

The RAF, Small Wars and Insurgencies: Later Colonial Operations, 1945-1975

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General Introduction

This second study of the RAF's prosecution of small wars and counter-insurgencies examines the period from the end of the Second World War through to the conclusion of British decolonisation. After the war, the RAF returned to its colonial policing role and repeatedly became involved in small-scale conflicts and internal security operations from the late 1940s through to the early 70s. The largest such commitment was the Malayan Emergency, which extended from 1948 through to 1960. The Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya lasted from 1952 to 1955, while the insurgency in Cyprus began in 1955 and finally came to an end in 1959. In the Middle East, instability in Oman was a source of constant concern for much of the 1950s and 60s, and there were intermittent troubles in Aden in the second half of the decade before the outbreak of more or less open rebellion in 1963. The rebellion in Borneo in December 1962 marked the beginning of a four-year confrontation with Indonesia.

The RAF's role in all these theatres has been surveyed in Air Chief Marshal Sir David Lee's series of official histories, *Wings in the Sun*, *Flight from the Middle East*, and *Eastward*. Furthermore, RAF activity in Malaya during the period of the emergency has been the subject of an extended and detailed monograph, at first intended only for internal Ministry of Defence consumption, but published later under the name of its author, Malcolm Postgate, as *Operation Firedog: Air Support in the Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960*. However, both Lee and Postgate were primarily concerned with narrating the RAF's history; they were not aiming to investigate the specific issue of the RAF's approach to the conduct of small wars and counter-insurgencies. The aim here is therefore to fill this gap in the official historiography using six case studies – Malaya, Central Oman, Cyprus, Aden, Borneo and Oman-Dhofar – to consider how doctrine and tactics evolved in the post-war years and the broader implications for our understanding of how air power may be exploited in this type of conflict.

In what follows it is particularly important to bear in mind one of the salient arguments of AHB's first study in this series. There is a widespread

misconception regarding the employment of air power in the colonies in the inter-war period to the effect that independent offensive operations predominated over all other activities. At its most extreme, this view can be manifested in the contention that the RAF had somehow failed if it did not single-handedly manage to bomb insurgents or other irregular adversaries into submission. Yet 'live' offensive operations in fact made up only a small minority of RAF missions during the era of colonial air policing, and both bombing and strafing were often used more for effect than for the direct targeting of enemy forces or their property, or else were employed against targets that lay in remote or inaccessible areas that ground troops could not reach. Much offensive tasking was also designed to provide fire support to ground forces – usually at their specific request, and in full accordance with the RAF doctrine of the period. The primary air power role by a very substantial margin was reconnaissance.

There is no obvious reason why the proportion of RAF tasking accounted for by independent offensive air operations should have increased after the Second World War. Indeed, given that this was an era in which the UK enjoyed considerably less freedom of action in the colonies than in earlier years, and bearing in mind the growing emphasis in British military doctrine on joint operations, and also the increasing mobility of ground forces, we might if anything expect to find considerably less offensive air power being independently utilised.

2. The Strategic Background

The UK's approach to the employment of air power in small wars and counter-insurgencies in the decolonisation era cannot be understood unless it is considered in context. The UK emerged from the Second World War with her empire still predominantly intact, but with her capacity to maintain the empire fatally undermined. The United States and the Soviet Union were now the world's superpowers, while the UK could no longer lay claim to the great power status that she had enjoyed in the 1920s and 30s. Wartime economic dislocation would take years to rectify, and massive debts were owed to her Allies. And yet post-war British governments found themselves confronted by new financial pressures – by a vulnerable currency, and by the need to finance the new welfare state. In this environment, there were inevitably strong pressures to reduce defence spending. However, the demands of imperial defence were in some ways more onerous than they had been in the inter-war period. The war had served to encourage nationalist movements in a number of British colonies, and communism emerged as a threat to British control in some areas. Of course, it was also perceived to be a threat in Western Europe, and the demands of European defence would consequently loom far larger in British thinking after 1945 than they had for most of the 1930s. Soon the UK would be committed to NATO.

Taking all this into account, it was perhaps remarkable that the British withdrawal from empire in the late 1940s was virtually confined to India and Palestine, and that a very substantial military presence was retained in both the Middle East and the Far East. Nevertheless, it became clear during the 50s that there were no longer sufficient military and economic resources to sustain the empire and increasingly, in any case, British governments lacked the will to sustain it. The old arguments used to justify the UK's overseas presence began to sound very hollow, and anti-imperialist sentiments were also strong in the Labour Party, which governed in the late 40s and from 1964 through to 1970. The turning point came with the Suez Crisis of 1956, which brutally exposed the limitations of British power in the post-war world. After Suez, the armed forces were subjected to repeated cuts, and the process of decolonisation gathered pace. By the early 70s, the withdrawal was complete, and British defence policy had been almost entirely reoriented towards NATO.

For the RAF, the commitments of these years were many and varied. Quite apart from the insurgencies in Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus, Oman and Aden, and the Indonesian Confrontation, there was the Suez Crisis, and the Kuwaiti Crisis (1961). There were also extensive colonial garrison duties to perform. And then there was the task of containing communist threats originating in both the Soviet Union and China, which involved the assignment of UK forces to NATO, to the Central Treaty Organisation (Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan), and to the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation. Finally, it should be remembered that the RAF were solely responsible for the UK's independent nuclear deterrent until 1969.¹ The RAF certainly emerged from the Second World War larger and better equipped than in the inter-war years; the number of front-line aircraft peaked at 2,231 in 1955, and there were still nearly 900 aircraft a decade later. But their innumerable operational responsibilities had to be very carefully balanced, and it was never possible to focus on one particular area of tasking to the exclusion of all others.

3. Doctrine

As we have seen, the RAF were very extensively involved in colonial policing operations in the 1920s and 30s and were quick to produce doctrine to describe how air power could best be employed to uphold imperial authority in so-called 'undeveloped countries'. By 1945, they had been locked in conventional hostilities on a global scale for six years, but there remained within their ranks many personnel who had participated in colonial operations between the wars, including the majority of the most senior officers. Hence, in the event of renewed counter-insurgency activity or other 'small wars', the RAF were still in a position to draw on a considerable reserve of experience and expertise, and RAF doctrine similarly continued to offer guidance on the peculiarities of such conflicts.

In full accordance with earlier doctrinal utterances, the RAF War Manual of 1950 began by insisting that insurgents and other irregular adversaries should not be underestimated:

These barbarous or semi-civilised peoples can be formidable enemies, and they usually have valuable allies in the climate and the terrain. Their very lack of formalised military organisation may in itself be a source of strength to them ... They will be largely self-supporting, capable of living on the country and independent of lines of communication in the accepted sense. Unencumbered by complicated equipment they will be highly mobile and elusive opponents, operating in a climate and in country familiar to themselves but presenting considerable difficulties to normal modern land forces.²

Again, as before, it was suggested that operations against such opponents might potentially involve 'the employment of air forces in the primary role' – essentially proscription bombing. According to the manual, when air power was used in the primary role, the aim was 'achieved not by killing the enemy or occupying his country, but by making life a burden to him – by so dislocating the normal existence of the community that they submit to terms rather than endure the continuance of inconvenience and discomfort.' It was recommended that the application of air power against insurgents in the colonies be carefully staged:

The first thing to do is to inform the people in unmistakable terms of what is required of them – the surrender of offenders or of looted rifles or camels or cattle, or the payment of a fine or whatever it may be. They must also be given a clear warning of what will happen to them if, within a stated time, they have not complied with our terms. This is done either verbally or by political officers or by dropping pamphlets in the tribal area concerned, or even sometimes by loud-speaker from the air. Action of this sort will sometimes suffice to restore order.

The pressure was then to be increased; the War Manual continued:

The next step is to issue a further notice that air action will begin within an area which must be clearly defined, from a certain time ... The enemy should be told to evacuate his habitations and advised to send his women and children out of the prescribed area.

On the expiration of the warning period, air action should begin and be continued until the enemy complies with our terms.

The object was 'to make it unsafe at any time for the inhabitants to return to their possessions or live any form of normal existence.' According to the War Manual,

Experience has shown that the inconvenience and discomfort, coupled with the feeling of boredom and helplessness engendered by this form of attack, sooner or later convinces the people that they have much to lose and nothing to gain by continued resistance.³

So much for the concept, but (once more, as in the inter-war years) proscription still only represented part of the RAF's doctrine on the employment of air power in the colonies. Proscription might exert sufficient pressure to 'restore order, stop raiding, or enforce collective punishment to discourage future misdeeds,'⁴ but the 1950 War Manual openly accepted that there were many scenarios in which it would be necessary to employ ground forces to quell unrest and that, in such circumstances, the role of air power would be to support ground operations. Indeed, it devoted considerably more space to 'air operations in support of land forces' than to 'air forces in the primary role'. Moreover, it was acknowledged that

proscription tactics were more suited to some environments than others. They would be impossible to employ in jungle or urban settings, where air power's role would again predominantly involve the support of ground forces.⁵

Otherwise the 1950 War Manual emphasised the critical role of intelligence, although warning that accurate information would often prove very difficult to obtain. The enemy, fighting on his own ground, might well command primitive but highly effective intelligence collection mechanisms.⁶ It also reiterated that the use of air power for internal security purposes should be the subject of close consultation between military and civil authorities.

At the same time the manual quite rightly drew attention to the foremost disadvantage associated with ground operations in the colonies, namely that the long-term subjugation of formerly hostile regions could only be achieved through protracted occupation. Ground forces might be deployed into particular trouble spots to restore order, but:

This method has certain disadvantages. It is expensive in men, material and money. Unless it is followed by permanent or prolonged occupation ... withdrawal is likely soon to be followed by a repetition of tribal disorder.⁷

The next edition of the War Manual appeared in 1957. It contained virtually identical introductory paragraphs on proscription tactics, but nine paragraphs in the 1950 manual dealing with the 'dislocation of the enemy's normal mode of life' had been compressed down to just two. Like its predecessor, the manual otherwise focused on air operations in support of land forces (identified as reconnaissance, offensive support, air transport, protection of surface lines of communication, the air cordon or 'air pin' system and psychological warfare), the value of intelligence, conduct after capture and jungle operations.⁸

Subsequently, RAF operational doctrine was substantially rewritten and, in March 1961, Air Ministry Pamphlet 375, *Internal Security Air Operations*, appeared. This 62-page document consisting of eight chapters and eleven appendices assigned just one paragraph to 'operations which are designed to punish by causing maximum inconvenience without inflicting casualties.' Its contents otherwise dealt overwhelmingly with the application of air power

'in support of civil authorities' (Chapter 1), which usually meant in practice 'in conjunction with ground operations'.⁹ Three broad categories of support were listed in Chapter 2 in the following order:

- (a) Air reconnaissance support
- (b) Air transport support
- (c) Offensive air support

The other chapter headings were command and control, intelligence and security, signals and communications, logistics, training, and psychological operations.

Where command and control was concerned, the fullest possible integration was recommended, with action for the restoration of law and order being 'initiated and conducted by the civil authorities, police and service commanders working together at all the appropriate levels.' On the specific subject of *air* command and control,

The greatest value will be obtained from internal security air operations if, as in all tactical air operations, operational control of the air effort is exercised at the highest practicable level. This can be done by a local air commander responsible to a director of operations or to higher air authority.

The Air Ministry Pamphlet envisaged that the control of air operations would probably be exercised through a joint operations centre (JOC) functioning either on behalf of the headquarters of a theatre commander-in-chief or as part of the operational headquarters of a director of operations. But centralised control might not always be desirable.

Circumstances may demand decentralisation of parts of the air effort below the level of a JOC. A provincial operations centre might, for example, be given an agreed allocation of offensive support or light air reconnaissance sorties to be used under local arrangements. Light aircraft of the air forces, army air corps or police might also be sent for operations with selected units in the field ... It must always be possible, however, for the local air commander to resume direct control of his forces without difficulty or delay.

On the subject of intelligence, the pamphlet both reiterated and enlarged upon arguments that the RAF had been making since the 1920s. 'The need for high-grade intelligence for the effective conduct of internal security air operations cannot be too highly emphasised.' It was recommended that intelligence collection be centralised under an intelligence committee (similar to the British Joint Intelligence Committee), and fully integrated across the police, government and the armed forces. The RAF's main intelligence input would of course be aerial imagery, but they continued to envisage the use of Special Service Officer-type field intelligence officers tasked with the collection of HUMINT. Turning to security, the pamphlet warned of the threat posed by hostile intelligence networks and pointed out that, as the insurgent was invariably at a disadvantage in terms of conventional military resources, 'he must exploit every possible source of intelligence to redress the balance.' A more air-specific security threat also existed in the form of sabotage to air force installations, aircraft, and their associated equipment, ammunition, weapons and supplies.

The allocation of a separate chapter to signals and communications reflected experience gleaned from several decades of colonial policing activity, in which



Psychological warfare: an Auster fitted with an under-wing loud-hailing speaker



A Valetta of 52 Squadron drops leaflets over the Malayan jungle, 1958

the RAF's revolutionary approach to operations, command and control, and the exploitation of intelligence had all been critically dependent on 'comms', in all their forms. No less important had been the possession of suitably located airfields, which in some theatres had necessitated the establishment of the most rudimentary forward landing grounds. The engineering and supply challenges associated with operating from such locations were the subject of the chapter on logistics. Training was now formally identified as 'indispensable to the conduct of internal security air operations', with the focus being on joint training activity, especially via command and control exercises, practice deployments, emplaning and deplaning drills, reconnaissance training and briefing. The chapter on psychological operations covered the broader principles of psychological warfare and the specific employment of aircraft for psychological effect through leaflet dropping and loud-hailing (also known as 'sky shouting').

Additionally,

Staff trained in psychological operations will normally be provided at force headquarters commensurate with the task and size of force ... to

advise the commander and lower formations and to control psychological operations of any tactical psychological units deployed with the force. All projected operations must, of course, be within the framework of political guidance from the civil power.

The various appendices covered the government of British overseas dependencies, the structure and function of local police forces, and legal aspects of the use of armed forces in support of the civil power. There was also information regarding lethal and non-lethal weapon effectiveness and target marking, and basic ground-to-air signalling codes were included, along with specimen requests for airlift and offensive air support.

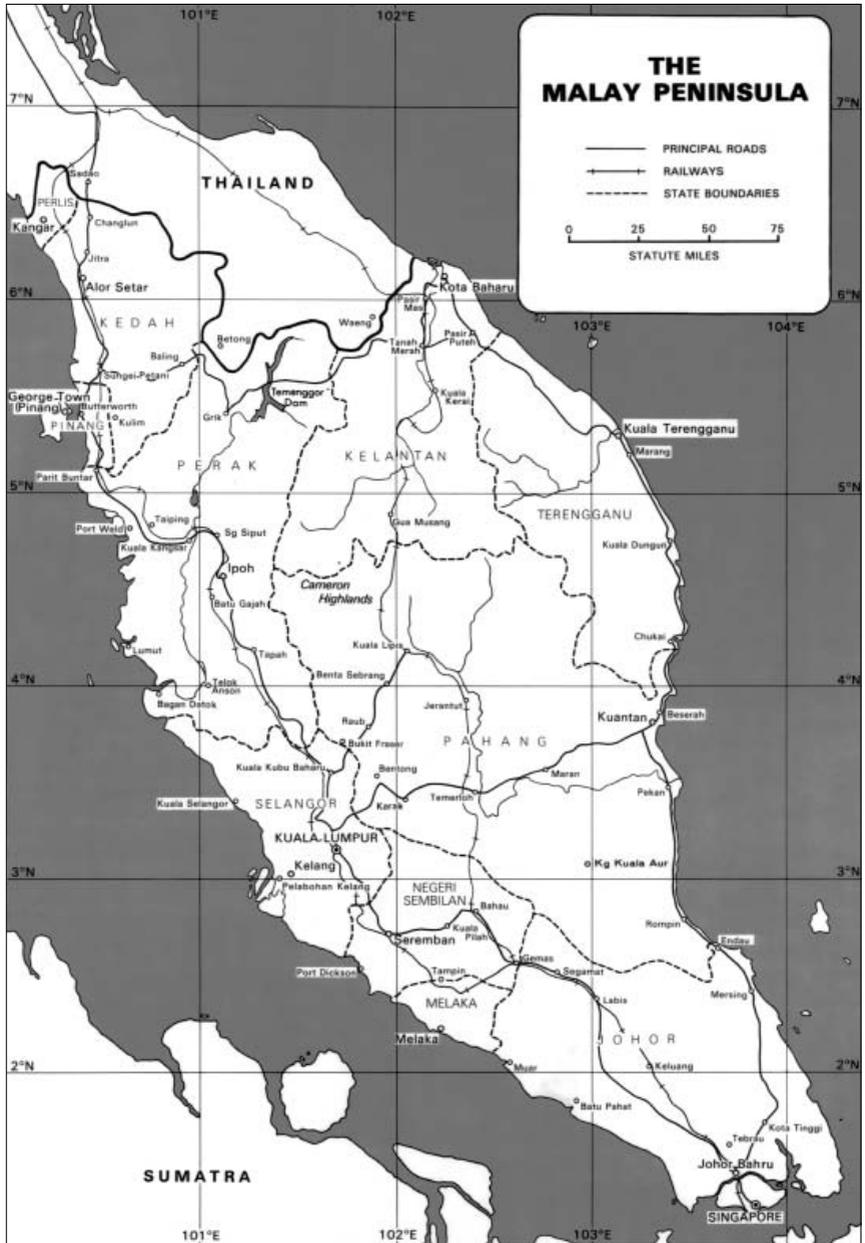
The publication of Air Ministry Pamphlet 375 clearly marks an important shift in the RAF's doctrinal position away from the language of the air control era and towards something far more recognisable from a modern-day perspective. Yet it is important not to exaggerate the extent of any break with the past. There was, for example, nothing new in the pamphlet's emphasis on support for the civil power or for ground forces; and, while the nature of joint command and control structures had not been considered in detail in written RAF doctrine before 1961, the first proper joint headquarters to be established by British forces in the colonies had actually been formed by the RAF in Palestine in 1936. In its coverage of intelligence, reconnaissance and air transport, the pamphlet merely enlarged upon themes repeated in successive War Manuals, while communications, forward deployment capabilities, training and psychological operations had all been fundamentally important to the RAF's colonial policing activities between the wars. Hence, although the pamphlet employed terminology that was very obviously (and no doubt deliberately) updated to reflect the realities of mid-twentieth century operations, its basic message merely evolved out of earlier RAF doctrine or practice in the majority of respects.

The key change (although clearly initiated by the 1957 War Manual) was the near-total disappearance of the proscription concept and of terms like 'primary role'. This was in part a reflection of far broader developments in British defence policy and in international affairs. It could be argued that the very concept of a 'primary role' was difficult to reconcile with the increasing movement of the UK armed forces towards jointery, as symbolised by the appointment of the first Chief of Defence Staff in 1957, and the creation of the unified Ministry of

Defence in 1963. But British action in the colonies was also subject to growing international scrutiny in a world dominated by the superpowers and monitored by the United Nations (UN) – a body through which countries in the developing world were coming to exert increasing pressure on the older colonial powers.

At the same time, the dramatic spread of mass communications – the press, radio, film and increasingly television – resulted in far more overt and widespread reporting of military activity across the globe. Even ‘independent’ reporting inevitably gave great prominence to excesses or mistakes by the military resulting in non-combatant casualties, and the media as always fuelled the widely held but mistaken assumption that air-launched weapons somehow killed more innocents than ground fire. Of course, many media depictions were very far from independent and by the late 1950s it was already becoming clear that the mere employment of offensive air power could easily bequeath a powerful propaganda tool to anti-British governments, insurgent movements or terrorist organisations.

The decline of the proscription concept was by no means an isolated development. Simultaneously, for example, the British Army was taking steps to reduce the potential for handing out information weapons to their adversaries and to ensure that, as far as possible, the employment of military force for internal security purposes in the colonies was subject to similar legal principles to those applying in the UK. Indeed, Appendix C to Air Ministry Pamphlet 375, entitled ‘*Legal Aspects of the Use of Troops in Support of the Civil Power*’, was transferred word-for-word from Army Pamphlet 9455 – *Keeping the Peace* (1957). This publication specifically ruled out punitive action and retribution, which had both been permitted by the 1929 *Manual of Military Law*, and by the Army’s *Notes on Imperial Policing* (1934) and *Duties in the Aid of the Civil Power* (1937).¹⁰ Instead, it emphasised the necessity for employing only the minimum force necessary to achieve the aim, and the ultimate subordination of the military to the civil authorities; it prohibited the use of lethal weapons ‘to prevent or suppress minor disorders or offences of a less serious character’, and outlined when force might be used for protective purposes, which obviously included self-defence, as well as defining the main types of civil disturbance that might necessitate the use of force. The modern-day concepts of necessity and proportionality were very clearly in evidence although not, as yet, discrimination.



Map 1. The Malayan Peninsula

Beyond this, an important part of the very *raison d'être* for employing offensive air power in a 'primary role' was removed by the revolution in military air transport, which occurred during and immediately after the Second World War. It was of course the case that air attack had been employed in the colonies on many (perhaps most) occasions to target opponents located in remote territory beyond the practicable reach of ground troops. But in the post-war years the RAF's augmented fixed-wing air transport resources allowed ground forces to be deployed into (and sustained within) many such areas, and the introduction of helicopters extended the potential for doing so further still. Moreover, air transport enhanced the mobility of ground forces not only *within* theatres but *between* theatres. While this weakened the Army's case for stationing large garrisons around the world, it similarly undermined the formerly compelling rationale for assigning a 'primary role' in particular colonies to the RAF because ground troops could not be made available economically. On the contrary, they could now be airlifted at short notice and in considerable numbers to trouble spots thousands of miles away from their normal bases.

Yet the use of offensive air power independently of ground operations was by no means entirely abandoned in the post-war years. Insurgents were sometimes able to retreat into jungle or mountain regions that remained virtually impossible for conventional ground troops to penetrate; and it was inevitable, given the many and varied demands facing the British armed forces in the 1950s and 60s, that air transport resources (particularly rotary-wing resources) should often have proved inadequate. Furthermore, ground forces were by no means always available in sufficient numbers. Hence, unless military pressure upon the enemy was to be suspended completely, there might still be no obvious alternative to air attack.

4. The Malayan Emergency

The Malayan Emergency has been the subject of several published histories, so there is no need for more than an outline of the principal events in this study. After the restoration of British colonial rule at the end of the Second World War, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), which drew its following overwhelmingly from Malaya's Chinese minority, became committed to the overthrow of the British administration and to the establishment of a communist republic. But failure over a two-year period caused the MCP to revise its hitherto largely non-violent tactics in 1948, and to embark on a programme of intimidation, violent demonstrations, murder and sabotage. These activities were perpetrated by what amounted to a standing insurgent army – the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA), which was backed by an extensive support organisation, the Min Yuen.

