to appreciate that, although my intended operation was supposed to end all *adoo* supplies into Dhofar, that it would contribute to ending the war so rapidly. Then, soldiering in peace, would be very different.

To be continued...

BLANK END OF MISSION

by Bob Birrell

Well, as it inevitably might, the plot was hatched during leave in 1975 – location (equally inevitable) The Duke of Wellington Watering hole in Chelsea. Conversation focused on the late much missed **Andrew Booth's** abortive attempt to drive a Jeep home rather than avail himself of the Gulf Air option – word was that the Jeep had expired in Athens.

Muggins here volunteered the idea that a motorbike trip might be an even more amusing alternative – the assembled company agreed this was a wonderful plan – only one simple soul agreed to actually do it. Problem 1 – I didn't own a motorbike and there didn't seem to be a source of acquiring one in Muscat. **Roger King** had a cool looking Suzuki – sadly it seemed to have a voracious appetite for pistons and rarely covered more than a few miles without expiring – I would need to buy one in UK.

How would I get a bike back to Oman? Well one of our number (at the bar) was **Barry Cheverton** who piloted one of the brand new BAC 111 which required to be flown to Hurn Airport (Bournemouth) on occasion for routine servicing – after the application of several pints, he agreed to fly a bike back to Seeb.

So, it came to pass a day or so later, I arrived at a Honda dealer in Fulham Road and came away with a brand new state-of-the-art Honda 4 cylinder 400cc flyer – by then I had considered the enormity of the undertaking so invested in a decent amount of spare parts which I felt I might need.



Arriving back at the pub, I was relieved to find Barry still in position at the bar – even more relieved that he was able to remember his part of the bargain – great guy – all I had to do was get the bike to Bournemouth – this was done on the day of my return flight – timings tight but sufficient – or would have been except the train returning me to London was delayed by three hours – result, I abandoned my suitcase at the Gulf Air Terminal in London and taxi from Waterloo to Heathrow, checking in a few minutes before take off with only a ticket, passport, a crash helmet and a sense of optimism.

The months passed without sign of my transport home but Barry overcame all the hurdles and the bike arrived at Salalah with three days to spare – meanwhile I'd chickened out of trying to find a sea crossing to Bandar Abbas and the Brigade LO to the Iranian Brigade (Roger King) had arranged for me and Honda to fly in a IIAF C130 to Tehran – luxury!

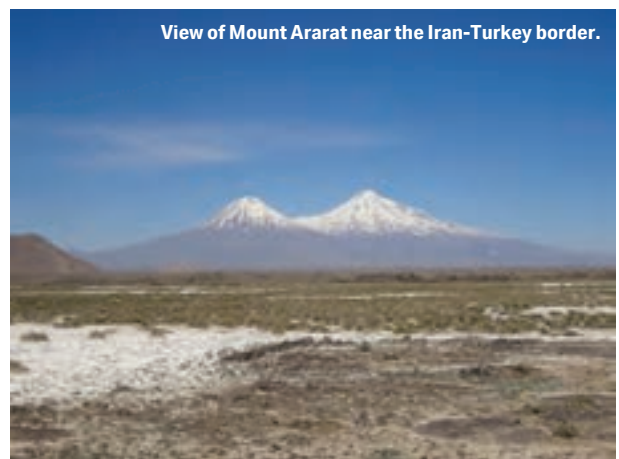
All went well until we arrived in Tehran Airport at the military side where they denied any knowledge of Roger's diligent arrangements – with great difficulty, I managed to persuade the ground staff to unload the Honda before I was incarcerated in their guardroom. That took a great deal of talking, explaining and bluff before I reunited myself with my bike but realised I had no entry visas or other documentation to herald my arrival in their country – I rode round to the civilian terminal, I distracted the arrivals desk sufficiently to apply their passport stamp with a deft hand (mine) – so I was officially in country – but not so the bike. I was so relieved that I treated myself to the night in a hotel in downtown Tehran.

I was beginning to think that I wasn't massively welcome so the plan was to head west to the Turkish border as soon as may be. A full day's riding next day – along the route used by the many European truckers – after dark I pulled out my trusty sleeping bag and settled down for the night in a very comfortable meadow.

It wasn't long before I became aware of being watched – bloody hell – a wolf circling my sleeping arrangements – time to withdraw – at this stage, for the first time panic reared its head – mainly because on a very dark night, I couldn't locate the keys of the bike – it seemed a very long time indeed before I found them in the bottom of my sleeping bag – hotfoot to the nearest village when for the second and last time on the journey I booked into what passed for a hotel – well I used my sleeping bag but at least no wolves.

Early start next day with the aim of reaching Turkey before dark – a hard day's riding and I arrived at a several miles long queue for the Border crossing, mainly empty trucks – so with more confidence than sense, I sailed up to the well armed sentry on the border post and invited him to step aside – predictably this plan failed – but I at least had a (self administered) stamp in my passport – so I joined the pedestrian queue, gained my exit stamp before rejoining my bike guarded by an increasingly bewildered sentry – I brandished my exit stamp but he was clearly unconvinced by the status of the Honda – he bade me wait while he sought higher authority – by the time he returned, I was well on my way – I was fairly confident of my survival having seen the state of their skill at arms in Dhofar.

The border is at the site of Mount Ararat (of Moses' repute) but sadly I didn't stick around to admire it!



Eastern Turkey was pretty wild – at each village a welcoming gathering of children awaited – I supposed, to wave and welcome strangers – no chance – they flung stones and sticks on my approach – the answer was to have a large stick and ride at speed towards the crowd – which seemed to work with no harm on either side.

It was important to refuel whenever the opportunity presented itself – more than once I had an enforced break while electricity was restored to revive fuel station pumps. As I progressed westwards, Turkey's Asian background faded and by Ankara, Western influence became more prominent.

On several occasions I camped next to European truckers treading the TIR trading route – I had been told of these truckers being robbed of their running money (always cash in various currencies in those days) – interestingly a few told me that some of these robberies were nothing of the sort – rather, dishonest drivers, depositing cash along the way!

At a distance of 42 years, I don't recall every drama or day but crossing the Bosphorus Bridge which divides Asia and Europe was memorable – as was the suicidal traffic in Istanbul. I will never forget a drama on a narrow country road (they were nearly all narrow and country).



Bosphorus Bridge.

Anyway, this one was covered in a grey slime substance – I crept forward at sub walking pace, no chance, I was off spreadeagled on the road, it was so slippery as to prevent me standing up – I was able only to clear the slime by sliding along, pushing the bike along – worse of all, the slime was some sort of fish manure – the stink of which was massive and long lasting.

So, eventually, I arrived at the border with Greece – here the shape of the journey changed – I met with a fellow biker – a Frenchman embarked on a similar trip (well up to Turkey only) – we decided that for company, we would ride in convoy through Greece at least – he rode a larger, more powerful but much heavier Kawasaki Z1 900 – inevitably we swapped bikes for a couple of hours – reinforcing my conviction that my choice of a lighter, handier bike had been correct.

Greece was proving far more relaxing than hitherto – a wine festival in Thessaloniki proved rather more relaxing than planned – resulting in an extra day recovering from some fairly indifferent wines before progress could be resumed!

By now we had had enough of following in the wheel tracks (and dust) of the TIR truck route – so plan B was swung into action – rather than slog through the (then) inferior roads through Yugoslavia, a command decision was made to take the ferry from Corfu in North West Greece overnight to Brindisi in South East Italy.

This done, the leisurely journey up the Adriatic Coast of Italy was perhaps the most pleasant sector of the trip – the climb up to San Marino was a real highlight.

From Northern Italy, the route, crossing the Alps without using the major tunnels was spectacular – principal memory was riding with my visor open when a bumble bee flew in (well I don't know what the closing speed can have been but I was doing around 60mph – the voluble jammed unfortunate insect became extremely upset inside my ear held there by the close fitting helmet – by this time I thought World War 3 had broken out inside my ear – somehow I summoned sufficient attention to stop and remove the helmet without the bee deploying its main armament!

Switzerland passed with me doing my best not to spend too much cash there – it always seemed to be hugely expensive then.

Germany was well known territory – I called in to Munster to visit **Ben Taylor Roberts** (Cracker Battery early '70s) and now a pilot with AAC. A few hours and rather more beers later, we had hatched a plan to go motor racing around the more interesting circuits in Europe – that's another subject on which I have promised **Keith Ryde** most faithfully I will write – wait out!

And so back to the Duke of Boots – the usual crowd still to be seen depending on leave dates.

Postscript

My new appointment was as 2IC 60 Squadron RCT in Catterick – I was determined not to enjoy it after Dhofar – how wrong I was, I was given plenty of scope for my ideas, three tours in Belfast and best of all, it was not a Staff Appointment – part of my motivation to volunteer for loan service in the first place was to avoid Staff Work and particularly Staff College. At one stage in Dhofar, an AB205 dropped an impressively large box at Sarfait which turned out to contain a huge number of books – required reading for a forthcoming Staff College exam – for years afterwards, the Command Library in Cyprus asked me to return them – I was able to furnish them with a grid reference (Sarfait) where the unopened box was doing sterling work propping up an oak beam in a Sanger on Blue 2!

So what became of the Honda? Well Catterick in winter diminished my enthusiasm for riding in short order – so it was promptly sold – along with the spare emergency parts, none of which were needed on the trip.

A number of individuals deserve my greatly belated thanks – principally Barry Cheverton who not only encouraged the idea but overcame a mountain of hurdles to deliver my bike from an Airwork shed in Bournemouth to Salalah, Nigel Knocker for persuading me (10 years) to write this account and Keith Ryde for 1 year – this script is finished 1 day before the annual dinner – too embarrassed to appear without it – I must apologise if the story appears a tad thin – 42 years have elapsed and for sure some anecdotes have been lost to time.

Finally, would I do it again? Eh? Enter and depart Iran without proper (or any) documentation? No thanks.

The bug which drove me to such adventures has not entirely left me – I was 29 when I did the trip – this year aged 71, I raced a Historic Lotus 20 on successive weekends in Belgium, Lithuania, Latvia and Sweden – driving with Mercedes Van and Trailer to each race track – no sleeping in fields these days!

Whoa, I think I've just talked myself into another story! ■

REMEMBERING...

Captain Ian MacLucas

In December 1974, SAF launched a major ground and air operation against the well defended *adoo* stores and sanctuary complex known as the Sherishitti Caves in western Dhofar. A reinforced infantry battalion – the Jebel Regiment (JR) – with the Armoured Car Squadron, BATT and firqat, together with an enlarged artillery battery was assembled north west of the caves and generous air support was allocated. The artillery battery (D battery OA) was equipped for the operation with eight 75/24mm pack howitzers in two troops with one 25 pounder to fire smoke and illuminating rounds. One of D battery's Forward Observation Officers (FOOs) was a loan service Gunner Officer, 27 year old **Captain Ian MacLucas** who, with his FOO party, was grouped with 2 Coy JR.



The Operation got off to a slow start and the intermediate objectives took much longer to secure than was expected. The initiative was largely lost such that by day three, 6th January, 1975, the *adoo* had mustered considerable reinforcements. At around midday 2 Coy JR took over as lead company and a short time later were ambushed west of the objective. The JR Company commander was killed and Ian MacLucas was wounded along with two members of his FOO party. He later gave his own recollection of what must have been an agonising and terrifying afternoon:

"An RCL exploded about five yards behind me smashing my right ankle so I wasn't going anywhere soon. The *adoo* sniped at me for about four hours. The damage to my shoulder, arms and spine, prevented me from firing my rifle even when a target appeared. Towards the end I saw four *adoo* coming over a ridge and thought I might get one or two. I pulled my rifle up to the shoulder although I could feel it crunching. Despite knowing they were sitting target I was simply unable to fire. I was also a bit sleepy due to loss of blood!"

Just before last light, displaying great bravery and determination, the remaining companies – assisted by air strikes and near continuous well directed fire from D Bty's guns – were able to manoeuvre close enough to the casualties to organise evacuation by helicopter to the FST at Salalah. MacLucas' body was initially put to one side by the triage Warrant Officer but he was quickly moved into surgery and stabilised before being evacuated back to UK. It was clear that he would be unlikely ever to walk again.

Ian David MacLucas was born in Stranraer on 19th November 1947. He was commissioned into the Royal Artillery as a University Cadet in September 1966 and joined 2nd Field Regiment in Barnard Castle before deploying to Northern Ireland. Here he was



ambushed on patrol and seriously wounded by a rifle bullet which ricocheted into his right femur. After recovery and rehabilitation his application for loan service in Oman was accepted and by September 1974 he was commanding a troop of D Battery's 25 pounders on SIMBA (Sarfait) where he remained until Operation DHARAB.