The federal government invoked emergency powers in June, and the armed forces were then called on to help the civil power restore law and order. However, the insurgency was barely being contained in 1950, when Lieutenant-



De Havilland Hornets over Malaya in 1954

General Sir Harold Briggs was appointed to the newly created post of Director of Operations. The so-called 'Briggs Plan' was soon afterwards introduced, amounting to a combined civil-military strategy to destroy the MRLA not only by direct action, but also by separating them from their main sources of supply (especially food supply) and support. Executed predominantly by General Sir Gerald Templer (under whom the posts of governor and Director of Operations were combined), the plan envisaged the domination of all the main centres of population and led to the enforced movement of nearly half a million Chinese squatters into protected areas – so-called 'new villages' – enclosed by perimeter fences and patrolled by police and Chinese home guards. Land, schools and other social provisions were offered to encourage the squatters to co-operate and to win 'hearts and minds', and extensive political concessions were granted to the Chinese community. They were now to be admitted to a range of state institutions – the army, police and civil service – from which they had been excluded by the ethnic Malays, and Malayan politicians were encouraged to help integrate the Chinese into the federation's developing political processes. At the same time, the government assumed absolute control of food stocks and distribution.

The government's intelligence organisation was overhauled, and many purely defensive and administrative tasks that had formerly absorbed the Army's resources were passed to the police, freeing up ground troops to venture ever further into Malaya's vast expanses of dense jungle, there to remain until they had been systematically cleared of insurgents. Although the insurgency peaked in 1951, these measures were achieving their desired effect by the following year. The MRLA was suffering heavy losses and was becoming far less active. The number of incidents perpetrated by the insurgents fell from 6,082 in 1951 to 3,727 in 1952, and to 1,170 in 1953. In the meantime, their sting was drawn even further by the promise of Malayan independence. A new constitution and national elections in 1955 provided for autonomy in many areas of government, and full independence duly became a reality two years later, although it was agreed that British, Australian and New Zealand forces should remain until any residual threat from the MRLA had been eradicated. Over the same period, the decline of the insurgency continued, and the emergency provisions were progressively lifted – one area after another – from the south to the north of the federation. Nevertheless, the regulations were not completely removed until July 1960.¹¹

Although it is generally acknowledged that the British were at first slow to respond to the threat posed by the MRLA, it is common for Malaya to be depicted as a model counter-insurgency campaign in most other respects. The ultimate centralisation of authority in a single leader – Templer – has been identified as a particularly shrewd initiative, and Corum suggests that Templer provides ‘a good example of effective senior leadership in counter-insurgency’.¹² Elsewhere, he and Johnson argue that ‘the British had pioneered modern counterinsurgency concepts that others would seek to emulate elsewhere’.¹³ In his seminal study *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning*, Julian Paget described how the security forces broke up large groups of guerrillas, prevented them from dominating vital areas, and successfully isolated them from the population. No less importantly, the British administration soon grasped the importance of optimal intelligence acquisition, distribution and exploitation, and of winning hearts and minds. This latter goal was achieved among the general population through the protection of the main inhabited territories, the promise of independence, and the various social and political reform programmes, while propaganda and psychological warfare campaigns at the same time relentlessly targeted the insurgents. Finally, in Paget’s view, effective civil-military co-operation played a key role in defeating the insurgency, and the ‘extremely efficient machine’ ultimately developed ‘became a model for the [later] Kenya and Cyprus Emergencies’.¹⁴

The case is a strong one, yet it should not be accepted uncritically, for it is possible to exaggerate the challenge facing the authorities in Malaya. To begin with, the Malayan political system was an entirely new and British creation, which operated under British protection – a form of government that received a substantial popular mandate in 1948. This gave British administrators the scope to devise and implement a range of far-reaching political initiatives, which might in different circumstances have faced strong opposition from (for example) dynastic leaders, vested political interests or larger popular interest groups. This relative freedom of action was further enhanced by the fact that no other major power took an interest in events in Malaya; nor was there any interference from the United Nations.

Second, the scale of the insurgency was always quite limited. In 1948, the Federation was inhabited by approximately 4.9 million people. The strength of what Postgate describes as the ‘communist terrorist organisation’ amounted to 2,300 in July of that year, and then rose to a peak of 7,292 in 1951, before falling

to 3,402 in 1954 and to just 868 by December 1958. However, it appears that these figures included elements who were not actually MRLA combatants for, according to the same author's breakdown of MRLA strength by regiment, in the peak year of 1951 they numbered only 3,280 personnel, or just 0.07 per cent of the population.¹⁵

Hence this was by no means a 'mass' insurgency. Moreover, the MRLA were representative of only one of Malaya's ethnic communities, they espoused a political creed (communism) which proved not to have widespread appeal, and they also lacked the external support that is so often crucial to sustaining insurgent organisations. The rebels were able to find sanctuary north of the Thai border, but they were not backed by Thailand. The Federation was otherwise surrounded by sea, which could be effectively patrolled by the Royal Navy and by RAF maritime reconnaissance aircraft. In this context, it is hardly surprising that the British administration should have adopted a strategy designed to isolate the insurgents. It must surely have been obvious that they would be particularly vulnerable to such an approach, particularly where food supply was concerned.

Even then, the cost of suppressing the Malayan insurgency was enormous. From 1948 until Malayan independence in 1957, it exceeded £700,000,000, of which the UK provided £525,000,000 (at a time when high overseas defence spending was exerting considerable pressure on the UK's precarious post-war balance of payments position).¹⁶ The manpower bill was no less impressive. Apart from the air and maritime elements involved, there were ten infantry battalions in Malaya in June 1948; by 1950 there were 19 and by January 1953 there were 23. As late as January 1957, when the strength of the 'communist terrorist organisation' numbered only 2,066 personnel of undetermined combat status, there were still 23 battalions along with three squadrons of the SAS, one squadron of the New Zealand SAS, one squadron of paratroops and six squadrons of the RAF Regiment (Malaya). The 23 battalions comprised around 40,000 troops. The assignment of ground forces and other military assets to Malaya on such a scale imposed significant limitations upon British counter-insurgency campaigning elsewhere in the Empire and Commonwealth.¹⁷

As for the police, the number of regulars grew from 9,000 in June 1948 to 36,737 in January 1953, while a special constabulary formed in response to

the emergency numbered 44,878 by June 1952, by which time there was additionally a home guard of 250,000.¹⁸ Most governments would be reasonably confident of their chances of defeating a small, fragmented and very isolated guerrilla force with such resources at their disposal.

Additionally, the surviving figures suggest that the ground security forces were not bound by very restrictive rules of engagement. Data exist for the number of 'communist terrorist' casualties for the years 1949 through to 1956. Out of a total of 8,620 terrorists listed as killed, captured or surrendered, the number killed outright was 5,841 (fractionally below 68 per cent), and 90 per cent of those killed were despatched by the Army, police or home guard.¹⁹ While such figures do not necessarily provide evidence of excessive force, equally it can hardly be maintained that they are indicative of restraint.

In summary, then, the British authorities possessed a number of important advantages during the Malayan Emergency, which unquestionably placed them in a strong position to win the struggle against the MRLA. And yet the counter-



Indirect air action: two airmen remove the aerial cameras from a Spitfire PR 19 of 81 Squadron in Malaya in March 1954



Supplies being parachuted into a tiny drop zone (circled) in the Malayan jungle from a Douglas Dakota, July 1951

insurgency campaign was only brought to a successful conclusion after so long a period as twelve years.

The obvious problem involved in treating Malaya as a model is of course that this peculiarly favourable combination of circumstances might not apply in every case. The political environment might very well be more restrictive. The insurgency might assume genuinely 'mass' proportions, the insurgents perhaps being less isolated ethnically or ideologically than the Malayan communists, or it might enjoy large-scale external and even cross-border support. The security forces might be far less numerous or their freedom of action more tightly

constrained. Factor in one or more of these possible alternative scenarios, and the Malayan counter-insurgency 'model' might well prove to be flawed, or might at the very least require significant adaptation, involving different policies and responses.

Because the British counter-insurgency operation in Malaya is taken to represent 'good' if not 'best' practice, it is equally common to read that air power was in most respects 'correctly' exploited in Malaya. 'Correct' exploitation is equated to the use of aircraft predominantly in an indirect or supporting capacity (such as reconnaissance or transport) rather than an offensive – particularly an independent offensive – role. According to one recent study, Malaya demonstrates that 'not only is it in the indirect capacity that air power serves its most effective function in such conflict, but that offensive aerial bombardment against insurgent units is either futile or detrimental.'²⁰

Direct offensive action by aircraft was responsible for less than ten per cent of all insurgent casualties during the Emergency. This places them [i.e., the RAF] responsible for nearly 700 fatalities. Yet, considering that FEAF [Far East Air Force] bomber and fighter aircraft flew nearly 4,000 strike missions and dropped over 70 million lbs of bombs, this works out at a particularly laboured ordnance-to-kill ratio of 100,000lbs of bombs per insurgent killed.²¹

By contrast, the RAF fulfilled a variety of indirect functions with 'great perfection', notably the airborne insertion of troops, aerial re-supply, air reconnaissance, casualty evacuation and psychological warfare operations, such as leaflet dropping, loud hailing and aerial broadcasting.²²

According to Corum and Johnson, 'most participants and later observers agree that the limited effectiveness of offensive air action was more than offset ... by the contribution of indirect air action.'²³ Beyond this, it is alleged that Malaya marked something of a watershed in the RAF's approach to small wars and counter-insurgencies: there was now a far greater willingness to accept 'indirect' and 'supporting' duties, whereas it had been argued previously that aircraft could act as an effective substitute for ground forces.²⁴ The surviving statistical records would appear to support these contentions. Spanning the period from 1949 to 1958, they do not record all air sorties flown during this time, but

they do record all *offensive* air sorties. Of a total of 324,184 sorties counted (including offensive, transport, reconnaissance and psychological operations) the number of offensive sorties was 22,570, or just 7 per cent. However, the number of sorties that actually released munitions was 3,966 – 1.2 per cent of the total.²⁵

There is abundant evidence to sustain the view that air power was very effectively employed in a variety of supporting capacities in Malaya, and yet, once again, this should not necessarily be viewed as justification for rigidly applying identical operational and tactical principles to other counter-insurgency campaigns. It must be born in mind that the RAF's approach in Malaya was shaped by the specific circumstances of the Emergency (as well as by other operational factors specific to the Far East theatre) and that, in many different respects, its contribution was constrained by significant disadvantages.

First of all, the RAF was not deployed in the Far East to conduct counter-insurgency operations in Malaya. Its primary role was air defence against China and it was therefore chiefly structured around fighter squadrons and radar units. There was also a secondary role of supporting ground and naval forces in conventional warfare scenarios, but neither the dispositions nor the aircraft associated with this task were by any means ideal for internal security operations. This situation changed over time, RAF units being adapted to the meet the demands of the Emergency in a variety of ways, but the air defence requirement remained a major commitment and continued to exert a significant influence on both training and equipment. Moreover, as obsolescence overtook older piston-engined aircraft such as the Lincoln and the Hornet, it became necessary to re-equip FEAF's squadrons with jets like the Canberra and the Venom – platforms that would have proved far more capable in the event of conventional hostilities, but which were less well suited to the counter-insurgency task.²⁶

Second, as the RAF's commitments in the Far East were theatre-wide and were not confined to a single country or region, it followed that their headquarters organisation was very difficult to integrate effectively into the higher civil and military command and control structure in Malaya. The Air Headquarters, Malaya, which was based at Changi on Singapore Island when the insurgency began, at first created an advanced headquarters at Kuala Lumpur, but this

merely served to institute an inefficient form of dual command which proved impossible to rationalise in a single forward location (Kuala Lumpur) until February 1954. Similarly, there was a considerable delay before the RAF was properly represented within the state and regional command apparatus.²⁷

Third, the airfield infrastructure in Malaya only became capable of supporting offensive air operations after Butterworth air base was enlarged in 1954. Until then, the overwhelming majority of offensive sorties had to be flown from Singapore. This effectively doubled the resources required to mount operations in northern regions like Kedah. Furthermore, because aircraft operating from Singapore into the north expended so much fuel in transit, they were unable to loiter in target areas for very long – a problem which became increasingly acute following the introduction of the various jet aircraft. Lack of loiter time was in turn important because, for a number of other reasons, the location of insurgent targets in Malaya proved immensely challenging.²⁸

Dense, featureless and poorly mapped, the jungle terrain rendered the MRLA all but immune to observation from the air, and the jungle canopy afforded them some physical protection from air-launched weapons; RAF doctrine had of course long emphasised that air power would be very difficult to exploit in such environments.²⁹ Offensive operations were also consistently hampered by the prevailing weather conditions. Before the advent of radar target marking in 1955, air support could only be provided during a short mid-morning interlude between the dispersal of ground fog or thin stratus and the build up of cumulus around midday, which was then invariably followed by storms extending well into the night. And then there were the insurgents themselves – highly mobile, far more familiar with their operating environment, quick to develop effective passive air defence tactics and well equipped with intelligence. In few locations were they committed to holding ground; they lacked any fixed lines of communication, and they were rarely 'pinned' in position by the security forces.³⁰

Optimal air-land integration, which might have helped the RAF to overcome at least some of these hurdles, was also lacking for a considerable time, and the difficulties facing the airmen were often very imperfectly grasped by those on the ground. During the early stages of the insurgency, air support was called for on an *ad hoc* basis, which was inevitably far from conducive to

effective mission planning or execution. After a while, it became clear that there was only limited scope for the provision of immediate air support similar to the modern-day 'troops in contact' (TiC) system, and all requests for air strikes after October 1949 were channelled through a combined Land/Air Operations Room at GHQ Malaya District, Kuala Lumpur, which ultimately evolved into a fully fledged Joint Operations Centre. The majority of missions sanctioned at this level took the form of attacks on pre-planned area or pinpoint targets, as part of combined operations with ground forces. However, this approach was to prove insufficiently responsive when short-notice requests for support were received, and a degree of decentralisation was ultimately approved permitting requests to be passed directly to RAF stations in certain circumstances.³¹

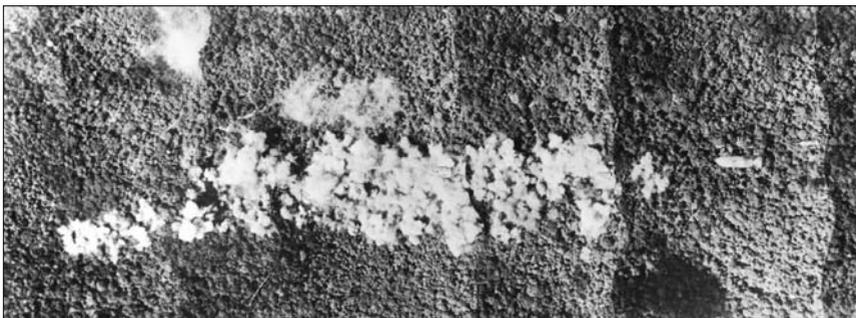
Yet none of the various procedures employed in the command and control of offensive air operations over Malaya were ever likely to produce a high mission-to-kill ratio, and the use of this yardstick to evaluate their contribution to the British counter-insurgency effort is thus grossly misleading. Offensive air operations were actually designed to achieve a variety of objectives such as driving terrorists into ambushes, moving them into country suitable for ground operations, dispersing or containing larger groups, protecting areas or convoys, harassing insurgents and lowering their morale or deceiving them as to security force intentions and locations.³²

Needless to say, the bland insurgent casualty data offer absolutely no insight at all into whether these goals were attained. The figures are, in themselves, very obviously flawed, for there were many occasions when full body counts were impossible,³³ and sometimes it did not make tactical sense to seek the highest possible kill rate. Efforts to do so in 1953 involved directing the bulk of offensive air support against a few pinpoint targets rather than using smaller numbers of aircraft to range across broad areas of jungle, but this well-intentioned initiative backfired: it was subsequently blamed for a sharp decline in the insurgent surrender rate. The farther-flung harassing operations were renewed as evidence accumulated to suggest that they had exerted a tangible morale effect on the MRLA.³⁴

Furthermore, as in so many earlier colonial policing operations, air power was also periodically employed over locations that were beyond the reach of

conventional ground forces – not because it was felt to be a particularly suitable weapon but because there was literally no other means of maintaining military pressure against particular insurgent elements. In 1958, for example, a formal decision was taken to continue ‘harassing’ air attacks in a number of areas, because of short-term political pressure to bring the Emergency to an end, and because there was no effective Army presence in the regions concerned. It was fully recognized that such missions were expensive to mount and that they resulted in very few insurgent casualties,³⁵ although the expense appears in a rather different light when it is recalled that more than 370,000 Army, police and home guard personnel had to be mobilised over a period of twelve years to deal with an insurgent force that at peak may not have exceeded 4,000 combatants.

Most air attacks launched with the specific aim of killing insurgents or destroying their camps were part of joint operations supporting the Army, and their success depended critically on top-quality intelligence direction from the ground. This was invariably lacking, as was meaningful battle damage assessment (BDA).³⁶ Moreover, even when accurate and timely intelligence was available on the location of occupied terrorist camps, land commanders frequently insisted on their physical subjugation by ground troops, while aircraft were allocated more general area targets that were believed to contain some terrorists.³⁷ Beyond this, the very approach of ground troops was often enough to warn insurgents of the danger of impending air attack and led them to employ counter-measures (movement, dispersal, concealment etc.) that reduced the likelihood that the air mission would cause casualties.³⁸ The need



Bombs from a 57 Squadron Lincoln falling in the Malayan jungle in 1950; such operations were often undertaken for effect, and did not target the MRLA directly

to complete highly centralised and time-consuming clearance processes in order to guard against fratricide (as well as civilian casualties) similarly reduced the scope for catching them by surprise.³⁹

When good quality and up-to-date intelligence was available, and when action on the ground did not jeopardize any chance of securing tactical surprise, there was scope in Malaya for employing offensive air power to lethal effect, not merely against the insurgent rank-and-file but against high value targets. In February 1956 an intelligence-led air strike killed the commander of the MRLA's 7th Independent Platoon, and the commander of the 3rd Independent Platoon died in another such attack in May the following year. That such impressive results might have been more regularly achieved if the collection, distribution and exploitation of intelligence had been more efficient is illustrated by the fact that this second attack was executed against *the only accurate pinpoint target supplied to the RAF throughout the entirety of 1957*.⁴⁰ RAF intelligence officers were attached to state police headquarters and were periodically sent out with ground patrols in an attempt to explain the air perspective and to advise senior police and Army officers on the means by which air support might best be employed, but this does not seem to have resulted in much tangible improvement. The flow of intelligence in any case became a mere trickle in the later 1950s as MRLA numbers steadily declined.⁴¹

In 1970, when concluding his study of offensive air operations during the Malayan Emergency, Postgate wrote:

From the point of view of offensive air support it is doubtful whether any modern air force has had to operate under more unsatisfactory conditions, from the point of view of targets and information on the results achieved, than that engaged in Emergency operations in Malaya.⁴²

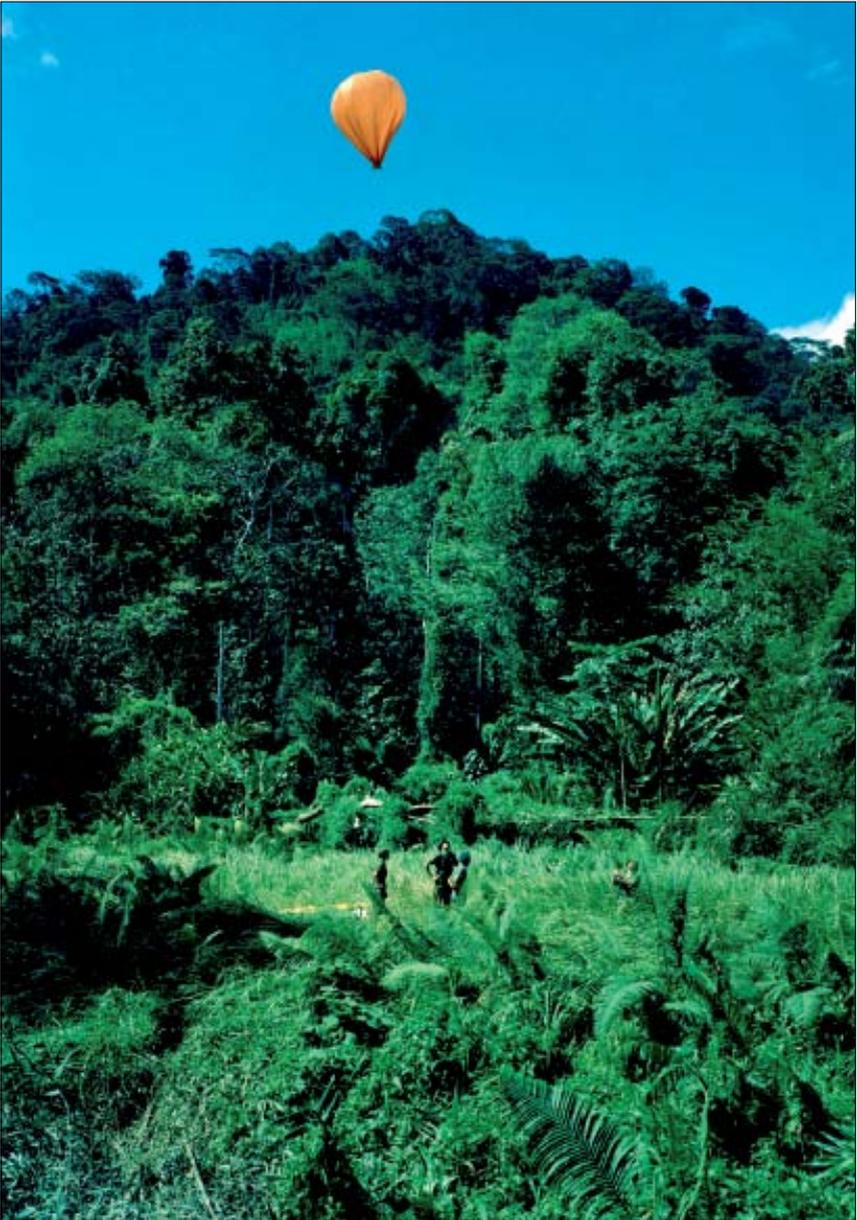
In other words, conditions in Malaya were peculiarly unsuited to the exploitation of offensive air power. But it would surely be unduly pessimistic to contend that identical constraints must necessarily apply in all small wars or counter-insurgencies. In particular, there could be greater scope for integrating air and land command and control more effectively, and a greater volume of good-quality intelligence might be obtained and more effectively exploited. It might



A Westland Dragonfly II helicopter lands in a clearing in the Malayan jungle in 1951 during a demonstration of air casualty evacuation



A Westland Whirlwind helicopter offloads RAF Regiment (Malaya) troops onto a jungle landing zone in April 1957



Malaya, November 1958: a single orange balloon is raised above the jungle canopy to mark the drop zone. The same technique was later used in Borneo

prove possible to mould air components or contingents more specifically to the task in hand, assuming an absence of other regional air commitments; better base facilities or more suitable platforms might be available; terrain features and climatic conditions might be more favourable.