When casevac'd to UK from Oman, it was obvious that he had suffered devastating, life changing wounds and he was moved to Stoke Mandeville hospital for specialist treatment and rehabilitation. By April 1975, just three months after he was wounded, he had substantially recovered his upper body strength and mastered the wheelchair on which he could outrun his fiancée and most visitors. He was invalided out of the Army in November 1975. With all the fortitude, determination and equanimity that had characterised his military career he turned his mind to a new life as a 27 year old paraplegic choosing accountancy for his profession and rising to set up his own practice.

"I could do it sitting down and there was little chance of being shot again!"

He had met and fallen in love with **Sarah Thorne** in 1973 before going to Oman. They agreed to postpone their wedding until his loan service was over; Sarah ordered her wedding dress on the day he was wounded. They were married in November 1975 and had two daughters. Both were to play pivotal roles in supporting their adored father during the increasing frailty and illness of his last years. After 21 years together, Ian and Sarah decided to live separately. In later life his frequent companion was **Kathe Persson** a close friend whose children had grown up with Ian's. Both Sarah and Kathe survive him.

Ian's roving intellectual curiosity led him in different directions. He gained a private pilot's licence, remained a rugby enthusiast and passionate Scotland supporter. Military history was also important to him especially the American Civil war and WW2 in Italy where his father had escaped as a POW. He played the guitar and liked a lie in on Sunday.

Ian MacLucas was clever, thoughtful, incisive, friendly and funny. His overriding priority was his family – his daughters and beloved grandsons with whom he was at last able to share boys' interests. Always stimulating company, he enjoyed long lasting friendships with a wide range of men and women. He was universally admired for the indomitable courage and unbreakable spirit that he displayed during Op DHARAB and for 47 years thereafter coping without rancour and mostly uncomplainingly with a profound disability that would have shattered lesser men.

Ian MacLucas died aged 74 in the Royal Surrey County Hospital on 7th January 2022 in the presence of his immediate family and fortified by the rites of the Holy Church.

Noel McGrath

Noel McGrath died on the 23rd of January 2022, and he was buried on the 28th of April at The New Cemetery, Teignmouth, near Newton Abbot in Devon. It was a lonely scene of a small gathering of mourners with Noel's younger brother **Brian**, his sister-in-law, and members of his wife **Dudi**'s family.



A dignified and solemn occasion with members of the family expressing their feelings for a departed and much loved character.

Gerry Yeoman and **Mike Goodfellow** represented SAF.

Originally contracted to Oman in February 1972 as an infantry officer following Service in the British Army, Noel's time in the Royal Artillery with experience in the Radfan was uncovered by **Hugh Colley** who diverted him to Taqa where he ran a single 25pdr gun detachment in support of Op Cyclops, a combined JR and BATT jebal operation around Wadi Darbat. He then deployed as an FOO for operations from Salalah Plain before moving to Sarfait where he was the FOO on Capstan for the busy ten days in May with Red Company (**Ben Hodgson**) and NFR (**Tresham Gregg**).

Being one of only a few artillery observers, Noel took part in many operations at short notice with quick deployments in support of operations. He sustained a wound, fortunately not serious, to his hand and wrist when deployed on Op Sycamore as an FOO.

In mid-1973 Noel was based in Mamurah with C Battery and was also involved in the initial training and deployment of A Battery's light gun troop to Tawi Atair, subsequently taking command of D Battery.

Following his resignation from the British Army, Noel intended to take up a career in business and was offered a partnership in a private company, but what business and which company remain a mystery. However, he was known to be a competent sailor and did operate a trawler out of Cork to Brixham in Devon, where he earned the nickname 'Skipper McGrath', by which name he was often known.

His was a very engaging smile and he had a wry and wicked sense of humour. Known to be operationally very competent, he was a reassuring presence on the ground when engaging the enemy and highly regarded in that capacity.

Hugh Colley remembers, "he was very good for us in the early days and will be sorely missed."

His brother Brian recalls, "the greatest brother of all and a privilege to have known him."

Alexander (Lex) Brown MBE, AFC

With sadness, we have learned that **Lex Brown** died peacefully on 11th February 2022 following a long illness. As a heli pilot on Loan Service, he flew with 3 Sqn in SOAF 1977-79, as well as on operations elsewhere both before and after that period. In so many ways he was the epitome of a Support Helicopter pilot, with a remarkable track record of skill, courage and commitment: the interests of the supported unit always came first.



Above all, he was a vivid and colourful character – once encountered, not lightly forgotten and the stories and anecdotes are many... "On Sarfait where I was based for six months, our livelihood was sustained by resupply drops by the SOAF AB 205s. They brought us everything, water, beer, mail, ammunition and live goats. I would gather with some jundeeds on Mainbrace and long before we could see it, the throbbing of the rotors could be heard; at that moment we would gather round the radio. Normally the radio would crackle into life with a conventional 'Hello 9 Bravo (me) this is SOAF c/s etc.' and there would follow a normal chit chat of weather, how much fuel was needed and a run through of the day's tasking. However, there was no such formality with Lex. He would just open up with a high pitched childish 'La la la la' and the look of sheer delight on the faces of the Omani soldiers was a joy to behold. 'Tayyarra al amodeeeya al Lex' (it's Lex's chopper!) They just loved his fun approach to everything."

Tim Jones adds: I was Lex's instructor when he first joined the RAF as an officer cadet in 1970. It was clear that he was 'different' from the start! A wicked sense of humour, slightly irreverent but never rude, a 'glass half full' outlook and always cheerful. He was a resilient character, mentally strong and physically tough he was always popular though never sought popularity. He relished the outdoor leadership exercises whatever the weather and was quick to help and encourage others. It was no surprise that he sailed through training and went on to excel as a support helicopter pilot.

It was also no surprise when we met some years later to find that he held an AFC and was on his way to be awarded an MBE – both earned for a variety of 'discrete' operations. He worked closely with UK Special Forces who rated him highly as 'one of their own'; many of them attended his memorial service held at St Clement Danes on 23 September 2022.