As for the view that Malaya marked a decisive shift in the RAF's thinking away from direct and towards indirect operations, in reality no such change would be required to explain the relatively small number of offensive missions flown. Quite apart from the practical difficulties already described, offensive action had only ever accounted for a small proportion of the RAF's flying effort in colonial theatres.⁴³ In actual fact, the tactical change most obvious from the statistical records concerns the relationship between air reconnaissance and air transport activity. In the interwar years, reconnaissance had represented by far the RAF's most substantial role in the colonies, the number of missions often exceeding the totality of offensive, transport and other operational tasking. In Malaya, by contrast, air transport predominated. Between April 1949 and December 1952 some 62,476 operational sorties were recorded of which 33,380 (or 53.4



RASC dispatchers push out a supply load from a Dakota over Malaya in 1950

per cent) were transport sorties, whereas only 13,789 (22.1 per cent) were reconnaissance sorties.⁴⁴ Comparable data would reveal broadly the same picture for the later years of the campaign.*

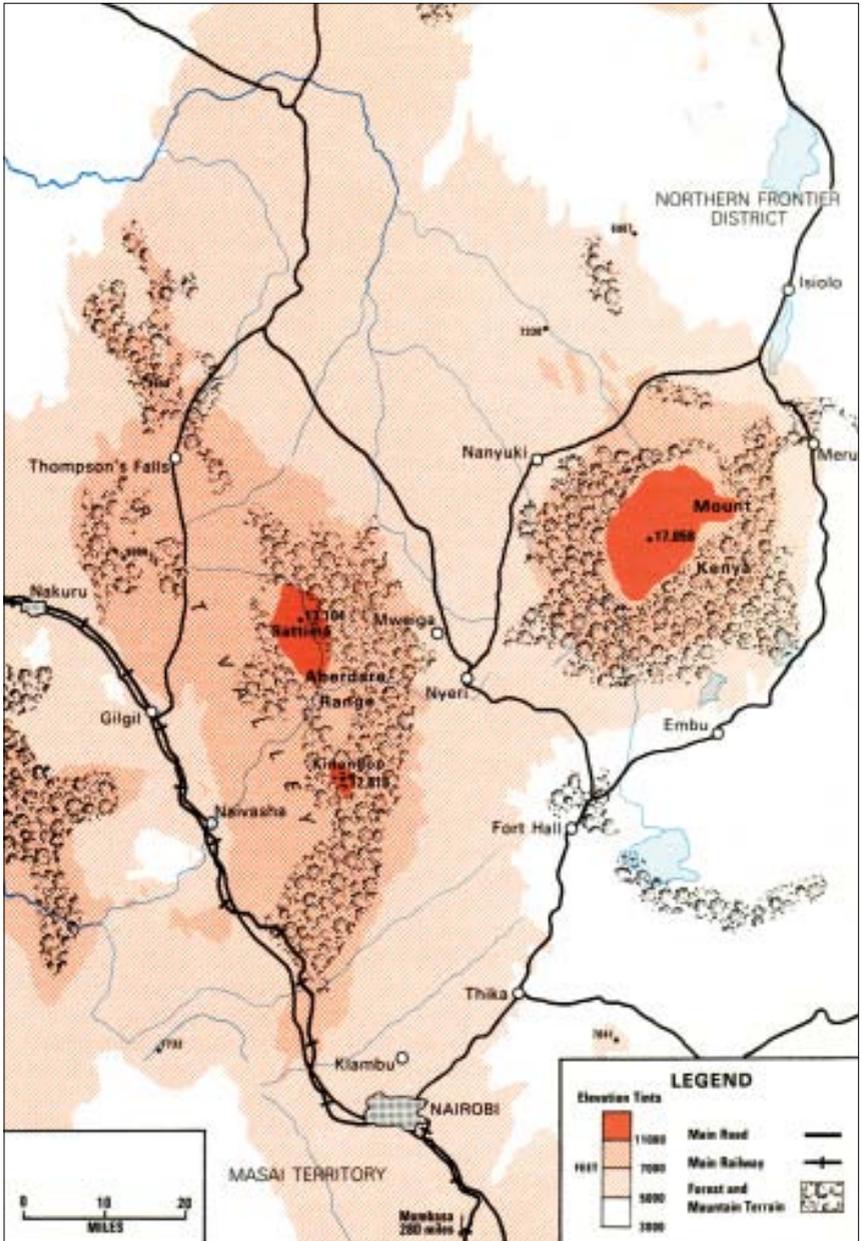
Some of the reasons for this have already been alluded to. Whereas the RAF possessed only a handful of very limited-capability air transport platforms in 1939, by 1945 a substantial fleet had been generated, and wartime experience in theatres such as Burma had highlighted the many and varied ways in which transport aircraft could support ground forces operating in jungle environments. Of the tasks assigned to the medium-range transport force, supply dropping was the most important, for it allowed troops to be sustained in deep jungle for periods of up to three months – a tactic central to the MRLA's ultimate eradication. Air transport was also used to supply permanent jungle fortifications, which were erected in a number of remote areas from 1953 onwards.⁴⁵ The quantity of stores dropped up to (and including) 1958 totalled more than 23,700 short tons, but this was in itself substantially less than the total weight of freight carried. The total number of passengers conveyed by these aircraft in the same period was 227,303.

Then there were also the light fixed-wing Pioneers, which were averaging 5,500 sorties and 6,000 passengers per year between 1954 and 1958, and, most of all, the new helicopters, for which the annual averages were 23,000 and 28,500 respectively.⁴⁶ Only a limited number of helicopters were available, offering modest load-carrying capabilities, and reliability and maintainability posed particular problems given the relative novelty of rotary-wing technology. Nevertheless, experience soon demonstrated the exceptional utility of the helicopter as a counter-insurgency weapon, and it proved possible through careful prioritisation to exploit their invaluable troop-lifting capabilities in a succession of critically important operations in this period. They provided a hitherto unknown degree of mobility to the security forces, giving them the capacity to concentrate troops rapidly and accurately against the MRLA before they had time to disperse. Surprise attacks could now be mounted from the air,

* Comparable statistical records are not available for the later years as the various sortie labels were changed, and some air transport categories were excluded from the records. However, of 227,433 sorties listed between 1955 and 1958, 120,805 or 53.1 per cent were executed by supply dropping aircraft, intermediate transport types like the Prestwick Pioneer, and by helicopters.

bypassing the look-out screens and ambushes that had previously hampered the attempts of ground forces to close on enemy encampments. And there was scope for landing (as opposed to merely dropping) airborne supplies at deeper jungle locations where no airstrips existed. Communications and casualty evacuation were among the other key helicopter missions.⁴⁷ In summary, then, the Emergency offered abundant scope for the RAF to exploit the full range of air transport capabilities.

By contrast, the RAF's equally enhanced proficiency in the field of reconnaissance had far less impact in Malaya. As the insurgents were so effectively concealed by the jungle, armed reconnaissance proved to be completely unproductive, and very few such missions were actually flown. Photo-reconnaissance (PR) was employed primarily for mapping and the provision of other topographical information, which was of immense importance in a country that was very poorly mapped at the beginning of the campaign. But the jungle otherwise limited the scope for PR aircraft to gather useful imagery, and the situation only tended to worsen during the later years of the Emergency, as MRLA numbers declined and the remaining insurgents became ever more skilled in the arts of camouflage and concealment. Again, however, this does not mean that PR would necessarily prove no more useful in supporting counter-insurgency operations in more open environments, and even in Malaya it was found that *visual* reconnaissance by the Austers of 656 Squadron could play an important part in the location of terrorist units. For example, one Auster flight (No 1907) involved in operations over Pahang in 1953 claimed that in six months they had provided information to ground forces that resulted in the elimination of 44 terrorists; between March and August 1955 656 Squadron located 155 confirmed terrorist camps and another 77 possible camps, 313 terrorist cultivations, 31 re-cultivations, 194 clearings probably made by terrorists and 21 aborigine farms under terrorist control.⁴⁸



Map 2. Mau Mau affected area of Central Kenya

5. Kenya: The Mau Mau Insurgency

The difficulties involved in treating Malaya as a model emerge only too clearly when the UK's involvement in other counter-insurgencies and small wars in the later colonial period is considered. Some accounts maintain that the British response to the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya in the mid-1950s provides an illustration of how the 'Malayan model' was drawn on to suppress insurgencies elsewhere. Responsibility for defeating Mau Mau was assigned to a single leader, initially Major-General W.R.N. Hinde, subsequently (from June 1953) General Sir George Erskine, who became both Commander-in-Chief and Director of Operations. Much the same emphasis was placed on the co-ordination of civil and military policy, on the improvement of intelligence-gathering and exploitation capabilities, and on the protection of the general population from the insurgents. The British also made ample use of indigenous forces, employing six African battalions, the Kenya Regiment, a home guard and the police, and sought to use similar jungle tactics by sending troops into deep locations, where they were held for extended periods of time.⁴⁹ Finally, as in Malaya, the actions of the Army and the police were not exactly notable for their restraint.⁵⁰

Yet there was also one important difference: although confined to a smaller geographical area, the insurgency enjoyed broader active and passive support, while at the same time it was opposed by far fewer British ground troops. By 1953, the active wing of the Kikuyu rebel movement could commit between 12,000 and 15,000 men to their campaign to recover farmland lost to white settlers, but this force was sustained by a 'passive' wing that numbered perhaps another 30,000, including elements of Kenya's urban population. To confront them, the British Army could spare just five battalions – not even a quarter of the force despatched to Malaya.⁵¹ Although Erskine of course had other formations at his disposal, which would make a very important contribution to Mau Mau's ultimate suppression, this very limited British nucleus inevitably influenced his approach to prosecuting the campaign.

The scope for employing air power to offset this numerical disadvantage must at first have appeared less than promising. When a State of Emergency was declared in October 1952, the RAF were even more strapped for resources than the Army, and their presence in Kenya was virtually non-existent – a single airfield (Eastleigh) and a communications flight of one Proctor, two Ansons and a Valetta. The security forces had at their disposal the light aircraft of the Kenya

Police Reserve Air Wing (KPRW), whose pilots (who included several former RAF personnel) possessed invaluable knowledge of the country across which the campaign would be conducted. Their aircraft – although unarmed – could be employed in the communications, reconnaissance and light transport roles. But, on the basis of past experience, it may not have been thought that the operational environment – whether jungle or urban – would offer many opportunities for the exploitation of offensive air power, and the prevailing weather conditions in the rebel strongholds around Mount Kenya and the Aberdare mountains also promised to be disruptive during the two rainy seasons (March to May and October to December).

Such considerations may potentially explain why the RAF's initial offer of limited additional air support was rejected by Hinde.⁵² However, after visiting Kenya soon afterwards, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff reversed this decision, and 1340 Flight RAF, which comprised eight Harvard trainers, was therefore made available in theatre in March 1953, following the closure of the Rhodesian Air Training Group. The Harvards were adapted to provide a basic offensive capability in the form of a single Browning .303 machine gun and bomb racks capable of carrying 20lb fragmentation bombs, and were placed under the command of Squadron leader C.G. Jefferies, an officer with extensive experience of Burmese jungle operations during the Second World War.⁵³ The importance of maintaining the support of Kenya's non-Mau Mau majority was fully understood, and great care was taken to ensure that no innocent civilians became casualties as a result of air action. There was never any intention of using offensive air power in urban environments, but its employment was carefully controlled even in the mountain and jungle terrain of central Kenya. It was in this region that a number of so-called 'prohibited areas' were established, to which all persons other than security force personnel were denied access. The release of air ordnance was strictly forbidden outside their boundaries.⁵⁴

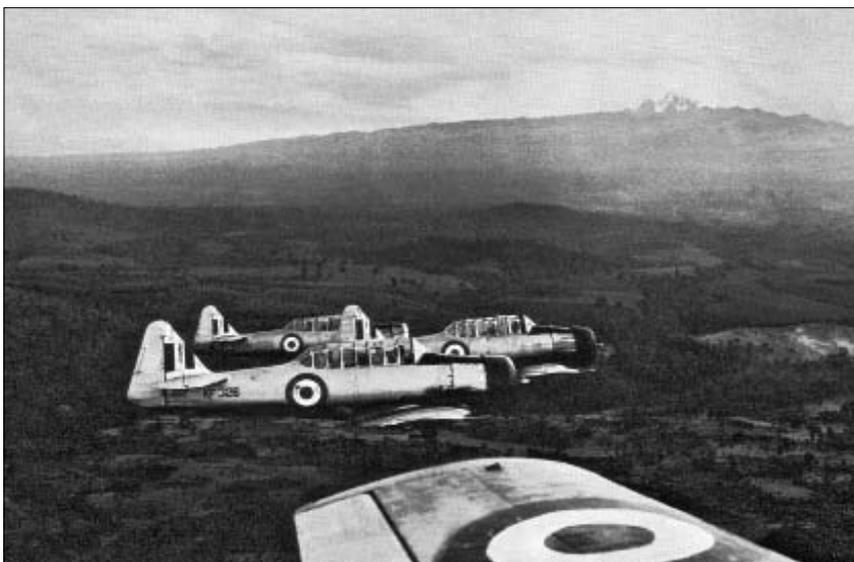
Both the KPRW and 1340 Flight deployed forward from Eastleigh to Nyeri airfield, which lay between the Mount Kenya and the Aberdares, and a rudimentary Operations Centre was established at the nearby town of Mweiga. Airfield defence was initially provided by RAF groundcrew, but they were eventually replaced by an RAF Regiment detachment.⁵⁵ It was soon established that even this very small air component could make a vital contribution to the



A Lincoln of 61 Squadron over Mount Kenya in April 1954



Aircrew are briefed by an Army officer prior to a bombing mission over Kenya in 1954



Harvards of 1340 Flight after take-off from Nyeri



Loading bombs into a Lincoln at Eastleigh, Kenya, in 1954

campaign. At first, the ground forces mounted a series of sweeps through the jungle, but these tactics gave way to the more protracted occupation of particular areas in mid-1953 – an approach that was more effective but also far more manpower-intensive. Air tasking involved making optimal use of the KPRW's exceptionally thorough knowledge of the area of operations, while 1340 Flight flew predominantly in a ground-attack role. The KPRW helped to ensure that troops were employed economically, using visual reconnaissance to target activity on the ground, and providing the communications essential to co-ordinate the operations of geographically separate units. They also played a leading role in supplying ground forces in deeper jungle locations.

As for 1340 Flight, while they could provide direct fire support and fly harassing missions similar to those mounted in Malaya, they could also be despatched to execute independent air strikes when the KPRW observed Mau Mau elements in the more remote regions that were beyond the immediate reach of the security forces. Flying from Nyeri, they could reach such targets within about 20 minutes. A typical week's work in July 1953 involved some 56 attacks, 21 in support of ground operations and 35 independent missions targeting suspected rebel hideouts in the Aberdares.⁵⁶

Although air tasking was logically divided between the KPRW and 1340 Flight in this period, command and control arrangements left much to be desired. For some months there was no Joint Operations Centre at GHQ level, nor even any RAF representation; the theatre air commander and air adviser to the C-in-C was the base commander at Eastleigh. Aside from targets reported by the KPRW, all requests for air support were originated by units in the field and passed to brigade headquarters, where they were approved or refused. This process apparently occurred without any consultation with the RAF, and the demands submitted were consequently, on occasion, too numerous to satisfy with the aircraft available. A further problem was that the KPRW, although nominally subordinated to the theatre air commander, actually retained a high degree of independence. One report remarked that 'they have no special qualifications for the job and are not subject to Air Force discipline. This places the Royal Air Force in the invidious position of having to rely entirely on this organisation for the success and conduct of its operations against Mau Mau.'⁵⁷

The impact of air operations during the Mau Mau rebellion has never been easy to gauge. At the time, as in Malaya, very little useful BDA was forthcoming, and conflicting reports often emerged from a variety of sources – aircrew, air reconnaissance, the Army, and captured insurgents. Predictably there were those who claimed that air operations were at best ineffective and at worst counterproductive.⁵⁸ This would hardly be surprising given the constraints imposed by the environment and the weather, the fact that the Harvards were not designed for use as offensive platforms, that their 20lb bombs, intended for operations in open country, produced minimal kinetic effect in dense jungle environments, and that few 1340 Flight personnel had much experience in the field of offensive or tactical air support.⁵⁹ Yet it is important to note that the Harvards only deployed to Kenya at all in response to Army requests for air support, and it is notable that Erskine reached the conclusion after a few months that he needed more – not less – offensive air power. At the very least, their non-kinetic impact is known to have been significant. The rebels were compelled to split up into smaller groups and to stay on the move, and (as in Malaya) there was some evidence of increased surrender and desertion due to air action.⁶⁰

Erskine's request for more air support led in November 1953 to the deployment of a detachment of heavy Lincoln bombers to Kenya. Their initial operations were mounted on a trial basis to test the psychological effect of heavy bombing on the Mau Mau. The Aberdare and Mount Kenya forests were designated prohibited areas and were then targeted by the Lincolns. Their primary task was to attack the Mau Mau in their hide-outs, with the aim of driving them into the adjacent Kikuyu tribal reserves, where they could be engaged more easily by the security forces. Again, judgements upon the utility of these tactics were left to those on the ground, but they evidently assessed the trial to have been sufficiently successful to warrant the maintenance of six Lincolns in Kenya for as long as their presence could be operationally justified.⁶¹

The Lincolns' primary contribution was of course the massive increase in firepower that they provided. A report by 39 Infantry Brigade in December 1953 stated that 'Harvard bombing had a negligible damage effect.' By contrast, 'the craters made by the Lincolns averaged 12ft deep and 25ft in diameter. The devastated area extended to a radius of 80 yards and some spoil carried over 100 yards.'⁶² In 1953 only 207.1 short tons of bombs were released against the

insurgents (114.6 by the Harvards); in 1954 the total tonnage amounted to 3,541.1, of which the Lincolns released 3,289.⁶³

But the Lincoln detachments had considerably more than this to contribute. Their officers were of course specialists in the employment of offensive air power, and at least some had gained experience of COIN operations in Malaya. Even the very first Lincoln detachment deployed against the Mau Mau was immediately able to identify the command and control problems already discussed, and the means by which they could be addressed – through the creation of a Joint Operations Centre at GHQ with a proper air staff (under a one-star air commander) to co-ordinate air and ground operations. They also quickly spotted shortcomings in the tactical application of air power. The absence of blind bombing facilities in theatre meant that operations could be seriously disrupted by reduced visibility during the rainy seasons, and were confined to the hours of daylight. KPRW target marking could warn the insurgents of impending attack, as could activity by air or ground units. Offensive air operations were totally dependent on the Army and the KPRW for target intelligence, although neither possessed any professional qualifications in air targeting. There was an urgent need for improved BDA.⁶⁴

All of these issues had to be addressed during the first half of 1954. After a variety of experiments, an effective radar-assisted blind bombing technique was developed, using Army anti-aircraft radar sets to permit all-weather day and night bombing. This reduced the Lincolns' dependence on the KPRW and hence the potential for visual target marking to jeopardise tactical surprise. With the same end in mind, other force elements were kept well clear of potential target areas, as were the Lincolns themselves until the actual attack run. Aircraft bombed from higher altitudes so that they were often invisible from the ground, and far less audible than the exceptionally noisy Harvards.⁶⁵ The need to acquire better target intelligence led to the brief deployment to Kenya of two Meteor PR10s in March 1954, after which basic vertical imagery was collected by the Lincolns. However, this proved inadequate. HQ Middle East Air Force were reluctant to accept any longer-term transfer of their scarce reconnaissance assets to Kenya, but agreed eventually to return the two PR10s, and to set up appropriate photographic interpretation facilities there. The PR10s were responsible for the overwhelming majority of the 250,000 aerial photographs taken in support of COIN activity in Kenya between August 1954

and May 1955.⁶⁶ A post-strike analysis officer was sent out from the UK to assist with BDA.⁶⁷

The enhancement of air capabilities allowed Erskine to employ direct substitution measures in the spring. An important intelligence coup occurred early in the year when a senior Mau Mau leader, Waruhiu Itote (known as General China) was wounded and captured by the security forces. Itote passed on such a wealth of information concerning the organisation of Mau Mau's passive wing that it was possible to initiate concerted operations against it in April, the supposition being that the more active insurgency could not be sustained if it was denied the support that the passive wing provided. This new strategy primarily targeted urban Kenya. Some 25,000 security force personnel were involved in the initial operation in Nairobi, Operation Anvil, and tens of thousands of Kikuyu were detained. The focus then shifted elsewhere. However, while a substantial proportion of the Army and the various other ground elements were being deployed into the towns, Erskine maintained pressure across the jungle areas through the extended exploitation of air power.⁶⁸

Once again, it would be quite wrong to judge the effectiveness of this approach purely on the basis of Mau Mau kills. The aim was not to kill insurgents per se, but to maintain the continuity of operations against them – something that would not otherwise have been possible when such a high proportion of the security forces had been transferred to urban areas. And, once more, Erskine was sufficiently impressed with the RAF's performance to assign them lead role in operations first in the Aberdares and then around Mount Kenya from the end of August through to December – a period that coincided with Kenya's second annual rainy season, when jungle conditions rendered ground operations particularly difficult. According to Lee,

Specific sections of the Prohibited Area in the Aberdare forest were to be vacated by ground forces at certain pre-arranged times during which large-scale bombing attacks would be planned and executed, the sections subsequently being occupied and mopped up by the troops. Each bombing attack would be preceded by photographic coverage to enable the best targets to be selected, and followed by psychological warfare in the form of 'sky shouting' sorties in an endeavour

to encourage surrender while the gangs were still suffering from the effects of the heavy bombing.⁶⁹

Erskine's view was that if these operations had not been mounted it would have been necessary to deploy an additional infantry brigade or three regiments of artillery; he believed that neither would have achieved such good results, and that both would have been more expensive.⁷⁰

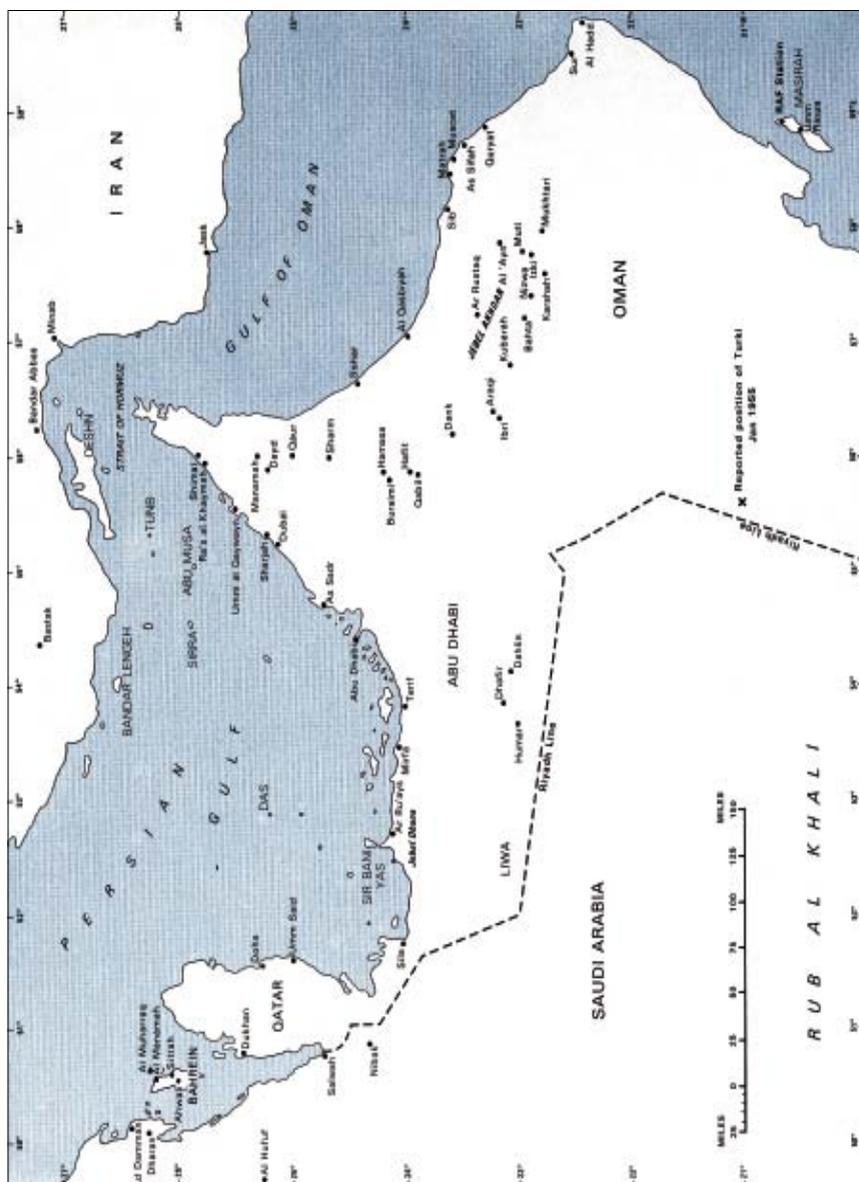
Erskine's deliberate substitution of ground by air forces throughout much of 1954 inevitably raised the ratio of bombing operations relative to other air activity in Kenya, but air power nevertheless sustained the British COIN effort in many other ways. The only comparative statistical breakdown for any given year employs flying hours rather than sortie numbers as its unit of measurement for 1954, and excludes data on eight aircraft used for sky-shouting, communications and casualty evacuation.⁷¹ It nevertheless provides an illuminating insight into the character of operational air tasking during the Mau Mau insurgency, illustrating how the reconnaissance, re-supply and communications work of the KPRW predominated:

Aircraft	Hours
Lincoln:	1,766
Harvard:	3,625
Meteor PR10:	241 (July-December only)
KPRW:	9,575

No less important was the role of medium and longer-range air transport – RAF Hastings, Dakotas and Valettas, as well as civil transports – which brought British troops, equipment and supplies into Kenya from other theatres.⁷²

By the beginning of 1955, Mau Mau was a spent force, and 'mopping up' operations were in progress to eliminate the remnants of the jungle gangs. By April, the Army's requirements for air support were rapidly declining; sky shouting operations were stepped up in an effort to persuade the remaining insurgents to surrender, but there was otherwise less and less air tasking that could not be carried out by the KPRW. The PR10s, Lincolns and Harvards were therefore withdrawn between the end of July and September.

The successful conclusion of operations against the Mau Mau may appear to vindicate the UK's approach to COIN during the later colonial period, yet we should not forget that – as in Malaya – a variety of extraneous factors greatly facilitated the British task. Again, the insurgency lacked any external sponsorship, and the cross-border issues that so often complicate COIN campaigns were completely absent; again, the isolation of the Mau Mau was inevitably increased by the fact that they represented only a minority of Kenya's population. Beyond this, their tactical ineptitude played into the hands of the security forces. Acts of intimidation and violence perpetrated against other tribes or even other Kikuyu elements were hardly likely to encourage mass support for the insurgency, and could only assist the authorities in their efforts to win hearts and minds. Equally, the Mau Mau failed to identify and target the security forces' vulnerabilities. By using mining, bombing and assassination, or by targeting key lines of communication or other infrastructure, they could have confronted those responsible for suppressing the insurgency with an infinitely more challenging task, which would almost certainly have required far more manpower resources to execute. It is important to bear this in mind when considering the relative ease with which the rebels were ultimately defeated.



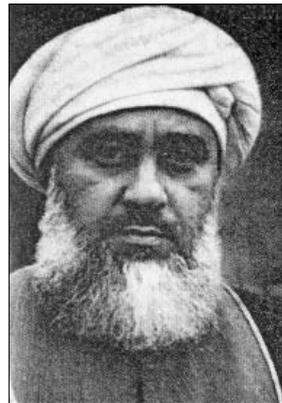
Map 3. Trucial States and Central Oman, mid-1950s

6. Oman

6.1 Introduction

No two insurgencies are the same. If the numerical balance between insurgents and security forces in Kenya necessitated the use of tactics that differed markedly from those employed in Malaya, this was all the more true of British COIN operations in Oman during the 1950s. Moreover, whereas in both Malaya and Kenya the British were able to combat the insurgencies relatively free from local political constraints, in Oman their room for manoeuvre was restricted by the presence of a deeply conservative and inflexible dynastic ruler – Sultan Said bin Taimur. Equally, while British operations in both Malaya and Kenya were not complicated by significant cross-border issues, consecutive insurgencies in Oman were promoted by adjacent foreign countries – first Saudi Arabia, then South Yemen – via remote and extensive frontiers that were virtually impossible to police. To make matters even more difficult, these external sponsors could rely on considerable international support.

The Middle East had always been of critical strategic importance to the British Empire, providing, as it did, the essential link between Europe and Asia, and the colonies beyond. The British had developed their interests in the Arabian Peninsula throughout the 19th century, in the process negotiating a substantial number of treaties and agreements with indigenous rulers and tribal chiefs, which left the UK with responsibility for the foreign affairs and defence of most of the areas concerned. The entire western Peninsula coast was effectively brought under British control through this process, primarily to safeguard sea-lanes across the Indian Ocean. After India was granted independence, the rationale behind the British presence on the Arabian Peninsula changed. The extensive oil resources of Oman and the Trucial States (now the UAE) made them attractive possessions in their own right, at a time when oil was driving Europe's post-war economic reconstruction; the UK's withdrawal from Iraq and Egypt in the mid-1950s enhanced the importance of her military bases further south, and their retention also appeared desirable to deter communist expansion into the Middle East.⁷³



Sultan Said bin Taimur

6.2. Oman: Buraimi

The first significant troubles in Oman in the 1950s (which also spilled over into the Trucial state of Abu Dhabi) had their origin in a long-term border dispute with Saudi Arabia, centred on a remote area around the Buraimi Oasis. In all, there were eight villages in the Oasis. Six belonged to Abu Dhabi, which was a British protectorate, and the other two belonged to Oman. The UK was not obligated by treaty to defend Oman, but the Sultan was a close and long-standing ally, and it was only with his agreement that the RAF maintained bases at Salalah and on Masirah Island. Saudi Arabia, which was by this time an independent and very anti-British state, had revived its long-standing claim to Buraimi in the inter-war period, as it became clear that the eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula was rich in oil. The Saudi claim was in turn backed by an American oil company, Aramco, which enjoyed considerable support in Washington, but the American government also inclined towards greater sympathy for the Saudi position, following Nasser's accession to power in Egypt in April 1954. King Saud had the potential to be a valuable regional ally, capable of blocking the spread of support for Nasser across the Arab world.

After extended negotiations came to nothing the Saudis took matters into their own hands, infiltrating a government representative and a police contingent into Buraimi in August 1952. They promptly set about subverting the population primarily by dispensing money among the local tribesmen. Fearing the potential cost of escalation, the UK responded cautiously. There were no overt hostilities, but Omani Levies (Omani troops with British officers) established a presence in the Buraimi area, and RAF Vampire jets flew a number of low-level sorties over nearby villages, while Valetta transports dropped leaflets urging the tribes to remain loyal to the Sultan of Muscat and Oman. However, although such techniques had often been employed quite effectively in the past, the UK was now confronted by an Arab country that could command considerable support in both the UN and Washington. The Saudis' protests subsequently led to the cessation of military activity around Buraimi, which they fully exploited by intensifying their efforts to ferment tribal unrest.⁷⁴

1953 brought clear signs of insurgency in the Buraimi area, and no indication of a Saudi withdrawal. Although the Saudis' forcible ejection would have been a relatively easy task, the British government remained anxious to avoid such

a solution and reluctant to employ more forceful air policing methods, such as firepower demonstrations. An alternative course of action was therefore proposed involving the aerial surveillance of cross-desert routes between Saudi Arabia and Buraimi to prevent overland reinforcement or re-supply of the area; at the same time, efforts would be maintained to settle the crisis through negotiation. Surveillance sorties began in March 1953 and involved a mixed force of combat, transport and reconnaissance aircraft. A largely Omani Levy ground force was positioned so that it could be called in to investigate contacts of interest. The task was protracted, monotonous and unrewarding. It did not result in a Saudi withdrawal from Buraimi, for their personnel were given food and shelter by the local tribes, but it did deter the Saudis from enlarging their presence.⁷⁵

Negotiations between the UK and Saudi Arabia resumed in the summer of 1954, and it was quickly agreed that the Buraimi region should be demilitarised, the Saudis being permitted to retain a police detachment of just 15 personnel. But subsequent talks made little progress and periodic rumours of further Saudi incursions in central Oman compelled the RAF to maintain their reconnaissance effort. In mid-1955 the Saudis mounted a new challenge by enlarging their contingent at Buraimi well beyond the level previously agreed; a number of armed personnel were infiltrated by air, using one of several makeshift airstrips in the area. The British government's attitude now hardened, and it was decided that an operation should be mounted to remove the Saudis once and for all. Any adverse diplomatic consequences would have to be accepted.

The operation was executed on 26 October and involved Omani Levies supported by RAF reconnaissance aircraft and two heavy bombers of Second World War vintage, employed primarily to intimidate rather than attack Saudi forces or any other hostile elements. Transport aircraft were to land at Buraimi to bring out Saudi prisoners and any casualties, and ground-attack jets were held at readiness in case serious resistance was encountered. However, the extraction went largely according to plan: the entire Saudi contingent was flown out to the RAF base at Sharjah within hours, and then repatriated.⁷⁶

6.3. The Jebel Akhdar

The Buraimi episode naturally did nothing to improve British relations with Saudi Arabia or indeed the United States. It did lead to the re-imposition of order around Buraimi, but the British government's protracted reluctance to tackle the problem head-on had in the meantime given the Saudis ample opportunity to extend their influence into central Oman, where there was a long history of tribal resistance to the Sultan's authority, and where the death of the ruling Imam in 1954 had left something of a power vacuum. Their success in fermenting unrest in this area became apparent in the autumn of the following year. An attempt by the Sultan to restore order was successful, but a number of the rebels afterwards fled to Saudi Arabia, where they received basic military training, weapons and ammunition, and formed the so-called Omani Liberation Army. In June 1957, a rebel force landed on the coast near Muscat and seized control of a remote mountainous area slightly south of the Jebel Akhdar. Omani ground forces deployed against them met fierce resistance, and the Sultan duly appealed to the UK for military support.

The British were inclined to view the threat very seriously; after Suez, the Arabian Peninsula assumed a heightened importance in their strategic thinking. Given Said bin Taimur's notoriously conservative and authoritarian nature, and the fact that the insurgents had already very obviously resorted to armed rebellion, there was little scope for a political settlement or for the type of hearts and minds strategy that had been employed in Malaya. Moreover, such an approach would only potentially have brought dividends in the long term, whereas British policy-makers were convinced of the need for rapid action. As Sir David Lee has written, 'a long drawn out conflict would inevitably create unfavourable speculation as to Britain's motives and involve HMG in much unnecessary diplomatic explanation.'⁷⁷

However, in the aftermath of Suez, and of the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary, there was strong political opposition to the despatch of UK forces into the sovereign territory of an independent state, merely to shore up the position of a despotic leader, who kept his country in a state of backwardness and its people in conditions of ignorance, servitude and poverty. The high degree of sensitivity surrounding the issue is reflected in the mistaken assurance which the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs offered to the House of Lords on 22 July, when he declared that there was 'no question at the moment of

using land forces' in Oman. Within 24 hours a further (and in part corrective) government statement was promising only that there would be no 'large-scale operations by British troops on the ground.'⁷⁸ Three companies of the 1st Battalion The Cameronians were deployed along with elements of the 15th/19th Hussars, but the only ground forces otherwise involved during this stage of the campaign were the Trucial Oman Scouts (as the Levies were now known) and the Sultan's own army – the Muscat and Oman Field Force. The British contribution to the Jebel Akhdar campaign would thus primarily take the form of air power.⁷⁹



A De Havilland Venom at Sharjah airfield in the Trucial States (now the UAE) in 1957



An Avro Shackleton at Sharjah in 1957

It was initially proposed that offensive air power be used in a series of firepower demonstrations against selected rebel-held forts, after which Omani troops with very limited British Army support would move into the Jebel Akhdar to occupy rebel territory. But the Commander of British Forces in the Arabian Peninsular (BFAP) believed that it was also essential to employ proscription techniques. The government feared that this might result in non-combatant casualties but agreed eventually to the use of proscription against an area believed to contain most of the insurgent villages.

The RAF at first gathered detailed imagery of the fortified mountain villages occupied by the rebels, and a broader aerial survey allowed accurate and up-to-date maps to be prepared; they also used visual reconnaissance to identify friendly and hostile elements. Warning leaflets were afterwards dropped giving 48 hours notice of air attack. Then, on 24 July, the village fortifications were rocketed by formations of Venom ground-attack aircraft. There followed a week of further air attacks on fortified structures, and proscription operations also began, Venoms and Shackletons mounting regular patrols to deter rebel movement during the hours of daylight. In the meantime, ground troops moved into the Jebel: while the Omanis approached Izki from the north, the Cameronians, the Hussars and the Scouts, who had been flown to Fahud airstrip, to the south, set out towards Izz.

By early August the rebels had been pressed into a small pocket in the Nizwa area. But the final ground advance into this region proved extremely hazardous and required highly effective co-ordination between air and ground forces, the Venoms repeatedly being called in by forward air controllers to clear road blocks and sniper positions, while both ground forces were in part sustained by aerial re-supply. The principal insurgent stronghold fell on 12 August, but the rebel leaders and at least some of their followers escaped capture and pulled back further into the mountains.⁸⁰

In the first Jebel Akhdar campaign a prominent role was assigned to the RAF not because this was considered to be the ideal military solution, but because such a strategy best suited the political requirements of the British government. Even then, the RAF was not committed in an *independent* offensive role. On the contrary, it was always anticipated that their initial strikes would merely precede (and facilitate) action on the ground. Otherwise, virtually all air operations were

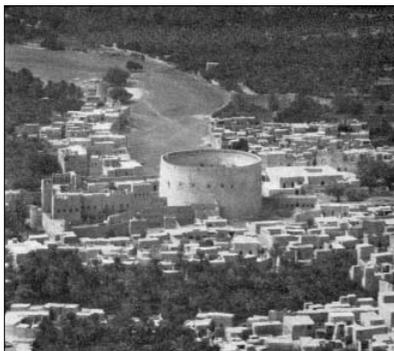
mounted in direct support of ground forces and overwhelmingly involved close air support (CAS), reconnaissance, air movement and air re-supply.

In the second half of August, the UK withdrew most of the ground troops and the extra aircraft that had been committed to central Oman. International and domestic opinion, resource constraints and an overoptimistic assessment of the insurgents' residual strength all contributed to this decision. It was also announced publicly that the rebellion in Oman had been suppressed. Indeed, a statement to this effect was actually included in the Queen's Speech on 1 November.⁸¹ But it soon became clear that the rebels remained a force to be reckoned with and that, at the very least, it would be necessary to continue air operations around the Jebel Akhdar. And when, on 15 November, Omani ground forces (with air support provided by the RAF) tried to follow the rebels on to the plateau that dominated the southern approaches to the Jebel, they were halted and then thrown back.

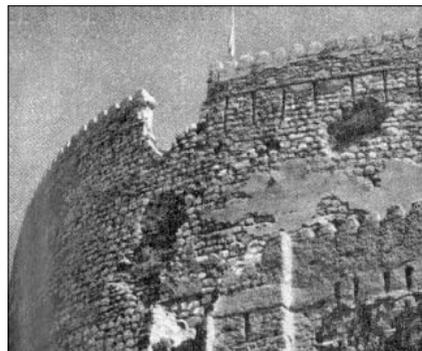


The Cameronians entering Nizwa

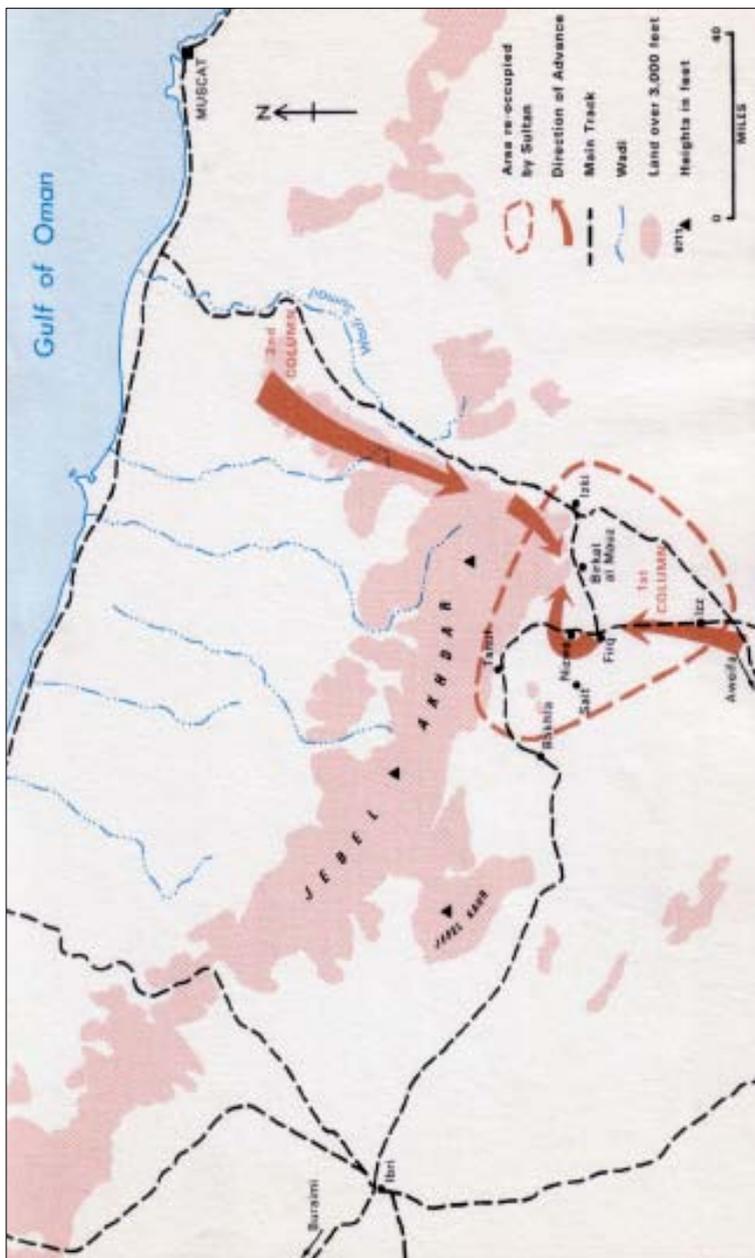
Having openly declared that operations in central Oman had been brought to a successful conclusion, the government was now even less well placed to consider a substantial British ground deployment to the region. So the decision was taken to intensify



The round fort at Nizwa, attacked by RAF Venoms in July 1957



Rocket projectile damage to a fort in Central Oman



Map 4. Central Oman operations, July-August 1957

air operations and to combine offensive air strikes with psychological warfare activity and artillery harassment. From February 1958, two medium howitzers daily bombarded the three main rebel villages. The government also despatched a mission to the Sultan to consider how Oman's armed forces might be strengthened, and whether any political or economic steps might be taken to persuade some of the rebel tribes to turn against the leaders of the insurgency.⁸²

The resumption of the insurgency and the instigation of renewed counter-measures were kept secret. No information was supplied to Parliament until June 1958, when it was merely stated that 'three of the rebel leaders' were 'still at large with a few of their followers' and that the Sultan's forces were conducting limited operations designed to bring about their surrender.⁸³ The government did not issue any kind of public statement concerning the involvement of British forces until November, and referred even then only to 'personnel seconded to the Sultan's Armed Forces for the purpose of assisting in the military reorganisation in the Sultanate,' and to 'troops temporarily engaged in training the Sultan's forces and assisting them to maintain order.'⁸⁴ Not until 11 February 1959, in response to a specific parliamentary question, did the government admit to the involvement of the RAF,⁸⁵ and yet the RAF had by that time been mounting air attacks on the Jebel Akhdar at increasing levels of intensity for more than twelve months. Targeting largely focused on the rebels' rudimentary economic infrastructure – on cultivated areas, livestock, and water supplies. For the first time in Oman, the use of 1,000lb bombs was authorised. Leaflet drops and loud hailing maintained psychological pressure, and air reconnaissance was employed to monitor both the Jebel and the supply routes that led into it.⁸⁶ An RAF Field Intelligence Officer was sent to Nizwa in an effort to secure a better understanding of the situation on the ground.⁸⁷