I had left SAF before Lex arrived but I am sure he would have been an excellent 'fit' for Oman service. It was a great pleasure just a few years ago, to work with him on one of his many aviation projects and find that he had lost none of his enthusiasm. There were ups and downs and, of course, the crumbling castle in Scotland... but that is another story. A full life, well led, Lex will be remembered fondly and our thoughts are with his wife **Frances** and his daughters **Jessie** and **Flora**."

Colonel Roger Woodiwiss MBE

Roger Woodiwiss sadly died on Saturday 12 March 2022 at the age of 92.

He was conscripted on 1 January 1948 and decided to go 'regular' being commissioned into the Dorsetshire Regiment on 16 December 1949, which later became the Devon and Dorset Regiment. Roger served three tours with A, B and D Squadrons, 22 SAS from 1955 to 1965. He then he returned to his regiment as second in command. He again served with the SAS in UK from 1973 to 1976 during which time he made several visits to the Regiment operating as the British Army Training Team (BATT) in Dhofar. He finally retired from the British Army on 1 September 1976 and moved to Oman to take up the post of Director of Purchasing with the Omani Ministry of Defence, from October 1976 to November 1979. After a brief break he returned in June 1980 to HQ SOLF where he was SO2 Finance (June 1980 – February 1991), Director Finance (February 1991 – September 1998), and Financial Affairs Adviser (September 1998 – December 1999) when he finally left Oman. Roger classed himself as a 'northern lurker' and was very happy to be one.



Roger and his beloved wife **Peggy** were well known to many in Oman. Their two great passions were sports diving and mountain walking. Roger was Chairman of the Muscat divers for many years and Peggy was the club's matriarch, organising many of their outings, especially the traditional Christmas lunch on Shark Island. In later years diving gave way to mountain walking and their weekly expeditions to the Jebel Akhdar have become a legend.

Roger and Peggy's knowledge of the jebel's many walks, particularly of old 'SAS' routes and notably of routes to the summit of Jebel Shams, was formidable and it was fitting that one of their last walks was done in the company of **Major General Tony Jeapes**, former commander of 22 SAS and a lifelong friend. The Woodiwiss fame was legend and when **HRH The Prince of Wales** visited the jebel during the 1990s Roger was tasked with guiding his party.

Just before leaving Oman Roger attended his final Sultan Qaboos Military College passing out parade tea party in the HQ RAO mess, MAM, where he was honoured to be granted a farewell audience with **His Majesty Sultan Qaboos**.

Roger's funeral was held on 30 March 2022 at Croscombe, Wells. Our thoughts are with Peggy and their three daughters.

Lottie Higgins writes

Roger was a keen diver and headed the SAF Aqua Diving Unit. He was also very keen on Camping as well as Night Dives. He was always very kind and helpful to our vulnerable Nursing Staff advising them of the pitfalls with 'Investment Advisors' coming from the Gulf looking for naive expats to exploit.

Mike Lobb writes

I have particular reason to remember Roger and be truly grateful to him. In 1966 I was languishing in BAOR in a tactical nuclear missile regiment wondering seriously whether I had made the right career choice when I attended a Combat Survival course run by Roger and a team from Hereford fresh from proper soldiering in Borneo. Before I knew it, I was on the January 1967 selection and my life changed forever. Roger was the ultimate military role model, the professional SAS officer who was also a gentleman.

Sqn Ldr Frank Pole BSc

Frank Pole who served with both SOAF and the ROP Air Wing recently lost his battle with cancer. His funeral took place at Balldarroch Crematorium on 22nd July 2022 and included a selection of his favourite Scottish music.

Frank's early career was with the RAF as well as a secondment to the Army Air Corps. He served with 3 sqn SOAF from 1977-79 and then returned to the RAF. Around 1974 he served in Germany with **Tommy Collins** in 651 squadron, AAC and both he and Tommy were stalwarts of the AAC ski team.



Tommy later bumped into him unexpectedly at Saiq with his then girlfriend and wife to be **Lorna** in 1978 and Frank and Tommy both served together flying helis in Salalah.

Frank returned to Oman to the ROP Air Wing during the 1980s. One of his colleagues in the Air Wing, Randy Mains, writes: I first met Frank in 1988 in the Sultanate of Oman when we both flew with the Royal Oman Police. He was a thoroughly competent pilot and a mentor to many of the young Omani junior officers teaching them 'by example' the admirable qualities they needed to learn to become a safe and competent pilot. Frank and I flew in Saudi Arabia, too, in EMS support to the King and the royal family.

One anecdote about Frank I'd like to share that highlights the measure of the man is this: he had placed an ad for a Bell 214ST pilot for the operation in Saudi stating the minimum hourly requirements and that as chief pilot, he was looking for pilots with 214ST time. He received several responses from pilots who were low-time pilots with Robinson-22 time in their log books. Instead of relegating those CVs into the trash bin as being totally unacceptable, Frank took the time to personally write a letter to each and every one of them, thanking them personally for applying but that they did not meet the minimum requirements at the time. He always ended by wishing them good luck in their aviation career. I always thought that was a classy, kind and compassionate thing to do.

Mike StC Baddeley

We are very sad to announce the death of **Captain Michael Baddeley** on 4 August 2022, aged 88. Mike had suffered from Alzheimer's for a number of years.

Mike was commissioned into the Somerset Light Infantry in February 1955. He served with them in Malaya, Malta and Cyprus in 1956, before moving to Warminster. Following the amalgamation of the SOM LI and DCLI in 1959, he served with the SCLI in Germany. In 1960, he was seconded for two years to the Trucial Oman Scouts.



In 1962, he re-joined the SCLI which was then located in Gibraltar. He spent a few months with a rifle company in Tobruk, Libya and was highly regarded by the local Arabs for his knowledge of falconry. After leaving Gibraltar, he moved with the Battalion to Berlin in 1963, before being sent to Durham University to learn Arabic. He then spent three more years in Cyprus after which he worked at GCHQ. He left the Army in 1971 when he joined ORD where he was based primarily in Rostaq until 1985.

He married **Barbara** in 1963, who survives him along with their daughter, **Annabel** and son, **Shaun** and four grandchildren.

Sander Carling

Sander died 24 August in hospital in France. He had been out looking for his dog the day before and had a fall, hit his head and did not recover so died peacefully.