Yet it proved impossible with the resources available to isolate the insurgents completely, and supplies of weapons, ammunition and money continued to reach them from the coast. The weapons included both mines and mortars, which they used to some effect against the Sultan's forces. In July, the Commander BFAP, Air Vice-Marshal M.L. Heath, with the support of the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, recommended that British ground forces should launch a large-scale assault into the Jebel Akhdar to bring the insurgency to an end. Inevitably, this concept was not warmly received in London, but Heath was ultimately permitted to draw up plans for an operation commencing in the



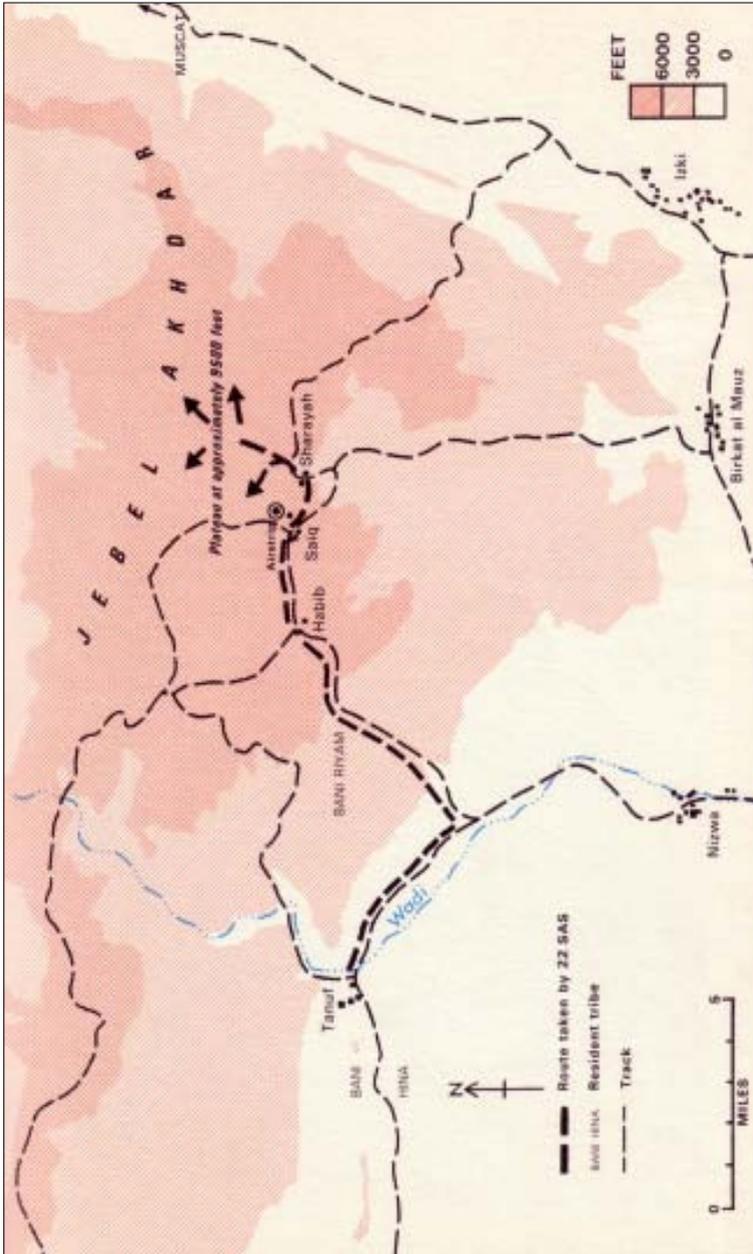
SAS troops talking to Bedouin tribesmen in Oman, 1959

autumn, when weather conditions would be most favourable. In September he duly submitted proposals based on the deployment of a brigade, artillery and other ancillary land forces, substantial RAF offensive and transport support, and naval elements in the Gulf. But the political, diplomatic and financial implications of such an undertaking again proved unacceptable to the British government. Moreover, it was by no means certain that the operation would succeed.

In the meantime, however, reports from Oman at last began hinting at progress. Intensified air attacks and more effective blockading were taking their toll, rebel casualties were mounting and there were clear signs that their morale was weakening.⁸⁸ Instead of mounting a major conventional operation into the Jebel, the government therefore decided that there would be an operational pause to test the validity of rumours that the rebels were ready to lay down their arms. Then, if they proved unwilling to capitulate, a squadron of the Special Air Service (SAS) would scale the Jebel to lead Omani troops into the insurgent stronghold. This concept became the basis of a revised plan in which the RAF were to provide close air support and reconnaissance. It was initiated on 22 November, after an offer of surrender had been received from the insurgents couched in terms that were completely unacceptable to the British government and the Sultan.

The second stage of the Jebel Akhdar campaign could be seen as an early attempt at Special Forces (SF)-air integration. To this day, it is sometimes thought that on-call air support can compensate for the more fundamental limitations of the SF – particularly their numerical weakness – but this is by no means always the case. Early in December, the SAS began their ascent of the mountain. Although they made good initial progress, it soon became clear that the task lay beyond the capability of a single squadron, even with close air support and aerial resupply, so a second was transferred from Malaya. Following an epic climb, they finally penetrated the Jebel's central plateau on the night of 26-27 January 1959 and effectively brought the insurgency to an end. Very few enemy combatants were subsequently found in the area and the three rebel leaders managed to escape to Saudi Arabia.

The differences of historical opinion that have emerged over the role of air power in the Jebel Akhdar war can only be described as predictable. Some have inevitably argued that the ultimate role played by the SAS serves to illustrate the



Map 5. Jebel Akhdar operations, December 1958 – January 1959

limitations of air power as a counter-insurgency weapon.⁸⁹ More recently, on the other hand, Peter Dye has pointed out that air power helped to bring the insurgency to an end in a number of different ways.

Employing no more than 50 aircraft, and flying some 2,000 sorties, air power delivered:

Speed – Rapid deployment of ground forces and additional air assets enabling operational and strategic surprise.

Sustainability – Effective support to operations in the heat of the summer, over extremely difficult terrain, employing forward airstrips to sustain the advance and evacuate casualties.

Intelligence – An accurate picture of enemy held territory and progress of the close battle while enabling independent action to be co-ordinated between separate ground units on different lines of advance.

Fire Power – Substantial fire power, beyond the small-calibre weapons and limited indirect fire available to ground forces.

Leverage – Leveraging the tactical and psychological impact of aircraft in the close air support role, enabling lightly armed infantry to take and hold objectives otherwise beyond their reach.

Low casualties – As in the Protectorates, air power largely obviated set-piece battles or close fighting, reducing casualties on both sides.

Political credibility – Aircraft represented a relatively low ‘political’ footprint (compared to ground forces), giving the Government more room for manoeuvre without drawing international criticism.⁹⁰

Of these, the last is perhaps the most significant. Based on the experience of Malaya, there might have been a case for arguing that the insurgency in Oman would have been most effectively suppressed through the deployment of a substantial ground force, with all the associated support infrastructure, over a protracted period of time. But such an approach was both politically and

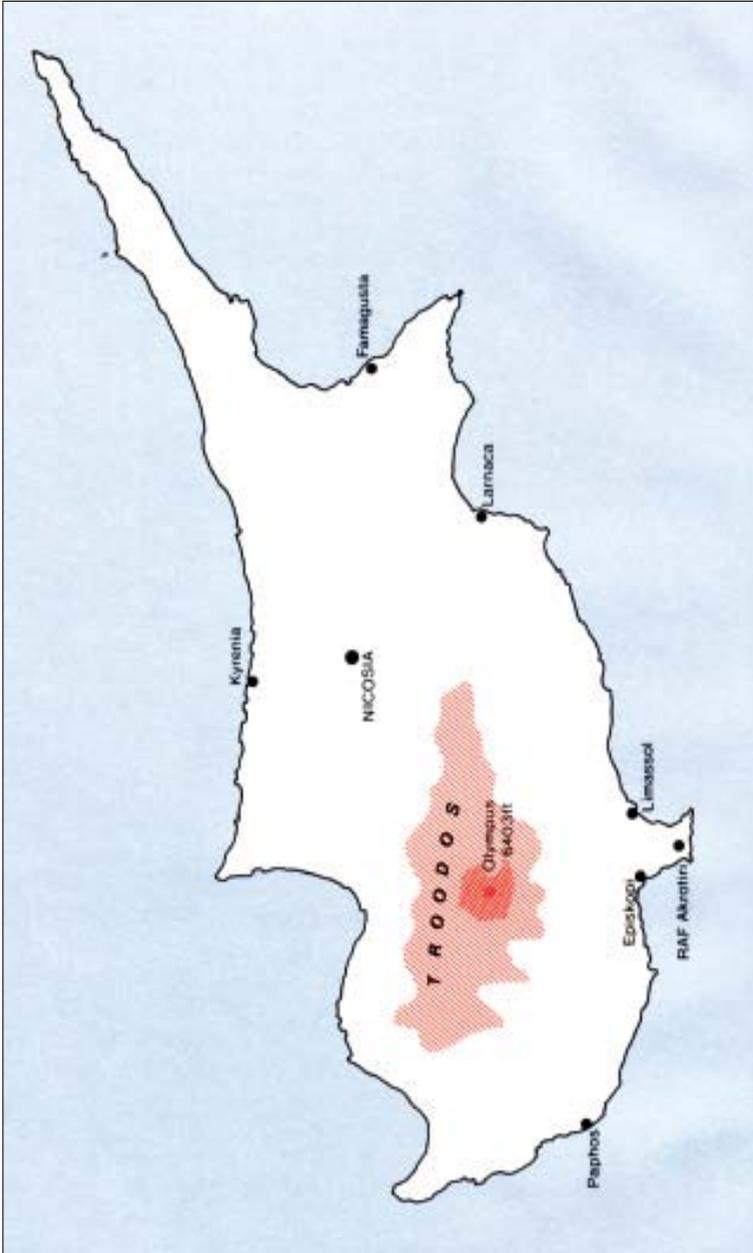
diplomatically unthinkable by 1958, and an alternative had therefore to be found. This meant, in proportional terms, relying far more heavily on air power, but ground troops were not to be dispensed with; this was not an independent air strategy. Rather, the aim was to minimise the British Army contribution by relying on the locally raised Scouts and on Omani forces. Quite apart from the various cost, resource and political advantages that this offered, the Omanis would of course possess the essential element of legitimacy that the British lacked. However, for this strategy to have succeeded without the deployment of the SAS, it would have been necessary for the UK to have started sponsoring the expansion and modernisation of the Sultan's forces earlier in the decade, and far more energetically. Here, perhaps, was the most important long-term lesson bequeathed by the Jebel Akhdar campaign.

7. Cyprus: Enosis

Oman did not provide the RAF with scope for the exploitation of rotary-wing capabilities; the use of helicopters to lift troops into the Jebel Akhdar was considered, but rejected on a variety of grounds.⁹¹ However, while operations in Oman were still very much in progress, the UK was confronted by a further challenge – this time in Cyprus – where there proved to be far more scope for helicopters to support internal security activities.

Cyprus had been a British colony since the 19th century but, in the aftermath of the Second World War, strong support emerged within the majority Greek population for the concept of Enosis, whereby a UK withdrawal would be followed by Cyprus's incorporation into mainland Greece.⁹² Needless to say, this agenda was opposed by the Turkish minority and also by the Turkish government in Ankara. For the UK's part, Cyprus's value lay in the various military installations established on the island over the previous half century – particularly the air base at Nicosia (construction of the larger airfield at Akrotiri began in 1955). Enosis appeared incompatible with the retention and full exploitation of these facilities. Equally, there seemed to be little potential for exploring possible alternatives because of the extent to which events in other parts of the Middle East were highlighting the island's critical strategic value – British withdrawal from some areas (through Cyprus), continued presence elsewhere (partly sustained from Cyprus), and a new counter-Soviet alliance with Iraq and notably Turkey, known as the Baghdad Pact, to which the UK could not contribute without the new Akrotiri base. Cyprus was also a vital command, control and communications hub. Events in Egypt clearly demonstrated the inherent disadvantages of maintaining bases on foreign soil.

After the United Nations formally rejected Enosis early in 1955, a nationalist guerrilla organisation – EOKA – emerged in Cyprus. Having accumulated arms and munitions smuggled in from the Greek mainland, they announced their existence on 1 April by detonating bombs at a number of government offices, police stations and military premises. The subsequent internal security tasks were many and varied, and extended across urban and rural areas. EOKA's tactics included bombing, mining, sabotage, ambush, assassination, murder and kidnapping, but there was also civil unrest. Strikes, demonstrations and riots periodically confronted the security forces, and inter-communal violence became a factor during the later stages of the emergency.



Map 6. Cyprus

The general pattern of insurgent activity in Cyprus has been misrepresented in a number of published histories, to create an impression of more-or-less continuous rebellion over a period of four years.⁹³ Yet the publicly available fatality records of the British armed services and the Cypriot police disclose a different picture: there were in fact important variations in the intensity of EOKA operations, which must be clearly identified if the insurgency and the accompanying British counter-measures are to be accurately portrayed. After the events of 1 April 1955, EOKA only gradually expanded their campaign, mainly targeting the Cyprus police and other members of the indigenous population; but a marked upsurge occurred in October, reflected in a sudden and sharp rise in the number of military fatalities.

The following year witnessed by far the most intense phase of the insurgency. Of 153 security force fatalities that clearly resulted from terrorist activity between April 1955 and March 1959, no fewer than 89 (58 per cent) occurred in 1956. Then there was an equally pronounced decline. From the records it is only possible to establish with certainty that nine members of the security forces lost their lives as a result of EOKA action throughout the period January 1957 to March 1958. After that, the casualties began to increase again, peaking in October, although EOKA remained far less active than in 1956. In December, their operations were again scaled down, and they ceased completely at the end of the month.⁹⁴

As in Malaya, the British were at first slow to realise that the threat from EOKA might necessitate the introduction of far-reaching counter-insurgency measures. The garrison was enlarged. Amounting to 5,876 personnel on 1 April 1955, it doubled in size over the next six months, but there was no comprehensive review of security policy. This reflects the relatively limited scale of early EOKA activity and hopes for a negotiated settlement, either through talks between the British government and the Greek Cypriot ethnarch, Archbishop Makarios, or through UN intervention. The failure of negotiations and the UN's refusal to reconsider the Cyprus question then prompted EOKA's 'surge' towards the end of the year, while the British response was to appoint the former Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Sir John Harding, Governor of Cyprus. He immediately overhauled Cyprus's governmental and security machinery, integrating civil administration with the activities of the military and the police under a single leader – Harding himself – functioning

both as governor and Director of Operations.[†] Military command and control was assigned to a fully joint staff, operating out of a Joint Operations Centre, with the support of a joint intelligence organisation. Finally, on 26 November, a State of Emergency was declared.⁹⁵

It has been argued that Harding lacked political awareness and that some of the more authoritarian measures he introduced – especially Makarios's exile to the Seychelles in 1956 – merely encouraged opposition among the Greek Cypriot community and handed a considerable amount of ammunition to EOKA's propagandists.⁹⁶ While there is some truth in these allegations, they do not take sufficient account of the British government's steadfast refusal to contemplate Cyprus's independence in the mid-1950s, which left Harding with little realistic room for manoeuvre. Even if he had adopted a somewhat more conciliatory approach towards EOKA, it is extremely unlikely that they would have suspended their activities in the absence of a substantial shift in the government's position.

The events of the next twelve months clearly illustrate the enormous difficulties that confront security forces attempting to contain an insurgency of this nature. EOKA at no time fielded more than 300 guerrillas, but there was very broad passive support for the cause of Enosis across the Greek Cypriot population. Many consequently chose to assist EOKA, and many more voluntarily withheld any form of co-operation from the security forces, or else succumbed to the various forms of intimidation that EOKA employed to deter 'collaboration'. Such initiatives as were launched by the authorities to win hearts and minds predictably ended in failure.⁹⁷ Against this background, it inevitably appeared that EOKA's suppression would only be achieved by 'boots on the ground'. Troop numbers were duly increased to reach nearly 21,000 by the beginning of April 1956, and 27,000 a year later.⁹⁸ But what this actually meant was the arrival in Cyprus of a great many military personnel – including numerous National Servicemen – who were poorly trained and prepared for their operational environment. They made easy targets for EOKA, and it seems unlikely that their losses during 1956 would have been as high if so many had not been deployed in the first place. The problem was exacerbated by the build-up of troops for

[†] A separate Director of Operations post was created at the beginning of 1957 but the post-holder was, of course, responsible to the governor.

the Suez operation, and by their subsequent withdrawal, between August and December. It was in this period that the British armed services suffered their heaviest losses to the insurgents.⁹⁹

Given that Cyprus is an island and that EOKA was at first heavily dependent on imported weapons, ammunition and explosives, the most obvious means by which the RAF could contribute to COIN operations was through the interdiction of these supplies, in collaboration with the Royal Navy. Early operations involved a motley collection of light aircraft, sometimes supported by Meteors and Valettas from Nicosia. But the limited endurance of these platforms proved a serious disadvantage, so their place was taken by Malta-based Shackletons. The Shackletons were capable of mounting 18-hour sorties from Luqa if necessary, but they more usually flew from El Adem in Libya – one of the RAF's few remaining airfields in North Africa.¹⁰⁰ The RAF also made a vital contribution to covert maritime interdiction operations, which depended heavily on air reconnaissance to identify suspect shipping.¹⁰¹ Air and naval operations were controlled and co-ordinated by a maritime headquarters at Nicosia.

When it became clear that some supplies were also reaching EOKA by air, the two RAF radars at Nikolaos and Kivides initiated an overnight aircraft reporting radar watch, while Cyprus air traffic control procedures were tightened up, and both RAF Ansons and Navy Gannets sought out potential intruders. At sea, the combined efforts of the RAF and the Navy resulted in the interception of many suspicious vessels, but no aircraft engaged in arms smuggling were ever detected or observed.¹⁰²

With the aim of preventing smaller-scale arms smuggling by individuals (as well as monitoring travellers and collecting intelligence), a Port and Travel Control Section was created at Nicosia. Detachments manned by selected Army personnel were deployed at the various seaports, while an RAF detachment became responsible for the airport. They presided over the maintenance of elaborate travel controls. Civil aircraft were effectively sealed off on landing, and disembarking passengers were escorted to the airport terminal by armed guards, after which they were subjected to extended checks and searches. Similar search procedures were applied to freight and cargo, and to aircraft interiors.¹⁰³

The imposition of such measures was not merely sensible but inevitable given the nature of the EOKA insurgency, but it is difficult to gauge their impact. During the early stages of the crisis EOKA managed to steal arms from the security forces and from private citizens in considerable quantities, and they soon developed their own rudimentary arms-making facilities. During their most active period, between April 1955 and March 1957, 61 per cent of the 2,270 recorded incidents involving the use of arms and explosives took the form of grenade throwing, and the overwhelming majority of the grenades were basic home-made devices produced in Cyprus.¹⁰⁴ This illustrates one of several ways in which EOKA managed to circumvent British counter-terrorism initiatives, but more evidence would be required to prove that the British failed completely.¹⁰⁵ It is reasonable to assume that EOKA would have favoured the use of more advanced and capable weapons if it had been possible to import them in quantity. To this extent, their tactics may have been shaped by the British blockade to a significant degree.

From the RAF's perspective, a particular problem during the EOKA insurgency was the security of its installations and aircraft against sabotage by explosives or arson. As EOKA did not restrict itself to operational sabotage, and considered an explosion in a NAAFI or cinema with several casualties as useful to their purpose as sabotaging an aircraft on the ground, the number of targets for time bombs within an RAF station was immense. The issue was complicated by the presence at both Akrotiri and Nicosia of large numbers of Cypriot employees. The authorities were reluctant to terminate the employment of all Cypriots at the two bases, and therefore opted to rely on a rigorous regime of gate checks and searches. Given the number of civilian workers, this could never be entirely successful, so additional supporting measures were introduced. Strict controls were imposed on civilian access to such locations as aircraft parking bays and fuel dumps and, when the presence of civilians in these areas was essential, they were subjected to still further searches.

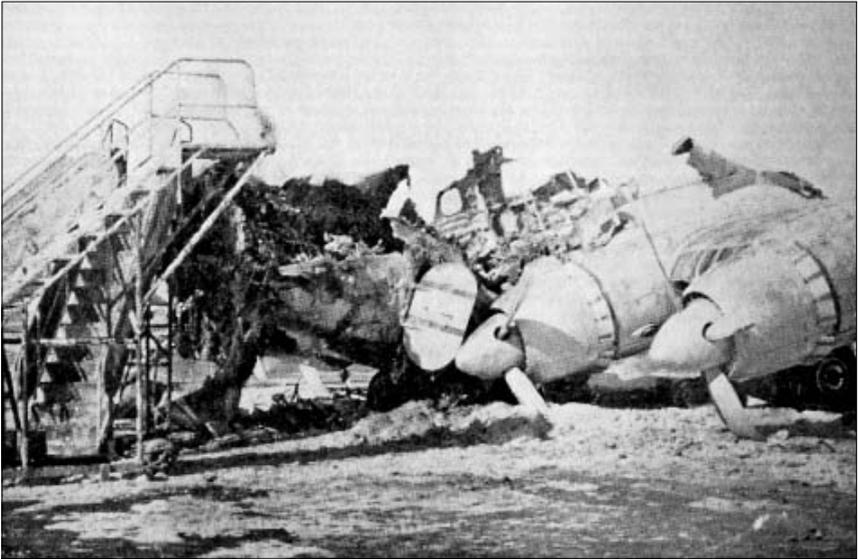
The deterrent effect of these measures was doubtless considerable, but the accompanying outlay on guards and search parties was exorbitant. At Nicosia alone, it was estimated that approximately 750,000 man-hours were expended in one year on station security measures in the form of guards, search parties and escorts. This did not include the employment of a complete RAF Regiment wing on security duties, and the effort expended in assisting the Security Forces



A Shackleton of 38 Squadron, which was assigned to maritime interdiction operations during the EOKA insurgency



A military escort was assigned to all passengers arriving at Nicosia's civil airport



The Hermes destroyed at Nicosia by an EOKA time-bomb in March 1956

outside the station.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, beyond the bases and other outlying facilities, there was also Nicosia's civil airport, where there were, again, many Cypriots employed in such sensitive areas as customs, immigration and aircraft maintenance. After a time-bomb destroyed a Hermes charter aircraft in March 1956 – fortunately before 68 servicemen and their families emplaned – many of these workers had to be replaced by RAF personnel, and the airport was then put under RAF control.¹⁰⁷ In an effort to reduce the number of potential terrorist targets still further, severe restrictions were imposed on off-duty Service personnel, who were armed at all times and instructed to maintain the maximum possible degree of personal alertness.¹⁰⁸



A WRAF NCO of the Port and Travel Control section at Nicosia airport searching passenger luggage

Apart from periodic reconnaissance missions over Cyprus's interior, there appeared – to Harding at least – to be little more scope for using fixed-wing aircraft in support of counter-insurgency operations. However, rotary-wing platforms could potentially make an invaluable contribution to security force activities, particularly outside the larger conurbations. In 1955 the RAF did not maintain any helicopter units on Cyprus, and the essential base infrastructure was also non-existent. Two Sycamores were sent out to perform search and rescue (SAR) duties in May 1955, but the unit commander arrived in theatre having flown only ten hours on Sycamores, the remaining 40 hours of his career as a helicopter pilot having been spent training on Westland Dragonflies. He was now faced with the prospect of operating an unfamiliar aircraft in an extremely harsh environment, characterised by rugged, mountainous terrain rising to 6,000ft above sea level, and extremes of heat, humidity and wind. There was literally no knowledge of how the Sycamore would perform in such conditions. Equally, no personnel had any knowledge or experience of using helicopters against insurgents, and there was no operational or tactical doctrine covering their employment in counter-insurgency warfare.⁵ It is hardly surprising, given the prevailing lack of expertise, that one of the two Sycamores should have crashed during an early trial mountain landing. There were no casualties, but the aircraft was written off, leaving only one helicopter on Cyprus for the next three months.