Sander commanded the Signal Regiment as an Acting Lt Col between May 1974 and Jan 1975 following the upgrading from a squadron to a regiment in 1973. Both **Peter Brunton** and **Mike Chandler** met Sander at Welbeck College before going on to RMA Sandhurst then to the School of Signals at Catterick. Sander was well known for his love of jazz and his extensive collection of records. Mike and Sander played together in the College's rather *ad hoc* skiffle cum jazz band. Sander was an accomplished cornet player and could do a mean imitation of **Louis Armstrong** or **Humphrey Littleton**.

When Sander left SAF in 1975 he ran Electroman LLC, one of **HH Sayyid Fahr**'s companies in Muscat. It was during this time that Mike met up with Sander again and they enjoyed 'banyans' and water skiing together with his speed boat in the *bandars* south of Muscat.



Sander was married to **Jill** for over 30 years with whom he had two sons, **Oliver** and **William**. On leaving Oman, Sander owned and ran the Alpaka Hotel in Tignes, a Ski resort in the French Alps. Sanders's funeral was in Tignes on 31 August, with jazz by the lake afterwards.

Editor's note: I met Sander in Bait al Falaj when he first arrived in Oman. He was obviously a good 'fit' for 'SAF', full of life and enthusiasm, focused on operational effectiveness but huge humour and enjoyment of life. I spoke to him last year and we planned to get together but it was not to be.

RIP Tim Jones

Major Charles Frederick Wilson



Major Charles Frederick Wilson died peacefully in Nobles Hospital on the Isle of Man after a short illness on Thursday, 25 August 2022.

After attending the RMA Sandhurst he was commissioned into the RCT in which he served until the 1st of January 1984. He had a very successful career including three tours

in Germany, time in Aden, then Sharjah as a Desert Intelligence Officer. He commanded 3 Tank Transporter Squadron and enjoyed attending the Liverpool Tank Transporter reunions.

After his UK service he joined SAF to help in establishing the Transport & Movements Branch in HQ SAF. Later he was posted to HQ Northern Oman Brigade to help plan for the Royal Review and Exercise Ra'ad. He made a major contribution to the planning and then the operational aspects of both events. The 'Movement' and 'Logistical' problems of getting 10,000 troops, 3,000 vehicles, two

REMEMBERING...

Artillery Regiments and an Armoured Regiment to an open desert area some 130 miles South of Muscat were overcome and both events were immensely successful.

After Oman he worked in the HR Department of Emirates Airlines recruiting and training Nationals to take over management roles in the company. Later he joined Bradford University administrating their Management School. He then spent two years in Kuwait managing HR for the Al Sayer Toyota dealership.

In retirement on the Isle of Man he was involved in many activities. He was Commandant, then Honorary Colonel of the Cadet Force, President of the Royal British Legion, helped to establish the Armed Forces Committee and campaigned to ensure over 70s TV Licences remained free.

He was the 2021 winner of the Award of Excellence and received the Isle of Man Newspaper Lifetime Achievement Award.

Charles was a man of high integrity and principles, a good man in every sense of the word. He was a caring and loving family man and a wonderful friend.

Our thoughts are with **Ann** and all of her family at this very difficult time.

David McAllister

Captain Guy Preston Gowlett WKHM

23rd June 1929 – 5th September 2022

On Monday 5 September, after a long illness, **Captain Guy Gowlett** died in hospital near his home in Great Dunmow, Essex at the age of 93.

Guy took a short service commission on National Service with the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC) in 1947 which was later converted to a regular commission. He had a series of postings in Germany which were distinctly irregular, including dealing with Serb nationalists. Guy really found his niche when he was posted to Aden in the early '60s – the Arabian Desert. He spent much of his time on secondment, first in Aden then with the Trucial and Oman Scouts in the United Emirates and finally in Oman where he served with the Oman Research Department (ORD) from 1974 to 1985. It is reputed that Guy was the most senior Captain in the British Army. His Regiment, the RASC had metamorphosed into the Royal Corps of Transport with which he never served. On retiring from Oman he lived in Great Dunmow, Essex where he kept his beloved 1928 vintage Rolls Royce called Daisy. Guy's other vintage Rolls which he drove in Aden was Betsy and was not brought back to UK.



I remember first meeting Guy soon after his arrival in Oman in 1974. He was to be the Desert Intelligence Officer (DIO) for North West Dhofar. In particular I remember shaking his hand for the first time: ring and little fingers missing from an encounter with a misfire from a mortar in Aden. I also remember our conversation. He told me that although we patrolled the same area, it was large enough for us not to bump into each other. Known as Sheik Saleh, Guy roamed his area with his small band. I had **Bin Gabaisha**, one of Thesiger's two guides in my Firqat at Mudhai but he was getting a little old so I passed him to Guy to our mutual benefit. Guy had a wonderful schoolboy's sense of humour with nicknames for everything. **Sue Ward** said that Guy translated *Winnie the Pooh* into Arabic.

However, Guy will probably be best remembered as the last of the old fashioned English eccentrics who served as desert intelligence officers. We shall not see his like again, more's the pity. He will be much missed by those of us who treasured his friendship.

MCL

Albion 'Jack' Simpson

11 August 1934 – 30 October 2022



Jack came to Oman in March of 1989 following his retirement after 35 years from the British Army. He was to remain in Oman with his wife **Ada** for four years during which time he made many friends, including **Saud** and **Shareen Al Habsi**. As well as meeting new friends Jack and Ada were also pleased to meet many old friends

from the early years of their time with the British Army.

Whilst serving in Oman the first Gulf war occurred and Jack was kept busy supplying front lines for the Omani army.

Jack enjoyed the challenges of serving in Oman but especially loved the culture and people he was to meet. From going up in to the Jebel to check on bases and to Salalah where Ada had the opportunity of driving a challenger tank and wadi bashing there was always something to keep him occupied.

A great squash player Jack would often be found in the squash courts taking on any one who wanted a challenge. Having played for the British Army, Jack was certainly someone you'd want to play against.

In 2018 Jack sadly lost Ada, his wife of 62 years and life thereafter was never the same. After a long and valiant fight, Jack died peacefully on the morning of the 30 October 2022.

Jack Simpson will be remembered by all as a kind, gentle, helpful and wonderful person. His family, **Jacqueline** and **David**, will miss him beyond words, but they will have the knowledge that his time in Oman was one of fun, laughter and a little bit of hard work. A great way to end his Military career.