Training and trials continued as the year wore on and received an important fillip when Harding became governor, as he had some prior experience of using helicopters for communications purposes and believed strongly in their capacity to assist operations against EOKA. This was first demonstrated in November, when the Sycamores provided support for a Commando unit engaged in arms searches in the Black Forest area of the Kyrenia mountains. Gradually, at Harding's urging, the helicopter force was enlarged, unit establishment reaching 13 by the end of 1956. In October they were assigned the squadron number 284.

It was quickly recognised that the helicopters' utility in Cyprus would substantially

⁵ There had not been sufficient time for experience gained in Malaya to exert much influence on helicopter operations in other theatres, and terrain and environmental conditions were in any case so different that not all the lessons identified in Malaya could have been directly applied in Cyprus.

depend upon their capacity to land troops at virtually any location across the island. The fact that the Sycamore could only carry three passengers was less of a disadvantage than it would have been in, say, Oman, because the EOKA cells rarely numbered more than a handful of guerrillas. The key advantages were (as in Malaya) rapidity and flexibility of deployment, which would substantially increase the Army's chances of securing tactical surprise and of preventing the escape of EOKA elements. However, as there were many parts of Cyprus where helicopter landings were impossible, the technique of 'roping' was introduced. It was soon acknowledged to be of prime importance, and it became a major element in 284 Squadron's monthly training task throughout the emergency.¹⁰⁹ While such essential tactical preparations were in progress, the security forces were steadily improving their intelligence picture of EOKA, exploiting captured documents, interrogations and informers to enhance their understanding of the organisation, methods and mentality of the insurgents.¹¹⁰

As we have seen, the most violent period of EOKA activity occurred in the later months of 1956, coinciding with the Suez crisis. Once the crisis was over, the availability of more helicopters, aircrew, suitably trained Army personnel, proper basing facilities and forward landing zones allowed the security forces to move on to the offensive to an unprecedented degree. Missions would typically be mounted at very short notice to exploit particular intelligence leads; for example, an evening intelligence brief might result in an operation being planned overnight and launched at dawn the following day, planning being conducted directly between the helicopter squadron commander and the commander of the tasked Army unit.

One of the tactics most commonly employed involved the establishment of several observation posts (OPs) at locations surrounding suspected EOKA hides. Small numbers of troops would at first be deployed with equipment and water for 48 hours, but a shuttle lift bringing reinforcements from a forward assembly area might follow to any or all of the OPs if required. Each OP would then serve as a starting point for the movement of troops into the area of the hide. By such means, troops could be very rapidly deployed against EOKA cells from several directions simultaneously. Another technique, exploiting rotary-wing airlift for the first time on a significant scale in Cyprus, was cordon and search. This was a direct descendent of the 'air cordon' tactic developed by the RAF and the Army between the wars, with helicopter-borne troops providing the cordon rather



A stream take-off from Nicosia by Sycamores of 284 Squadron, during an exercise with troops of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry



Troops 'roping' from a Sycamore in Cyprus



A Sycamore over characteristically mountainous terrain in Cyprus



A Sycamore in a typical troop deployment position in Cyprus



The entrance to a terrorist hide in Cyprus

than fixed-wing aircraft. The Sycamores would insert firing parties at each of several positions around villages or hides to prevent the escape or dispersal of EOKA personnel pending the arrival of ground forces by road. Their use allowed cordons to be established in minutes, even in remote areas. Additionally there were, of course, many occasions when helicopters were used to insert troops directly into locations where there was believed to be an EOKA presence.¹¹¹

All of these tactics were developed jointly, via the closest possible collaboration between 284 Squadron and the Army. The squadron commander later wrote:

Two things in particular stand out about the Cyprus operations: first, we learned not to be conservative in our rotary-wing thinking and, secondly, we found that a fresh approach – in this case the Army's – provided just the right sort of stimulant to make us explore exhaustively every possible means by which the helicopter might be put to the best use in the operational field.¹¹²

In total, between April 1956 and May 1957, the Sycamores flew 2,561 operational hours delivering 3,463 troops and 215,000lb of equipment; 4,080 troops were trained in helicopter operational roles. A typical month's effort involved 70 reconnaissance flights, 214 trooping sorties (449 troops) 407 supply drops (78,000lb), 697 communications sorties (961 passengers), 12 casualty evacuations and two sorties for the governor – a total of 338 hours flying.¹¹³ The intensity of rotary-wing activity in this period is revealed by an Air Ministry intelligence summary describing an operation that resulted in the capture of one of EOKA's mountain cells. This involved 597 sorties (for 130 flying hours) by the Sycamores, 75 per cent of which were accounted for by trooping or supply missions, which inserted 587 men and over 40,000lb of equipment and stores. The remaining sorties were communication or casualty-evacuation flights. By the time the summary was prepared (November-December 1957) between 35 and 40 operations on this scale are said to have been mounted, and the Sycamores had provided support to ground forces in about 70 field operations against EOKA.¹¹⁴

The security forces' offensive – particularly their enhanced level of air-mobility – caught EOKA off-guard. In the first quarter of 1957, 16 of their members were killed, including three prominent leaders, and 60 were captured, along with substantial quantities of weaponry, ammunition and explosives.¹¹⁵ According to one British intelligence assessment, this 'reduced the organisation to but a shadow of its former self.'¹¹⁶ In February they were compelled to abort a major series of actions planned to coincide with a UN debate on the Cyprus question, and they offered a truce in March – ostensibly conditional upon the release of Archbishop Makarios from internment.¹¹⁷ Even in the first three months of the year they had been operating on what the Army later described as a 'minimal risk basis'; between April and October they were virtually inactive, and their operations between October and March 1958 were mainly confined to sabotage.¹¹⁸

The EOKA insurgency was never likely to be suppressed by military measures alone. During this period of relative calm, the political climate changed in two important ways. First, after Macmillan replaced Eden as Prime Minister, the British government shifted its position, accepting for the first time that British military interests on Cyprus could be maintained even if the island became independent.¹¹⁹ In November, Harding retired and Sir Hugh Foot was appointed

governor in his place, with a clear remit to negotiate a political compromise that would persuade the insurgents to lay down their arms. Second, sensing a possible British capitulation to EOKA, the Turkish government and elements from within Cyprus's Turkish community succeeded in forcing the issue of partition on to the political agenda.¹²⁰

EOKA in the meantime used the cease-fire (as they had probably always intended) to reorganise, replace lost personnel, rearm, gather intelligence and plan new operations. Their inactivity (again perhaps by design) encouraged some relaxation in security postures: 4,000 troops were withdrawn,¹²¹ and some detainees were released. According to one source, daily life began to resume an air of relative normality, with 'troops walking about unarmed and fraternizing happily with the locals.'¹²² This could only have made EOKA's task easier when they returned to the offensive in March 1958.

Nevertheless, by that time, the authorities were confronted by a very different insurgency from the one they had faced two years earlier. The situation was radically altered by the UK's change of stance, and by the Turkish factor. The British government spent much of the year attempting to broker an agreement between Greece and Turkey on Cyprus's independence, and EOKA activity tended to ebb and flow with the cycle of negotiations, halting while they were in progress and resuming when the terms on offer were rejected by one party or the other, or both. Their attacks were backed by a broader 'passive resistance' campaign after the failure of talks in February, and Turkish Cypriots instigated a series of violent inter-communal riots in June, following the rejection of their demands for partition. The climax came in October, when the British sought to implement a power-sharing arrangement – the Macmillan Plan – which had been accepted by Turkey but not Greece. EOKA mounted some 50 attacks that month – a fraction of the number staged at their peak of activity in 1956, but very much more carefully targeted. They managed to kill 23 people and wound 300 more.¹²³

Against this background, predictably enough, the British launched a second security clampdown. Troop numbers, which had been reduced to 23,600 by the time Harding retired, reached nearly 35,000 in September (the peak figure for the entire insurgency); curfews were re-imposed, and British civilians were issued with revolvers. After the NAAFI at RAF Nicosia was bombed, thousands

of Cypriot employees were sacked and replaced by British volunteers flown out from the UK; and a new Director of Operations – General Darling – was appointed, following criticism of the security effort in the British press. Like Harding, Darling sought to take the fight to EOKA, but their tactics otherwise differed in certain important respects, notably in their approach to exploiting air power. Darling saw far more potential for combining the air-mobility that Harding had promoted with extended aerial observation and reconnaissance. For this purpose, he succeeded in obtaining a considerable number of light aircraft. His air component ultimately comprised:

230 Squadron	-	6 Single Pioneers
114 Squadron	-	16 Chipmunks
Joint Experimental Helicopter Unit. **	-	6 Whirlwinds
284 Squadron	-	10 Sycamores
653 Squadron	-	Army Air Corps Austers ¹²⁴

Their control was handled by a Tactical Air Control Centre, which was located next to the Director of Operations' main Operations Room.¹²⁵

The various light aircraft played a key role in a broad range of reconnaissance activities, not only to monitor civilian movements and locate EOKA hides, but also to assist the Army in planning operations in remote and inaccessible areas. Often flying at no more than 50 feet above the ground, individual pilots would repeatedly concentrate their missions on the same areas to gain a level of familiarity that allowed them to detect changes of a suspicious nature immediately. The helicopters were employed much as before, but with the Whirlwinds of the JEHU providing augmented lift for elements of the 3rd Battalion, Grenadier Guards, who were maintained at immediate readiness during daylight hours, with their rifles and equipment laid out on the floor of the helicopters. They were frequently deployed between 10 and 20 December in Operation Dovetail, a large-scale anti-terrorist drive involving 1,500 troops, which resulted in the arrest of 27 EOKA suspects and the discovery of a considerable quantity of arms and ammunition, and several hides.¹²⁶ This achievement was in addition to the killing or capturing of several senior EOKA members over the October-December period, the dead including one of their

** A combined RAF/Army unit formed in 1955 to develop troop and cargo-carrying techniques in tactical situations.

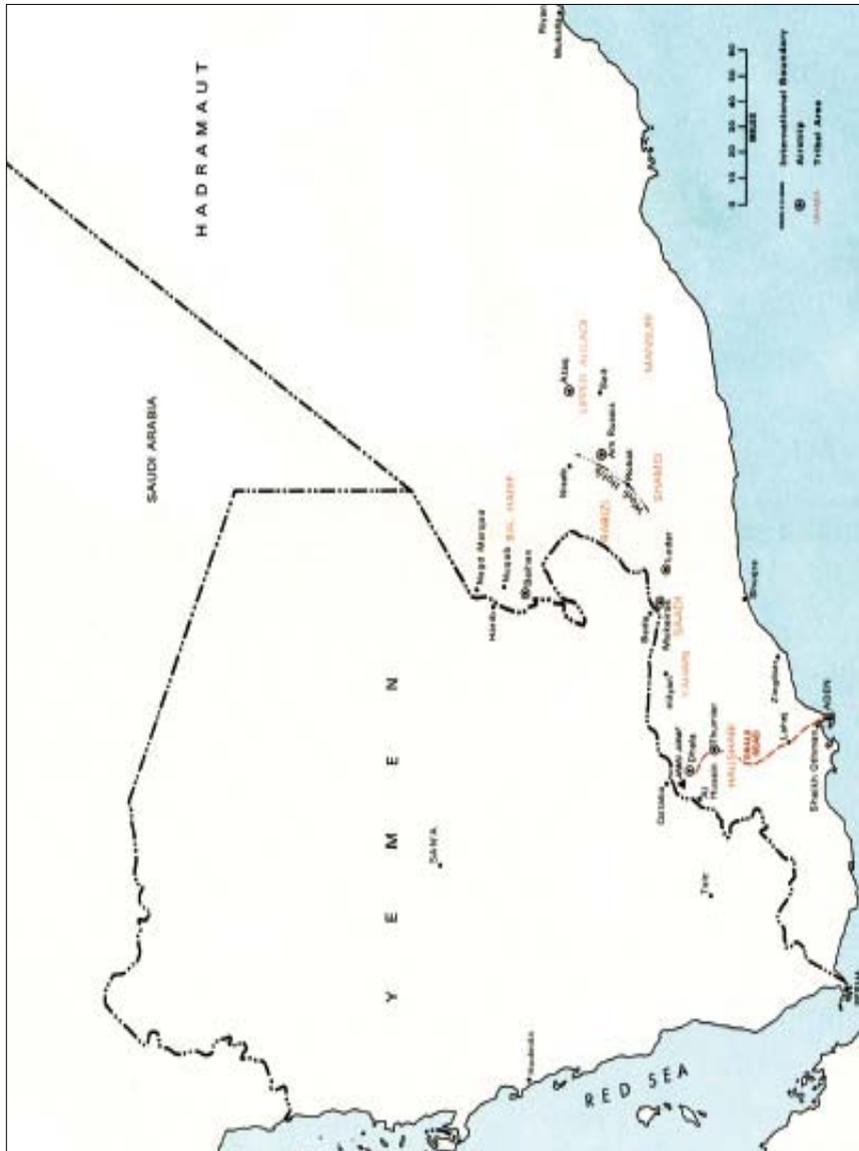
area commanders. The number of terrorist incidents fell off dramatically during December,¹²⁷ until EOKA finally announced a complete cessation of their activities on the 24th, 'on the understanding that the other side does the same.'¹²⁸

Although a range of motives probably lay behind this unexpected development, Darling evidently interpreted it as a defensive measure – a clear admission of weakness designed to buy time. While there were some troop reductions, therefore, operations against EOKA were otherwise maintained. The fact that there was subsequently no resumption of terrorist activity suggests that Darling's analysis was broadly accurate. In February 1959, Greece and Turkey at last reached agreement on the constitution of an independent Cyprus, and only when EOKA reluctantly accepted the terms on offer was the offensive against them suspended.¹²⁹ Alert states were then gradually relaxed, although the security forces maintained more defensively oriented reconnaissance and patrolling activity for several more months.¹³⁰

During the full period of the Cyprus insurgency – from April 1955 to December 1958 – the British launched two major offensives against EOKA, both of which were very successful. The first reduced insurgent activity to only a fraction of the levels witnessed during 1956, while the second culminated in the total cessation of EOKA operations. Air power played a key role in both of these campaigns. In the first, it provided the Army with substantially enhanced levels of mobility, sustainability, reach and speed of response, so making remote and dispersed terrorist hides and havens far more vulnerable to attack. Indeed, air mobility provided what might today be termed the 'sensor-to-shooter link', in that it allowed the improved intelligence that was available by the end of 1956 to be exploited through the actual deployment of troops against EOKA cells with the absolute minimum of delay – while the intelligence remained current and accurate. In the second, further advances in air mobility provided by the JEHU Whirlwinds were augmented by comparable improvements in air surveillance and reconnaissance.

Beyond this, for the duration of the crisis, RAF aircraft provided broader reconnaissance and maritime reconnaissance capabilities and support for Special Forces, and also ensured the sustainability of operations on Cyprus by maintaining the all-important air links back to the UK. It must nevertheless

be recognized that the EOKA insurgency was not defeated solely by military means, and that it would unquestionably have been even more protracted had the British government not formally accepted the concept of Cyprus's independence in 1957.



Map 7. Aden and the Protectorates

Aden

AHB's survey of small wars and counter-insurgencies in the Middle East between the World Wars considered how air policing was employed very successfully in Aden in the 1930s for the limited purpose of dealing economically with threats from Yemen and with a minimal amount of tribal unrest. However, during the decade following the Second World War, some far more formidable challenges emerged. Beyond the Suez Crisis there were no very obvious turning points. After Israel's creation in 1947, riots swept through Aden Colony, suggesting that some limited radicalisation had taken place among the population during the war. But the post-war development of the economy – particularly the oil industry and the port – drew in migrant workers (including many Yemenis) by the thousand, and they were to play a central role in the turbulence that finally culminated in the UK's withdrawal. Many of the migrants retained links with their villages, and this provided a conduit by which subversive political ideas spread to the Protectorates, although unrest at this level could also reflect a more traditional tribal opposition to even very limited governmental modernisation. North of the frontier, 1948 witnessed the accession of a new Yemeni Imam, who promptly repudiated the 1934 treaty with the UK and began supplying arms to rebellious Protectorate tribes. Tribal dissidence nevertheless gave few grounds for concern until the mid-50s, when it began to assume more significant proportions.

With hindsight, we can therefore see three major sources of opposition emerging in Aden by the mid-1950s, consisting of radical political groups in Aden Colony, Yemen, and the more rebellious tribal factions in the Protectorates. Here were the makings of a far more serious confrontation than the British had faced during the inter-war years. Initially, however, they were slow to grasp the severity of the threat. They certainly increased their military presence; Khormaksar air base in Aden Colony ultimately became the busiest station in the RAF.¹³¹ Tactics evolved: very few genuinely independent air proscription operations had ever been mounted in Aden, but virtually all internal security operations were jointly executed by the mid-1950s, ground forces playing an increasingly prominent role as it became possible to airlift troops into areas that had previously been beyond their reach.¹³² Yet proposals for constitutional change were rejected out of hand. Few colonial administrators or senior officers were willing to accept that some fundamentally new political departures were required if stability was to be maintained, but

even those who were more progressive in their outlook were left with very little freedom of action. Both the government and the Chiefs of Staff in London were adamantly opposed to reform in Aden, which in their view could only weaken the British position.¹³³

The extent of Yemeni backing for rebellious Protectorate tribes ultimately became clear in the mid-1950s, when the British suffered their first serious defeat. In 1954, after a series of disturbances along the remote Wadi Hatib, the Aden government decided to build a new fort at Robot. This isolated outpost quickly became the focus of tribal resistance, which was countered by typical proscription bombing techniques and by the airlift of troops into the affected area. Air operations were sustained around the Wadi Hatib throughout the second half of the year, and patrols were also mounted along the frontier in an attempt to interdict supplies from Yemen. By December, insurgent activity had declined considerably, but hostilities were renewed in the spring of 1955, when the rebels were again subjected to proscription-type measures by the RAF and (on the ground) the Aden Protectorate Levies (APL) and British troops. Gradually, it became clear that the Robot fort was a liability; it was too difficult to defend and maintain, and its presence merely encouraged tribal dissidence. After one further substantial airlift in July 1955, it was abandoned. It was levelled soon afterwards by the insurgents.¹³⁴

To the British it seemed clear that Yemen was chiefly responsible for this setback, and additional steps were therefore taken to reduce the flow of supplies across the frontier. Air patrols were stepped up, and RAF Field Intelligence Officers were deployed among friendly tribes to improve the flow of HUMINT and to help target and even direct air strikes against hostile elements.¹³⁵ But the border was too long to be closed completely, so measures were instead initiated to deter the Imam from further interference. These are not especially well documented, but British strategy was apparently to engage Yemeni forces in the border area, presumably to divert the Imam's attention towards his own security and away from the Protectorates. There was no authorisation to mount unprovoked attacks into Yemeni territory and, predictably enough, the Yemenis were not always willing to initiate combat at times and places favourable to the British. So a system of 'spikes' developed: one approach involved dangling targets in front of Yemeni gunners on the other side of the border, as 8 Squadron's Operations Record Book describes:

In view of the continued violation of the border by Yemen forces in the Qataba area near Dhala it was decided to launch an operation against them on 30 January [1958]. During the past few weeks Yemen forces have built up their strength in this area and an estimated 1,500 troops and irregulars together with machine guns, heavy machine guns (anti-aircraft) and artillery (75mm) were occupying well prepared positions on the south side of Qataba directly opposing the Protectorate fort of Sanah ...

The operation started at 0700 hrs on 30 January when a troop of armoured cars of the 13/18 Hussars patrolled the border in an attempt to incite the Yemen forces to fire on them. In the event of this happening the Protectorate forces were then to launch a full-scale retaliation. Venom aircraft were flying a continuous 'Cab Rank' ten miles south of the area ... However, it was not until 10.00 hrs that the Yemen forces opened fire on the patrol ...

Two minutes after the first shell was fired, a pair of Venoms rocketed both enemy guns and silenced them. From then on Venoms were continually rocketing and strafing Yemen positions to the East and South of Qataba, concentrating mainly on gun positions and their accompanying sangers. The aircraft were not cleared to fire on the main Yemen troop positions ...¹³⁶

Protectorate tribesmen were also sent into Yemen to undertake acts of sabotage and attacks on the Imam's troops. When the Yemenis responded by mounting their own operations across the frontier, such actions could again be used as a pretext for retaliation.¹³⁷

Recent scholarship has criticised British policy in this period on two grounds. First, it is argued that the cross-border operations stimulated Yemeni protests to the United Nations, encouraging unwelcome criticism of the UK from around the world, and so restricting her later freedom of action. Second, the border war is said to have contributed significantly to the decline and ultimate collapse of the Yemeni imamate, opening the door to an Egyptian-backed republican regime. Yet this actually posed a much greater threat to British interests in the region, and almost immediately initiated a far more systematic and effective programme of agitation and subversion in Aden.¹³⁸

While there is some limited evidence to support the first of these contentions, the second is unquestionably exaggerated. The near-total cessation of Yemeni backing for dissident tribes in Aden in 1959 itself occurred for a variety of reasons and was not primarily the result of British pressure along the frontier. In the words of Air Vice-Marshal Heath, the Commander BFAP from 1957-59, it was 'largely due to the internal affairs of The Yemen'.¹³⁹ At the same time, the UK's perspective on the war was also changing. Policy-makers were becoming increasingly aware of the danger that, as Heath put it, 'in all probability Nasser's intention is eventually to overthrow the regime in The Yemen and establish a republic under Egyptian influence.'¹⁴⁰ Hence, by mid-1959, the cessation of hostilities clearly served the interests of both Yemen and the UK, and so it was that the war was halted more than two years before Heath's prediction was fulfilled. The UK did not exert any tangible influence on internal Yemeni affairs in this period.