Raaid Mike Baillie RAFO

Raaid Mike Baillie served with RAFO for 22 years as a Flight Safety officer after a full career in the RAF. He then retired to Cyprus where he worked with SSAFA but returned to UK due to ill health in July 2022. He died in Eastbourne on 24 November 2022 aged 83 years. He was buried in January.

Mike is remembered by his many colleagues and friends in Oman and Cyprus as a generous and charming man. A lifelong bachelor, he is survived by his nephew and nieces. Mike was a keen offshore sailor who entertained his many friends on his 43-foot steel yacht (called 'Omani') which he regularly cruised and raced with much enjoyment and success.

TPFJ

Mark Scrase-Dickins CMG DL

Many older members will remember **Mark Scrase-Dickins** who died in December 2022. A former Green Jacket, he never served in SAF but held a number of important FCO roles in the Middle East and MOD including time in Muscat. He was duty officer in MOD at the time of Mirbat. Always discrete and urbane, he was a consummate diplomat who 'walked with kings nor lost the common touch'.

TPFJ

Major (Retired) Jonathan Dale Tittley (Titters) FRGS – NFR 1984-87

Jonathan Tittley (known as "Titters") died peacefully at home in Westbury, Wiltshire in January 2023 after a short illness having announced his terminal diagnosis to his many friends with a message headed "Titters-Endex!".

He had lived a full and varied life, joining the British Army from school in 1970 and commissioned into 6 Gurkha Rifles in 1972. Most of his army career was spent with the Gurkhas in the Far East except for a tour in Northern Ireland with the Green Jackets and a tour in Australia with RAR. In 1984 he joined SAF to serve with NFR as Mortar Officer until 1987 when he moved to UK and then Nepal where he ran an Elephant Polo Team as well as a security business employing ex-Gurkhas for security duties.

An energetic globetrotter, Titters also found time to live in Kenya and Malta as well as UK! Renowned for his sense of fun and good humour, he named his home in UK 'Rourke's Drift' and was an enthusiastic supporter of RGS as well as the Special Forces Club.

Well-respected for his military professionalism and much loved by many friends, we offer our condolences to his wife, **Lynne** and two daughters. Jon's funeral was on 14 January 2023 at Westbury.

TPFJ

LOST SINCE 2022 JOURNAL

The following deaths have been recorded:

2019	Brian Parks RNO 2017-18
Jan 22	Frank Batten HQ N OMAN BDE 1977-80
Feb 22	Michael Roberts SON 1975-76
Mar 22	Roger Woodiwiss MOD & SOLF 1976-99 (see obit)
Apr 22	Mike Ryan DR 1969-71
May 22	Brian Jayes DR & ACS 1972-73
May 22	Bill Johnstone KJ & INT 1974-78
May 22	Fiona Warton
Jun 22	Dick Morgan-Evans DR 1971-73
Jul 22	Frank Pole SOAF 1977-79 (see obit)
Jul 22	Ernie Webb SR 1984-88
Aug 22	Mike Baddeley ORD/ISS 1971-85 (see obit)
Aug 22	Sander Carling SR 1971-72 (see obit)
Aug 22	Charles Wilson HQ N OMAN BDE 1984-86 (see obit)
Aug 22	Trevor Pearce SON 1984-99
Sep 22	Guy Gowlett ISS/ORD 1974-85 (see obit)
Nov 22	Mike Baillie SOAF 1982-2004 (see obit)
Nov 22	Robert Atkins SOLF 1983-85
Nov 22	Robert Atkinson FOS 1980s
Dec 22	Brian Gilbert-Denham NFR 1982-87
Jan 23	Jonathan Tittley NFR 1987-89 (see obit)
Jan 23	Brian Rawlings TOS 1961-64
Jan 23	Jolyon Hunt SON 1980-83
Jan 23	Bill Davies SOLF 1984-87
Feb 23	Will Cook OA 1973-75
Feb 23	Nigel Knocker DR 1971-73 Office of CDS 1982-85

LOST CONTACT

David Carter SAF SIGS 2018-	<i>Journal Returned</i>
Pat Brown SO1 TNG 2019-20	<i>Journal Returned</i>
John Clayton SOLF 1974-78	<i>Nursing Home</i>

JOINED SINCE 2022 JOURNAL

Gareth Pugh	SOA	84-85
Richard Higgins	Head of Fleet Maintenance	88-92
Hugh Willoughby	KJ	74-76
Charlie Dalziel	23 Inf Bde Tng Adv	13-15
Jeff Morgan	OC 6 Sqn	80-82
Robin Hood	Beaver Pilot	63-65
David Reith	EME Inspection Team	03-05
Matt Wright	Student, Staff College & KSQA Adviser	17-21
Jack Papenfus	Artillery Advisor	17-22
Brodie Galbraith	Commercial Defence Advisor	04-18
Guy Charles-Jones	CoS, CATAT	22-
James Bryant	SBLSO(A)	22-
Richard Coombe	DR	72-74
William Leek	SO1 Jt Trg & Plans	22-
Rob Brown	Saif Sareea 3 Lead planner	17-18
Bob Parr	DR/JR	86-87
Jamie Dullaghan	SAFE	22-
Simon Elsey	RAFO Seeb	22-
Edward Roffe-Silvester	Royal Office	22-24
Wayne Middleton	RNO	22-
Simon Berwick	Royal Office	22-
Jon Nixon	SOAF	22-
Hugh Campbell-Smith	Duqm	19-
Allan Hall	Fleet Logistics Officer Wudham	22-
Paul Briggs	SOAF	76-79
Andy Bishop	HQ MSO	23-25
Naqeeb (Jaw) Qais bin Khamis Al Qasmi	Office of COSSAF (Protocol)	22-

TRANSFORMATION AND OMANISATION – PART III

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 Thutnait
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 M&O 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)

DEVELOPMENT OF TRAINING SCHOOLS

The developments in the size of the army and the addition of specialised units led to the creation of specialised military schools. SAFTR introduced courses for infantry support weapons such as the 81mm medium mortar, the GPMG (SF) medium machine gun and .50 Browning. It also began to provide a number of tactical courses for the training of the army's non-commissioned officers. Schools were formed for the teaching of engineer, artillery, armour, parachute, EME, ordnance, administrative and signals skills. All these were developed to assist in the increasing Omanisation of the Army, which was going ahead rapidly.



Right: Commander SAFTR addressing recruits
Left and below: Cadets on the Assault Course



Background picture: Cadets Platoon Attack



Officer Cadet Training

Officer Cadet Training had started in SAFTR in 1971 as the Potential Officer Training Wing (POTW) and it continued there until facilities proved too cramped, and, with the rapid growth in the Capital Area, the location was no longer conducive to good training. So in 1981 it moved to Aydim and took over the old Iranian Camp, renaming itself Wahidat Tadreeb Adhubaat Al Murashaheen (WTM). With the closure of Aydim Training Centre for training Baluch recruits, SAFTR's Support Weapon Courses and Senior and Junior NCOs Tactics courses also moved to Aydim. Eventually, it was decided to group all the various training courses under one HQ and accordingly, in July 1986, the whole organisation became Koliyat al Sultan Qaboos al Askariya (KSQA), and commenced a period of extensive upgrade and



Mortar Training



Cadet Colour Party



HM speaking with the Instructors

DS advises cadets during a Defence Exercise



Left: WTM Passing out Parade, 1984

Below left: HM meets newly commissioned Officers, watched over by CSOLF and CO WTM

Below: HM inspecting the cadets at the first Course Passing Out Parade at Aydim, 1981



Sayyid Fahr inspecting Officer Cadets at Potential Officer Training Wing, SAFTR, 1978

Officer Cadet Training Overseas

Not only were officer cadets trained in Oman, but some were sent to England to the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, where HM the Sultan received his military training. When HM was invited to take the salute at the Sovereigns Parade in 1983, he also met Omani Cadets on course there.



Officer Training School (Madrassat Tadreeb A'Dhubat)

Continuation training for officers, in the form of Platoon and Company Commanders Courses, Junior Staff, Methods of Instruction and Promotion Courses, had been successfully conducted at CTC in MAM since 1979.

However, with the ever-increasing expansion, not only in MAM, but in the general Capital Area, it became increasingly difficult to run the more practically-orientated courses now required by SOLF for their officers. Accordingly a suitable camp to accommodate CTC was looked into.

In early 1983, the then Oman Research Department (ORD), decided they no longer needed their Training School at Bait Kashmir in Sohar, and thus offered the camp back to SOLF (from whom they had acquired it in 1973). It was decided that this was the ideal location for the new Officer Training School; thus in July 1983, CTC ceased to exist in MAM and moved to Sohar, being renamed Madrassat Tadreeb A'Dhubat (MTD).

This organisation has gone from strength to strength, and now provides a comprehensive array of courses and promotion exams for the Army. Not only does it cater for Omani Officers, but by 1990 had officers from other GCC states attending its courses as well as students from the Air Force, ROP and ISS.



Clockwise from above: Students discussing tactics during a model exercise; HM arriving at MTD; HM being introduced to the MTD staff; HM visiting a lecture at MTD in 1984

Right and below: HM touring the camp





Bait Kashmir - Sohar

After Bait Al Falaj the Bait Kashmir Camp was the second most historical location for the Army. It had been given to SAF in 1952 by HH Sultan Said bin Taimour, and it was where the Batinah Force (later NFR) had been founded. In 1959 it had been handed over to OG, when NFR moved to Nizwa, and was initially their HQ, and later a Sector HQ, and remained so until 1973 when OG moved to a new camp further inland. ORD then took over the property and used it as their Training Centre. The original house was in a bad state of repair and had to be knocked down in late 1973. It was rebuilt to the same size and shape using modern materials, and using the original doors and railings. It was thus very apt that, in 1983, this historic camp should return to the Army and become the Officer Training School. (MTD).



Left and below:
Lectures at MTD



LOGISTIC EXPANSION

Medical Services

As the war ended in Dhofar the Medical Services consisted of the UAG Hospital in Dhofar, comprising 50 beds, and the newly opened Force Base Hospital (FBH) in MAM, which had opened in late 1974, with 56 beds as well as medical detachments with all units.

A Medical Equipment Depot was opened in 1980 and during the late 1970s and early 1980s various specialist departments were added to FBH, including a Dental Centre.

It became fairly evident during the 1982 Brigade Exercise that improved medical support in the field was required, so in 1983 a mobile medical unit, the Casualty Clearing Station, was set up in MAM, to help collect, treat and evacuate battlefield casualties.

The highlight for the Medical Services was the opening of the state of the art Armed Forces Hospital (AFH) at Al Khoudh in December 1985.



Above: The new Force Base Hospital at MAM

Left: FMS Medical Assistant at work in the hospital

Far left: FMS laboratory in the new hospital



Ordnance

By the end of the war, 1 Ordnance Maintenance Park (1 OMP) had been disbanded as the war had moved west and it was replaced by a Combat Supplies Platoon at Manston (Aydin) which itself was disbanded in late 1976. However, there was still a requirement for Ordnance Support in the south so 2 OMP, based in Salalah, was redesignated the Forward Ordnance Depot (FOD). In August 1978 HQ FOS finally moved out of BAF and into the new HQ complex in MAM Camp.

With the expansion of EME Workshops throughout the country, Ordnance Stores Sections (OSS) were formed to support these with the provision of MT and Technical Spares.

A further expansion of new barracks saw the requirement of a separate Accommodation Stores Unit, and this was established in November 1982, to provide units with the necessary Barrack Stores.

As a result of the new Concept of Operations, it became necessary to provide improved delivery of Ordnance Stores to units in the field, thus in June 1986 The Ordnance Stores Company (OSC) was formed to support the Army in the field. At the same time other 'Shadow' Field Force units were established to support Operations and Exercises.



CCS on exercise

Above: Casualty arrival at CCS

Left: Treating a casualty



CCS in the field

Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (EME)

EME, like Ordnance, were first to move out of BAF to MAM in the early 1970s, and by 1975 had their Base Workshops in MAM, as well as Brigade Workshops Dhofar in UAG, 1 Regt OA Workshops (North and South), an ACS Workshop, Midway Garrison Workshop, LADs with all units, as well as a fledgling EME School in MAM. In 1977 they were made responsible for the maintenance of vehicles in all three Services and in 1978 a proper EME Training School was established as part of Base Workshops, but with a separate command structure. At the same time HQ EME moved from BAF to the new HQ Complex in MAM.