Meanwhile, the British administration finally accepted the case for political reform. In 1958 it was decided that the Protectorates should be transformed into a self-governing Federation. At first, this was simply viewed as a buffer zone for Aden Colony. However, as it became clear that some form of self-government would also have to be granted to the Colony, its potential merger into the Federation was soon suggested. A conservative federal constitution would enable the UK's traditional allies among the tribal rulers to dominate the Colony's more disruptive urban political forces. With a friendly government controlling the port, the UK's long-term use of its facilities would be guaranteed. Central to this strategy was the co-operation of the Protectorate tribes. The majority were dependable, but there were factions in several areas opposed to the established tribal leaders, who were now all the more central to British plans. If the Federation were to stand any chance of survival, the threat posed by these dissident elements had to be removed. They therefore became the focus of British counter-insurgency operations between 1959 and 1961 – operations in which the RAF inevitably played a major part.¹⁴¹

Again, recent research has sought to illustrate the shortcomings of this strategy. On the basis of a campaign against the Ahl Bubakr tribal faction in the Upper Aulaqi Sheikdom, it has been suggested that, as a counter-insurgency weapon, air power was ineffective. Although employed with mounting intensity, aerial proscription was allegedly unable to overcome Ahl Bubakr resistance, and 'the

failure of air operations led to a punitive expedition into the proscribed area by ground forces, in this case, the Aden Protectorate Levies.' Furthermore, these operations are said to have been self-defeating because they accelerated the process by which formerly localised tribal unrest was turned against the British and the Federation. The rapid overthrow of established tribal leaders in 1967 is cited in support of this thesis.¹⁴²

There are two basic problems here. First (as we have already noted) air power was rarely employed independently of ground operations in Aden by the late 1950s, and this was certainly true of the campaign in the Upper Aulaqi Sheikhdom. The campaign extended from April 1959 to May 1960, and there were two 'peaks' of air activity during this time. The first occurred in August 1959. The principal offensive squadron in theatre (still 8 Squadron, still operating de Havilland Venoms) recorded that 'the operations were in support of Aden Protectorate Levy troops.'¹⁴³ The tempo of flying subsequently fluctuated, and the records do not reveal any discernable trend, either in the number of sorties flown or in the quantity of munitions released. What is certain, however, is that the Aden authorities did not 'respond to the failure' of these preliminary operations 'by resorting to larger scale air attacks.'¹⁴⁴ No 8 Squadron flew 92 sorties over the Upper Aulaqi Sheikhdom in August 1959, but only 18 in September; in October they flew none at all. The tempo increased briefly in November, when the squadron mounted 36 sorties in this area, but then declined again. There was virtually no operational flying over the Sheikhdom in February or March 1960.¹⁴⁵

The second peak then occurred in April and May. There was a limited amount of flying between 2 and 8 April (8 Squadron flew 17 sorties), but an operation named 'Damon' was launched on the 12th to soften up resistance prior to the deployment of 4 Battalion APL into the proscribed area for a reconnaissance in strength. Offensive flying in support of Damon finished on the 14th, and there were no more operational air missions until the 27th, shortly after the commencement of further activity on the ground. The 8 Squadron diarist recorded that

Operation 'Outmost' commenced at first light on 25th April when troops of No 3 Battalion Aden Protectorate Levies were flown into Mahfidh in Beverley aircraft of No 84 Squadron. On disembarkation,

these troops moved north into the proscribed area south of Museina, and at the same time No 4 Battalion Aden Protectorate Levies ... moved into the area from the north.

The operation then continued throughout May until the last of the dissidents fled into Yemen.¹⁴⁶

The records of 37 Squadron, operating Shackletons in Aden in the same period, provide a virtually identical picture. They note the same two peaks of activity (eight bombing sorties in August 1959, nine in April 1960), the same reduction of operational tempo in between (a total of six offensive sorties over the entire September to February period, inclusive), and the same link between air and ground operations. For example, the missions flown in April 1960 were described as 'medium level bombing and radio link in the proscribed area south of Al Museina in support of the Army'.¹⁴⁷

Hence it is quite wrong to suggest that ground operations were launched after intensified air attacks failed to defeat the insurgents. In fact (in a pattern repeated by RAF Harriers in Helmand Province in Afghanistan in 2006), the peak periods of air activity coincided with ground operations, and the records confirm a direct and inextricable linkage: the heaviest air bombardments were orchestrated to shape the battlespace for the APL or to provide them with fire support. Therefore, the campaign in the Upper Aulaqi Sheikdom cannot reasonably be employed in support of any thesis concerning the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of air action against insurgencies. If we view the campaign as a failure, then this outcome was clearly the result of both air and ground action; if, on the other hand, we consider the operation to have been successful, then air power must deserve at least some of the credit.

Second, considerably more evidence would be required to demonstrate any tangible connection between British counter-insurgency operations in the 1959-61 period and the events of August-November 1967. The British operations were very localised, with attention being overwhelmingly focused on the Upper Aulaqi and Lower Yafa regions,¹⁴⁸ yet the collapse Aden's traditional tribal elites in 1967 was general. It encompassed all the former British Protectorates, the majority of which had not recently been subjected to military action.¹⁴⁹ Counter-insurgency operations may have exerted some influence in

the few areas that were targeted, but other more important and far-reaching processes were evidently at work. British policy is more open to criticism on the grounds of its failure to mount an effective parallel information strategy to sell the new federal constitution to the Aden population as a whole. By contrast, in Lee's words,

A virulent programme of [anti-British and anti-Federation] propaganda streamed out continually from Radio Cairo, Radio Sana and Radio Taiz. It was both clever and entertaining and could be heard coming from transistor radios in almost every house and back street in Aden.¹⁵⁰

This comprehensive defeat in the information war had profound consequences. Aden's ailing traditional power structures gave way to new institutions that lacked the essential element of legitimacy, so that no one was prepared to defend them when they came under direct attack later in the decade.¹⁵¹

By the beginning of 1962, little overt opposition to the Federation remained in the Protectorates. Where internal security operations were concerned, both 1962 and 1963 were, from the RAF's perspective, quiet years, and they were



De Havilland Venoms of 8 Squadron at Khormaksar, Aden, 1957



A 37 Squadron Shackleton over Khormaksar; tasking included maritime reconnaissance (interdicting arms smuggling), photographic reconnaissance, air presence, leafleting and offensive air missions

rarely called on to provide more than 'air presence'. Again, the main commitment was Yemen in its new republican guise: border patrolling once more became a priority.¹⁵² But the situation within Aden Colony was deteriorating steadily in the meantime. Strikes, rioting, and civil disobedience became increasingly commonplace, and an even greater threat emerged in the form of urban terrorism. Of course, this phenomenon was by no means unfamiliar to the British armed forces, but the scale of the problem in Aden threatened to assume unmanageable proportions during 1963. Unable to quell the urban insurgency but desperate for a means to demonstrate its authority and force projection capability, the British administration decided to launch a further operation against some of the more unruly Protectorate tribal factions. The result was the first Radfan expedition, Operation Nutcracker.



An airman at Dhala air strip, close to the Yemeni frontier

The British headquarters in Aden had changed from an air command to a joint command in 1959, and from a local command to a theatre command – Middle East Command – in 1961. The first commander of Middle East Command was an Air Chief Marshal (Sir Charles Elworthy), but he relinquished his post in May 1963 to Lieutenant General Sir Charles Harrington. Harrington viewed Nutcracker primarily as a land operation, in which the RAF would play a supporting role to the ground forces. He was keen to assess the capability of the new Federation army, known as the Federal Regular Army, but they were to be augmented by regular British Army tanks, artillery and engineers.

Launched in January 1964, Nutcracker merely repeated the basic mistake that had been made a decade earlier in the Wadi Hatib. As an exercise in force projection, it was quite successful. The air support was highly effective, as it should have been given the resources available and the RAF's extensive

experience in theatre. However, there was little option but to pull back from Radfan once the initial objective of Nutcracker had been achieved, for there were insufficient troops to garrison the area and maintain security across the rest of Aden. The insurgents then moved back in, while Yemeni and Egyptian radio proclaimed that a great victory had been won over so-called 'puppet imperialist forces'.¹⁵³

So the decision was taken to mount a second operation. The British ground component was enlarged by Parachute Regiment, Royal Marine and Special Forces elements, as well as by other regular Army units. The first incursion at the beginning of May was partly planned as an airborne operation, but insurgents intercepted the SAS team that had been tasked with marking the drop zone. The airlift was therefore cancelled, leaving 45 Commando and 3 PARA to advance into the Radfan mountains largely on foot. The offensive developed into a classic exercise in air-land integration, as 3 PARA often found themselves beyond the range of their artillery. Ground attack aircraft – Hunters – were frequently called in to strike rebel forces only just ahead of forward British units. In one instance, a British soldier was injured by a spent cartridge case ejected from a Hunter overhead.¹⁵⁴

Once British forces had reached their initial objectives, the nearby airstrip at Thumier was enlarged so that additional ground troops could be brought into Radfan, and two tactical landing grounds were established known as Monk's Field and Blair's Field. While the build-up was in progress, frequent air strikes maintained pressure on the insurgent tribes. The subsequent advance towards Bakri Ridge was supported by artillery that had been airlifted by helicopter into mountain-top positions overlooking the rebel stronghold. But the operation also witnessed further exceptional collaboration between 3 PARA and the Hunter squadrons. After the ridge had been taken, the final objective became the 5,500ft Jebel Huriyah, which could not be approached without the preliminary capture of two wadis. When elements of 3 PARA found themselves cut off and under fire in the Wadi Dhubsan, the supporting Hunters actually flew up the wadi at ground level to attack rebel positions. The final assault was executed early in June, and Jebel Huriyah had been secured by the 11th. This did not bring an end to resistance in the Radfan, and operations were maintained in the area for several months afterwards; but it did begin a process whereby dissident tribes started to sue for peace. The final pocket of

resistance came under heavy attack in November, and the last of the rebel tribes then capitulated.¹⁵⁵

The period encompassing the Radfan campaign in Aden has been characterised as an 'era of proscription'.¹⁵⁶ Yet this was certainly not true from the RAF's perspective. Indeed, the renewed employment of air power on a large scale for internal security purposes during 1964 occurred not because of any revival of enthusiasm for aerial proscription but, once again, because of the fire support requirements of major ground operations. In any case, in appearance, Radfan owed less to the proscription concept than to the sort of punitive expedition that the British Army periodically launched in the 19th century. Mounted in response to a specific terrorist incident in Aden Colony, the operation was, in Lee's words, intended to 'teach' the Radfan tribes 'that they could not challenge the authority of the Federal Government with impunity'. They were to receive 'a proper lesson, and one which it was hoped would have a salutary effect upon



A Blackburn Beverley taking off from Thumier. The airfield played a vital role in the Radfan campaigns



Air-land integration: the Brigade Air Staff Officer's control tent, Thumier

the subversive elements in Aden itself.¹⁵⁷ The tribes concerned were not actively engaged in urban terrorism but were instead singled out because (unlike the urban insurgents) they presented a distinctive target, and because (on the basis of past experience stretching back to 1934) they could be counted on to offer active resistance. Lawlessness among the Radfan tribes was an established fact and had been tacitly accepted by the British authorities for many years.¹⁵⁸

At considerable expense, the Radfan operations dealt with one source of opposition in Aden, but not a very significant one; and, contrary to the more optimistic British expectations, the campaign did nothing to discourage the urban insurgency.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, it merely handed another propaganda weapon to Egypt and Yemen. Moreover, along with subsequent operations in the Dhala

area, the expedition may have played some part in undermining tribal support for the Emir of Dhala, who was an important British ally, even if this was not the decisive factor in his ultimate downfall in 1967.¹⁶⁰ If Radfan exerted any beneficial effects at all, they were in any case quickly nullified by strategic developments. In 1964, the new British Labour government announced that the South Arabian Federation would be granted independence 'not later than 1968', although the UK might retain a base in Aden. The announcement had the effect of creating a deadline for the attainment of Arab nationalist aims, and caused the security situation in Aden Colony to deteriorate more rapidly still. It was followed by a further statement in February 1966, which declared that the Aden base itself was no longer essential. This implied a total British withdrawal, and the removal of British military backing for the Federation and for Aden's traditional rulers.¹⁶¹

In later attempts to keep order, the RAF's role was confined largely to maintaining the operation and security of Aden's main civil and military air bases. There were limited further air operations in western Aden and along the Yemeni frontier, particularly in response to a number of cross-border incursions by Yemeni and Egyptian aircraft. But the RAF could play little direct part in combating the urban insurgency. With minimal intelligence and with the relatively inaccurate weapons of the period, it was virtually impossible to strike insurgents in built-up areas from the air, and aerial reconnaissance was of limited effectiveness.¹⁶² There were leaflet drops, and



No 37 Field Squadron RAF Regiment preparing defences at Thumier



Close air support: a Hawker Hunter provides support for the Federal Regular Army in the Radfan mountains



A Beverley being loaded at Ataq – another forward airstrip in Aden – in 1963



A Hunter of 43 Squadron over Radfan in 1964

helicopters were often used to lift troops to particular trouble spots at short notice, or to position them for cordon searches; fitted with machine guns they also had some deterrent value.¹⁶³

But the RAF's task in Aden increasingly became one of managing withdrawal. The challenge was vastly complicated both by terrorism directed towards the security forces, and by the increasingly bitter struggle between rival political groups in the Federation. Any residual support for the British presence collapsed, even the indigenous police and armed forces becoming unreliable. Force protection gained a heightened importance against this background, as terrorists frequently sought to target airfields and other RAF installations; this was a particularly busy period for the RAF Regiment, although airfield guard duties were also performed by many other RAF personnel. The final British departure from Aden came in November 1967, some months earlier than originally planned.



Delivery of supplies to a remote landing zone in the Radfan mountains



A Belvedere collecting a netted load from Thumier

The nightmare scenario of a fighting withdrawal was at least narrowly avoided, but the Federation collapsed and all the established tribal rulers were overthrown.¹⁶⁴ The new People's Democratic Republic of Yemen afterwards remained a serious threat to British interests in the region as the primary sponsor of the Dhofar insurgency across the border in Oman (see P. 120).¹⁶⁵



Map 8. Borneo

Borneo

Of the various themes that have recurred throughout this study, two have been particularly prominent. We have repeatedly noted the vital importance, first, of suppressing an insurgency before it can take hold, and, second, of isolating insurgents from outside sponsors. Air power would play a critical role in enabling the UK to meet both these challenges in Borneo in the 1960s.

At the beginning of the decade, the island of Borneo was divided between four states. Two, Sarawak and Sabah, were Crown Colonies, while a third, the Sultanate of Brunei, was a British protectorate. The fourth and largest state, Kalimantan (a former Dutch possession), had become part of Indonesia in 1949. It accounted for three quarters of the island's territory, and its frontier with the adjacent British colonies meandered through some 900 miles of dense and mountainous jungle. Sarawak and Sabah were both more developed than Kalimantan, while Brunei had grown rich on the proceeds of her oilfields at Seria. By 1962, British decolonisation was in full swing, and plans had been drawn up to achieve a political union between Sarawak and Sabah on the one hand, and Singapore and Malaya on the other, to forge a 'Greater Malaysia'. But this concept was opposed by nationalist and anti-colonialist elements in the Borneo colonies and Brunei (although Brunei was not included within the scheme), and also by Indonesia. Indonesia had a long-standing interest in bringing the entire island of Borneo into its sphere of influence – if not domination.

Borneo's racial composition was complex. There were several indigenous tribes, which took little interest in politics, although some, like the Kelabits, had a history of close collaboration with the British;^{††} otherwise, the chief Malay presence was in Brunei, and there were substantial Chinese minorities in Brunei, Sarawak and Sabah, including communist elements. Indonesians were by no means confined to Kalimantan, at least 30,000 living in Sabah alone. The 'Greater Malaysia' plan was unpopular among the Chinese and the Indonesians, but political tensions were generated as much, if not more, by socio-economic factors or by the desire for political reform – particularly in Brunei. The complex variety of motives that underpinned the emergence of political opposition

^{††} The Kelabits were foremost among the tribesmen mobilised by British Special Operations forces against the Japanese occupation during the Second World War.

groups in Borneo lie beyond the scope of this narrative. The key point is simply that their presence created obvious potential for cross-border intervention by Indonesia, via Kalimantan.

There was no permanent British military presence in Borneo. There were several small airfields, and the RAF maintained a staging post on the off-shore island of Labuan, which provided at least some potential for therapid deployment of troops to Borneo if necessary, using the air transport resources of the Far East Air Force. But the nearest main operating base was Singapore, which was 400 miles from Kuching airfield in western Sarawak, and 1,300 miles from Tawau in eastern Sabah. Sabah and Sarawak possessed locally-raised forces (the Sabah Field Force and the Sarawak Rangers), but the normal security requirements of the three British colonies were otherwise fulfilled by the police. During 1962, the British authorities in Singapore began to receive intimations that the political opposition in northern Borneo might be preparing some form of active rebellion, focusing on oilfields in Brunei or Sarawak.¹⁶⁶

The uprising began in the early hours of 8 December. It was staged by the so-called North Kalimantan National Army (TNKU), the militant wing of the main opposition party in Brunei, to promote the establishment of an independent confederation of Borneo states, which would have been aligned with Indonesia. With Indonesian assistance, the TNKU had managed to generate a rudimentary military capability, based on a force numbering perhaps 4,000 volunteers. However, by December, the majority of their personnel were still untrained, and the few firearms that they possessed were mostly shotguns. Their plans were also seriously flawed: although there were good reasons for targeting the Sultan of Brunei (as the head of state), police stations (for weapons and ammunition) and the main Brunei oilfield at Seria (as a bargaining counter), the TNKU paid insufficient attention to airfields, which should either have been secured or else placed beyond use. Finally, their activities were poorly co-ordinated: they failed to communicate the decision to launch the uprising to many of their members, so their full strength was not initially brought to bear.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, any significant delay in despatching British forces into northern Borneo to counter the TNKU would have significantly increased their chances of success, especially if their numbers had been swelled by Indonesian sympathisers crossing the border from Kalimantan.

By chance, deployed at Tawau in eastern Sabah in December 1962 were elements of 209 Squadron, operating a Twin Pioneer transport in support of ongoing Royal Navy counter-piracy activities. Their presence, together with the availability of additional light civil aircraft, allowed a small Field Force contingent to be airlifted from Jesselton (now Kota Kinabalu) to Brunei at the first hint of trouble, to assist the police in defending the Sultan's palace and key public buildings. It is clear that there were rebels in the immediate vicinity of the Brunei airport when they landed, for the squadron diary records that 'it was obvious that the safety of the aircraft could not be assured', so they flew on immediately to Labuan. The extra troops helped to ensure that several TNKU objectives were not achieved.¹⁶⁸ However, a number of police stations were quickly overwhelmed, and the rebels soon established control over the Seria oil complex, taking numerous westerners hostage. Only a single police post at Panaga, west of the complex, held out against them. Otherwise, the TNKU rapidly extended their influence across Brunei (outside the capital), into Sarawak, and even into western Sabah.

In Singapore, the British possessed a small-scale rapid response plan, Plan ALE, based on the airlift of two rifle companies into Brunei. This was duly initiated within a matter of hours, and four Beverleys took off during the afternoon carrying elements of 1st Battalion, 2nd Gurkha Rifles. The crew of the leading aircraft were charged with reconnoitring Brunei airfield to establish the viability of a landing there. Doubts were raised by a report from the Labuan control that the rebels had blocked the runway following the earlier Twin Pioneer landing, but the civilian fire brigade cleared away the obstructions before the Beverley arrived, and it was brought down safely, offloading 93 Gurkhas to secure the airfield. The TNKU uprising was now doomed to failure. During 8 and 9 December, 28 air transport sorties reached Brunei, while an all-out effort began at the same time to improve the facilities at Labuan, where personnel, equipment and supplies were delivered by strategic transports such as Britannias, which were too large for the Brunei runway. Elements of the 1st Battalion, The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, and also of 3 Commando Brigade, Royal Marines, were soon arriving to augment the original Gurkha force, and four more Twin Pioneers also deployed to Borneo.¹⁶⁹

To his credit, the initial force commander, Major Lloyd Williams, immediately grasped that time was of the essence, and established two over-riding priorities.

The first, securing Brunei town, was rapidly achieved at a cost of only six casualties (two killed). The second, the recapture of the Seria oilfields was less straightforward. When the Ghurkhas set out for Seria by road on 9 December, they ran into rebel opposition and eventually became bogged down in the town of Tutong.¹⁷⁰ The force commander therefore found himself considering possible airborne alternatives.

Early the following morning, in one of the 209 Squadron Twin Pioneers and with the Brunei Police Commissioner alongside him, he reconnoitred the Seria area. At the Shell airfield at Anduki (east of Seria) it was observed that armed rebels had blocked the runway, but they waved as the aircraft flew past, and showed no signs of hostility. It was later ascertained that they had thought it to be Indonesian – a misidentification based on the fact that the Twin Pioneer's fuselage top was painted red and white, the colours of the Indonesian Air Force. The reconnaissance then continued by investigating a rough grass strip near Panaga, and confirmed subsequently that light aircraft could potentially land there.¹⁷¹ This provided the basis for a plan that has since often been described as audacious, although very different adjectives would doubtless have been used if it had failed. Major Williams decided that the Highlanders should stage simultaneous landings either side of Seria, using Twin Pioneers at Panaga and a single Beverley at Anduki.¹⁷² It must presumably have been calculated that the rebels had left unobstructed a sufficient length of runway at Anduki for a landing to be successfully effected; presumably, too, the troops conveyed to the airfield would have had to remove any obstacles that might have stopped the Beverley from taking off again.

There was minimal time for planning and preparation. Troops practised rapid deplaning, and the exit doors of the aircraft assigned to the operation were removed. But little else could be done before the force took off, soon after midday. It comprised five Twin Pioneers carrying 60 troops, and a 34 Squadron Beverley with 110; the force commander accompanied them in an Army Air Corps Beaver. Although they possessed excellent short take-off and landing characteristics, the Twin Pioneers despatched to Panaga were heavily laden, and the first pulled up only just short of a road ditch at the end the strip. The remaining four were therefore ordered to land in the opposite direction – a feat impossible without the port wing of each aircraft making contact with one of the surrounding trees during the final stage of the approach. They landed safely,

nevertheless, and a single aircraft which became bogged down in soft soil in the middle of the strip was successfully extricated. All of the troops deplaned rapidly, and set out to relieve Panaga police station, which was about two miles to the east, while the five aircraft took off again to complete reinforcement and supply missions to Anduki and Lutong – another trouble spot.¹⁷³

In the meantime, the Beverley approached Anduki. The crew were assisted by a Shell employee who possessed a detailed knowledge of the airfield and its surroundings, and it was also found that the rebels had obligingly cleared the runway, assuming the arrival of airborne reinforcements from Indonesia to be imminent.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the pilot still faced what Sir David Lee described as ‘a particularly hazardous landing’.