With the introduction of the new Concept of Operations it was essential that better EME support was provided in the field, thus in 1984 the Force Mobile Workshop (FM Wksp) was formed, with its Forward Repair Groups (FRG) and Forward Repair Teams (FRT) working forward with the leading combat troops.



Above: EME in the field



Left, below left and below: Carrying out repairs in the EME workshops



Below: Repairing Saladins in the EME workshops at Thumrait

EME in the field



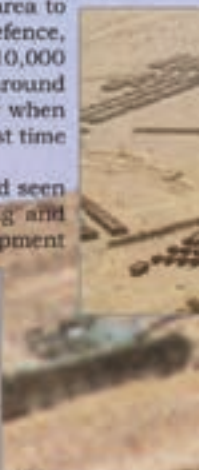
EXERCISE RA'AD AND ROYAL REVIEW – 1985

The years 1983 and 1984 saw a concentration on individual and collective training at unit level. This was to consolidate the lessons learnt during the 1982 exercise period and to prepare for a large-scale force exercise in April 1985. Exercise Ra'ad (Thunder) was most aptly named for it was a powerful demonstration of Oman's military forces' ability. It was mainly a SOLF exercise, but also included much air support from SOAF, controlled by the army's Forward Air Controllers (FAC's). A number of SOLF Force Units were added to Northern Oman Brigade to form a friendly forces Task Force. Troops from Southern Oman Brigade provided the bulk of the enemy forces. It was held from 2-11 April 1985 in the area to the south-west of Adam centering around Afar and Barzaman. The Task Force practiced screen force, mobile defence, withdrawal, advance and attack procedures including the seizing of important points by parachute forces. In all, 10,000 troops and 2,500 vehicles took part in Ex Ra'ad. It was watched by military observers and journalists from all around the world and was widely reported as a great success. The exercise was preceded by a gigantic Military Review when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Supreme Commander, inspected his army, drawn up together for the first time in one location.

The review was a fitting display to put on for His Majesty, whose vision in the first fifteen years of his reign had seen both the country and the army develop beyond all expectations. In mid 1970, SAF was about 3,000 strong and very basically equipped; by 1985 the army alone was just over 20,000 strong, with all the latest kit and equipment including Armour, Artillery and sophisticated communications and logistic support.



Left: SOAR Chieftain tanks advance
Right: A Scorpion tank
Below: MR officer briefs visitors to the exercise



Visiting guests being briefed



OP position



Left: A combined Infantry/Tank attack
Below: Screen Force in action



A Chieftain Tank



Foreign visitors to HQ NOM Bde



COLONEL NIGEL KNOCKER OBE WO WKHM

31 August 1930 - 21 February 2023

Following a defiant fight against cancer, **Nigel** died on 21 February 2023 at home in Wiltshire. It is evident from his personal notes that his formative years in the army offered a breadth of experience that later generations could barely imagine.

In January 1949, aged 18, he was called up for National Service. He joined the 14/20 Kings Hussars in Catterick and recalled conditions there as beyond primitive! After attending WOSB, he was commissioned into the Lifeguards. However, mess bills became a challenge (his words) and he soon transferred to the infantry. He joined 1st Battalion, The Royal Sussex Regiment, on the Suez Canal in 1951. His subaltern duties extended well beyond his platoon and he was sent to Jordan to accompany the regimental band on tour. Nigel recalled fondly: "**Brigadier John McCully** commanded 2 Brigade of the Arab Legion. This is where I first met his son **Douglas** – we have been firm friends ever since." Indeed, that friendship spanned more than 70 years.

He became ADC to **General Sir Lashmar Whistler**, GOC Western District, then returned to the battalion as adjutant in Korea, Germany and Gibraltar. He married **Catriona** in 1958 and they were posted to Canberra. Three years in Australia were happy times, but the subsequent tour in Northern Ireland in 1961 was a culture shock, mitigated only by the birth of **Jonathan**. Nigel records: "It was a dreary place and we were not sorry to leave."

Fiona was born in 1963, during his Staff College tour. Despite his subsequent promotion to Lieutenant Colonel, Nigel became increasingly disenchanted with the dullness of staff and depot roles. With no command appointments available in the Queens Regiment (as the Royal Sussex had become) he chose adventure and active service. In May 1971 he took command of The Desert Regiment (DR) in the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF).

Nigel was nothing if not courageous and prepared to push the boundaries, and he had an eye for the bigger picture. He conceived a plan to cut the *adoo* resupply route from (then) PDRY right at the border. Thus was *Operation Simba* planned, reconnoitred and

finally, on 16 April 1972, mounted. Well beyond SAF's front line in a strategic, dominating position and supportable only by air, Sarfait (its geographical name) was an enduring thorn in the *adoo's* side until the end of the war. It was all things to all people: international signal, logistic nightmare, operational launchpad, and a clear statement of intent by SAF.

In March 1973, now based on the Salalah Plain, DR was responsible for the insertion of the original Diana positions on the jebel following the RCL attack against the airfield. Nigel's actions earned the respect and friendship of CSAF, **Major General Tim Creasey**. After a brief period as acting Dhofar Brigade Commander in mid-1973, Nigel returned to the UK and his family in Shorncliffe.

Promoted to Colonel, he was posted as Defence Attaché in Muscat in December 1977. It was a fraught time regionally as the Iranian Revolution took hold and, in cruel harmony, **Catriona** became terminally ill and died in October 1979. On return to UK, Nigel viewed the offered postings with little interest. However, **Tim Creasey**, by then knighted and appointed as Oman's CDS, offered him a senior staff appointment in Muscat: the deal was done.

Nigel married **Angela Willoughby** in March 1981. They moved to Muscat in 1982, returning to the UK in 1985 at the end of Nigel's military service.

In parallel with his first civilian role – with Wiltshire Council's Emergency Planning Department – Nigel became deeply involved with both the SAF Association and the Anglo-Omani Society, appointed Vice-President of the latter in 2018. He was Editor of the Association's Journal from 1990-2019 and served as Chairman from 1994-2017.

In recognition of his achievements in command, he was awarded the WKHM in 1973 and appointed OBE in 1974. For his work on behalf of the Association and his broader role in furthering UK-Oman relations he was awarded the Order of Oman (WO) in 2018.

Nigel is survived by Angela and his children, Jonathan and Fiona.

GA



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