He concentrated all his passengers on the lower deck, approached low along the coast line to avoid detection, climbed over trees at the last moment and braked hard on landing using only a quarter of the runway length. The troops leaped out in full battle order and the Beverley executed a short field take off in the same direction, 1 minute, 48 seconds after landing.¹⁷⁵

The aircraft came under small-arms fire but escaped with only minor damage, and the Highlanders soon captured the airfield and its buildings. Reinforcements were already arriving from Brunei by the end of the afternoon, by which time the TNKU were in full retreat.¹⁷⁶ While they were outfought on the ground, their morale was targeted from the air. Fast jets – a Canberra and four Hunters – were used to provide ‘air presence’, in the form of intimidating low passes and mock attacks, while a ‘loud-hailing’ Pioneer called on the rebels to surrender. They had been driven out of Seria by the 13th.¹⁷⁷

On the same day, a no less daring amphibious assault on Limbang was successfully mounted by ‘L’ Company, 42 Commando; but it is worth noting that the troops involved were conveyed to Borneo by air rather than by sea.¹⁷⁸ By the 21st, 3,209 personnel and 113 vehicles had been airlifted into Brunei, along with an assortment of guns and trailers, light Auster aircraft and 524,308lbs of freight. The first four RAF helicopters – heavy twin-engined Belvederes of 66 Squadron – also deployed. They flew directly from Singapore to Kuching, after receiving special clearance for take-off with overload fuel tanks at 19,500lbs



British troops practise deplaning from 209 Squadron Twin Pioneers at Brunei in December 1962

all-up weight, and then transited on to Labuan, which they reached on the 17th. They were found to be fully serviceable, and were put to work immediately. The build-up – which was of course soon augmented by sea-borne reinforcements – allowed British forces to press further into rebel-held areas, and bring all the main towns under their control. On Christmas Eve, a Joint Force Headquarters became operational in Brunei, Major General Walter Walker becoming Director of Operations. Walker was a jungle warfare and counter-insurgency expert, a veteran of both Burma and Malaya, and a strong advocate of jointery.¹⁸⁰

Air power – primarily air transport – played a fundamental part in breaking the TNKU's rebellion in northern Borneo within a matter of days. Mopping up operations continued into the early months of 1963, but the vast majority of the rebels proved to have little stomach for a fight when confronted by professional troops in any strength. Some 3,400 ultimately surrendered, while only 40 were killed; a few doubtless escaped across the border into Kalimantan.¹⁸¹ This phase

of the operation was still ongoing when Borneo was struck by a period of torrential rain, which brought serious flooding to Brunei and parts of Sarawak. Here was an unexpected but very obvious opportunity to win hearts and minds via flood relief, and it was fully exploited, not least through the use of the Beverleys and Belvederes (and other platforms such as Royal Navy helicopters) to bring food and supplies to villages cut off by flood water, and to move the more vulnerable from the worst affected areas. The principle of helping the local population whenever possible, particularly with helicopter lifts and medical evacuations, was followed throughout the Borneo campaign, and exerted a very beneficial effect on the attitude of the island's inhabitants.¹⁸²

Any hopes that the TNKU's defeat would bring operations in Borneo to an end were soon to prove illusory. Having successfully executed a relatively straightforward counter-insurgency, British forces were now to be confronted



Troops prepare to board the single 34 Squadron Beverley used in the assault on Anduki

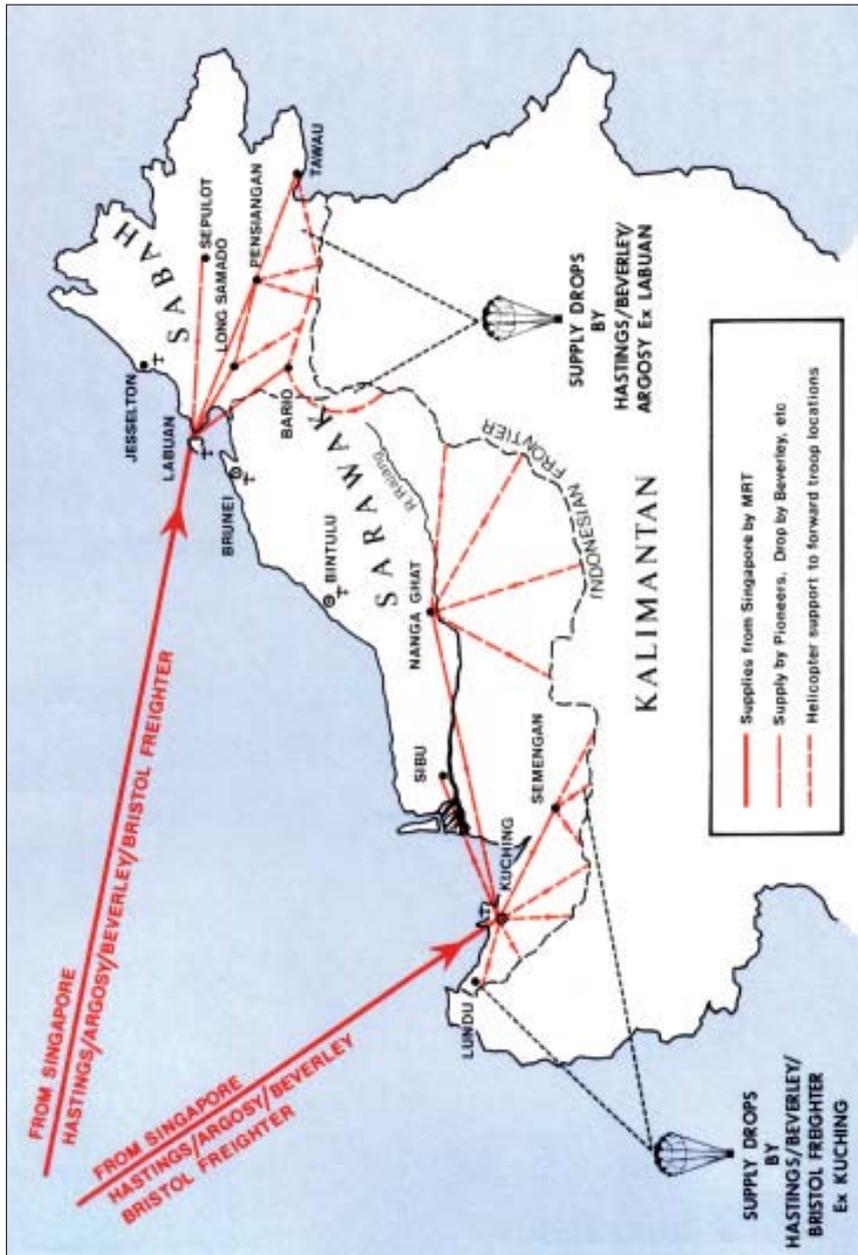
by an infinitely more exacting counter-infiltration task. The potential for cross-border intervention by Indonesia has already been noted. It was fully recognised by Major General Walker, who soon established a thin screen along the frontier using a combined Ghurkha and SAS force. But they were too dispersed to prevent the first significant Indonesian raid, against the police station at Tebedu, Sarawak, on 12 April 1963. The perpetrators were predominantly Kalimantan irregulars – Indonesians, tribal elements and Chinese – trained, led and supplied by the regular military. There was very obvious potential for such operations to be staged to support and encourage the activities of the principal Chinese dissident group in Sarawak, the Clandestine Communist Organisation (CCO), which was thought to number about 2,000 personnel. The cross-border raids initially formed part of a combined military and diplomatic strategy by Indonesia to obstruct northern Borneo's incorporation into Malaysia, which was due to be proclaimed in September.¹⁸³ Walker soon received reinforcements. By the summer he could support his frontier screen with a defence component of five battalions, and indigenous tribesmen were also recruited into the so-called Border Scouts.¹⁸⁴ However, in Borneo's undeveloped jungle and mountain environment, the capability of the ground forces depended substantially on the availability of rotary-wing air lift, and this was insufficient throughout 1963. Deliveries of the new Westland Whirlwind Mk 10 were delayed, so that the planned FEAF helicopter force of two Whirlwind squadrons and one Belvedere squadron was not fully established until August, some months later than originally envisaged. Even then, other actual or potential theatre commitments meant that they could not deploy to Borneo in their entirety. At first, twelve Whirlwinds and 5 Belvederes were made available – a force augmented by a number of Royal Navy Whirlwind Mk 7s and Wessex Mk 1s.

The proclamation of Malaysia in September – with Sarawak and Sabah jointly forming Eastern Malaysia – engendered a level of hostility in Indonesia far beyond British expectations. The cross-border incursions were stepped up, and it became necessary to call in further reinforcements, including two battalions of the Royal Malay Regiment. The mounting intensity of ground operations and the increasing number of troops added to the strain on the helicopter force, and led to the short-notice deployment of more aircraft from 38 Group in the UK during November and December – a further three Belvederes and ten Whirlwinds.¹⁸⁵

The requirement for rotary-wing lift cannot be fully grasped without an understanding of tactical developments on the ground. The initial Army presence along the frontier was based on a chain of platoon bases, from which about two-thirds of the occupants were out on patrol at any one time.¹⁸⁶ They were established at strategic locations along the main infiltration routes although, given the length of the frontier, it was impossible to cover them all. In time, as more troops were deployed forward, many of these bases were enlarged into company-sized forts of considerable strength and sophistication.¹⁸⁷

These defensive positions were sited in some of the most inhospitable and inaccessible country in the world. Their construction and much of their subsequent supply was critically dependent on helicopter lift, as was communication between them, and the movement, reinforcement and relief of the troops that they housed. Helicopters were also the sole means of casualty and medical evacuation, and they were used to move heavy weapons – notably 105mm artillery guns – and other key items of military equipment to and between the various outposts. The availability of helicopters allowed single battalions to be assigned responsibility for a frontage of 100 miles or more, for they provided the means by which troops could deploy rapidly to areas that were under threat, or from where operations were to be mounted. Between the various forts and patrol bases, helipads were constructed every 1,000 yards or so to enable such movements, as well the subsequent re-supply of individual patrols in the field.¹⁸⁸ In this way, the helicopter functioned as a force multiplier. As one Army officer who served in Borneo put it, 'a single battalion with six helicopters was worth more to the Director of Operations than a complete brigade with none.'¹⁸⁹

Despite the enlargement of the force, there were never enough. Furthermore, Borneo's climate imposed severe constraints upon flying, morning mist and bouts of violent turbulence and severe downdraughts later in the afternoon often restricting operations to a period of seven or eight hours per day. Resources had therefore to be husbanded very carefully. Only centralised command could ensure that the available helicopter force was employed with optimal efficiency so that, in the words of the overall joint campaign report, 'The cry for "more aircraft" and in particular "more helicopters" was normally satisfied by increased utilisation and redeployment of the existing force.'¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, there was the usual pressure for forward decentralisation, which appeared less



Map 9. Air supply in Borneo



RAF Labuan in 1965: mainland Borneo is just visible on the horizon

bureaucratic and seemed to hold out the prospect of faster response times to battalions fortunate enough to be allocated aircraft on a semi-permanent basis. Fortunately, the senior land commanders in Borneo fully appreciated that this approach could potentially deny support to those with a genuine and perhaps more pressing need. So, while it was periodically necessary to decentralise command and control, this only occurred as part of a co-ordinated operational policy, and then usually for short periods or for specific purposes.

Vital as the helicopter was in Borneo, rotary-wing activity represented only part of a very much larger air operation designed to sustain the frontier defence line. Singapore functioned as the main operating base, from where a constant stream of Hastings, Argosies, Beverleys and RNZAF Bristol Freighters conveyed the more urgently needed supplies to Borneo's two airheads, Labuan and



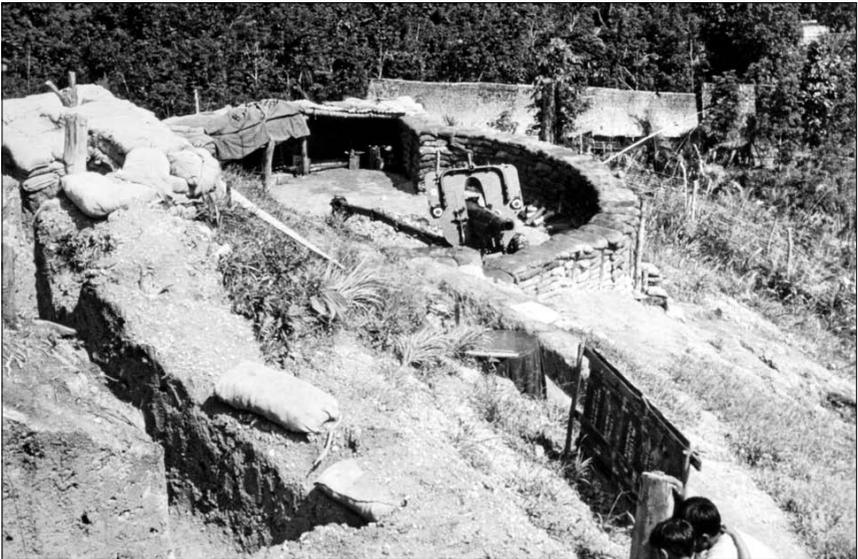
Aircrew briefing in the operations room at Labuan, 1965

Kuching, leaving bulk supplies to be carried by sea. From the airheads, supplies were flown on by Twin and Single Pioneers or by the Belvederes to a series of forward airstrips, constructed by the Royal Engineers, the RAF's airfield construction branch or the troops themselves. Some of these strips were co-located with the larger frontier forts.

Otherwise, supplies were conveyed onward to border posts or to troops on patrol – a task performed either by the helicopters or by fixed-wing aircraft, which would drop their supplies by parachute.¹⁹¹ Over the course of the campaign, a monthly average of over 2,000,000lbs of supplies was delivered by air-dropping alone, and 18 forward bases relied almost entirely on parachuted supplies for a considerable period of time.¹⁹² The practical difficulties involved in dropping supplies to patrols in poorly mapped deep jungle locations are



A 66 Squadron Belvedere lifting a 105mm howitzer; as these weapons could be moved rapidly and at short notice between prepared positions, relatively small numbers were required to protect substantial tracts of territory



A typical artillery position on the Borneo-Kalimantan frontier

difficult to exaggerate. Aircrew were frequently supplied with map references that were inaccurate by distances of several miles, and drop zones were often only marked by a single orange balloon, hoisted above the jungle canopy.¹⁹³

An unusual feature of frontier operations in Borneo was the fact that there was an enemy air threat. Although partly equipped with obsolete Second World War aircraft, the Indonesian Air Force also boasted some more modern Soviet designs, and could potentially have been employed to considerable effect against border defences or other targets such as airfields. Malaysian airspace was violated on a number of occasions after September 1963. So a combined force of RAF Hunters and Javelins was deployed to both Kuching and Labuan to provide permanent day and night all-weather air defence, and a detachment from 65 Squadron also deployed to Kuching with Bloodhound surface-to-air missiles.¹⁹⁴ While their primary role was to deter Indonesian air activity or – if deterrence failed – to intercept Indonesian aircraft, the Hunters could also have been employed in the ground-attack role to support the Army. Both fighters also flew ‘presence’ sorties at low altitude, to deter the enemy and shore up the morale of Commonwealth ground troops, and they escorted transport aircraft on supply-drop missions during periods of heightened tension.¹⁹⁵

It was this system that effectively underpinned northern Borneo’s defence throughout the Indonesian confrontation; without it, the Indonesian challenge simply could not have been contained. It conferred a wide range of tactical advantages upon British and Commonwealth forces against an adversary that fought without air support and with very little airborne logistical backing. The Indonesian incursions were not halted, but their numbers and effectiveness were restricted and, even if they were not at first intercepted, those who crossed the frontier soon found themselves hopelessly vulnerable. They had no re-supply, no reinforcement and no casualty evacuation, and it was difficult to attempt more than the most fleeting attacks without being out-maneuvred by heli-borne pursuit or ‘cut-off’ parties deployed along potential escape routes; they also faced the threat of air attack.¹⁹⁶

Why, then, was Indonesia able to continue mounting incursions on a significant scale for so long? There are two reasons. First, substantial manpower resources were available. While the earlier cross-border raids were overwhelmingly

staged by irregular forces, there was always the option of using regular troops too – a course of action increasingly employed later in 1964, sometimes in direct attacks on border forts.¹⁹⁷ This, in turn, necessitated the expansion of Commonwealth forces, which numbered 14,000 by January 1965, as well as a further enlargement of the helicopter force to nearly 60 aircraft.¹⁹⁸ Second, for the first 18 months of the confrontation, the political sensitivities surrounding the subject of Commonwealth incursions into Kalimantan were such that they were forbidden outright, only the SAS being allowed across the border for intelligence-gathering purposes rather than combat. Although the Commander-in-Chief of British forces in the Far East repeatedly requested that this prohibition be lifted, no concessions were forthcoming. This was a spectacular own goal. It allowed the Indonesians to locate their bases close to the frontier, which in turn gave them abundant opportunities to study the Commonwealth defences, and to identify and exploit their vulnerabilities. The time and place of incursions could be carefully determined to maximise any scope for evading detection and securing surprise. Commonwealth forces were effectively tied to defensive or reactive postures.¹⁹⁹

It would require an Indonesian own goal of comparable magnitude to resolve this acutely unsatisfactory situation. In June 1964, an international conference was organised in Tokyo in an attempt to produce a negotiated settlement to the crisis. Predictably enough, it failed, and Indonesia afterwards implemented a dramatic change of strategy, mounting a number of small-scale raids against Western Malaysia in late August and early September. Although they were easily dealt with, the Malaysian government in Kuala Lumpur was sufficiently alarmed to support a request from Major General Walker that cross-border operations be approved up to a depth of 5,000 yards inside Kalimantan. Once the Malaysians had altered their stance, the British government followed suit. By the end of the year, Walker had the authority to mount pre-emptive attacks into Kalimantan to counter specific raid threats, although it remained necessary for political reasons for these operations to be subject to the utmost secrecy and security, and for the 'minimum force' principle to be observed. In January 1965, the permitted depth was extended to 10,000 yards, and a further concession later raised the limit to 20,000 yards for a small number of particularly important missions. At the same time, there was some relaxation of the rules of engagement concerning cross-border artillery and mortar fire, and the SAS patrols into Kalimantan were permitted to engage the enemy in combat.²⁰⁰



The permanent helicopter base at Nanga Gaat had landing platforms for five helicopters, one large enough for a Belvedere



Nanga Gaat from ground level

Within strict limits, therefore, Walker could now adopt more offensive tactics, and the outcome was a series of operations, staged under the codename 'Claret', which compelled the Indonesians to pull back from many of the bases that they had constructed in the immediate frontier area.²⁰¹ The RAF mounted one or two clandestine night supply-dropping missions over Indonesian territory,²⁰² but the use of offensive air power in support of Claret operations was prohibited, and helicopters were also forbidden to cross into Indonesian airspace, although they were now compelled to operate closer to the (very poorly defined) border than ever before, and to accept the risks involved. One Whirlwind was shot down after mistakenly straying across the frontier in November 1965; sadly, the crew were killed.²⁰³ The Claret operations were accompanied by further strengthening of Sarawak's defences, a three-layer system being constructed in many areas to provide defence in depth.²⁰⁴

This combination of new offensive tactics and enhanced defensive measures effectively determined the outcome of the frontier conflict in Borneo during 1965.²⁰⁵ Even if the incursions continued on a limited scale into the following year, they became even more difficult and expensive to mount, and brought even fewer rewards. Indonesia descended into political and economic chaos in the meantime, and the new government that eventually came to power was quick to conclude that an end to hostilities was essential. On 1 March 1965, the British Commander-in-Chief Far East reported a marked 'decline in Indonesian activity'.²⁰⁶ Although a formal peace treaty did not materialise until August, the pressure on the Kalimantan-Sarawak frontier was negligible by that time.

Inevitably, perhaps, the majority of histories of operations in Borneo during the Indonesian confrontation have focused largely on the role of the Army. The scale and nature of the RAF's contribution is seldom acknowledged or, perhaps, fully appreciated. But it is a fact that the Army's achievements during the conflict were sustained in some way, shape or form by no fewer than 18 RAF Squadrons. This significant commitment was one of the major factors necessitating the extensive development of Kuching and, especially, Labuan. Having originally functioned as a staging post, with a handful of detached airmen, Labuan was ultimately transformed into a fully independent RAF station accommodating more than 1,000 airmen and as many as 30 aircraft of 9 different types. By the middle of 1965 Labuan was handling 2,500 aircraft movements per month, and was working round the clock for seven days per

week.²⁰⁷ Without the commitment of air power on the scale reflected by these figures, a very much larger British and Commonwealth ground component would have been required in Borneo to achieve broadly the same effect as the component actually deployed, which comprised 15 battalions^{††} at its peak, and which was always heavily outnumbered by the Indonesian forces on the other side of the border.

It is not surprising to learn that ten of the participating RAF squadrons provided rotary or fixed-wing air transport. But the high cost of confronting the Indonesian air threat provides rather more food for thought, given the prevailing modern-day tendency to assume that control of the air will not be contested. In an environment where no such assumption could be made, it was necessary to deploy detachments from four fast jet squadrons as well as the SAM squadron. Also, of course, the necessary air defence infrastructure was required on the ground for aircraft reporting and control. Despite the fact that no hostile aircraft were intercepted (although many fleeting airspace violations were reported), these measures had to be sustained for three years.

Of the other roles performed by RAF squadrons, two were particularly important. The first was of course reconnaissance. At the beginning of the confrontation, accurate and detailed maps of the frontier and of Kalimantan were non-existent. Such mapping was essential to the successful prosecution of ground operations, and had to be generated from scratch, using aerial imagery collected by the Canberra PR7s of 81 Squadron. The task absorbed the entire squadron effort from May to September 1963, when deteriorating weather forced them to suspend their operations. By that time about 80 per cent of the survey area had been covered. Beyond this, there was inevitably a high demand for tactical imagery from the troops deployed along the border, which 81 Squadron had to satisfy. Throughout the confrontation, they supplied the ground forces with high-quality photographs showing (for example) jungle tracks, frontier crossing points, and buildings potentially used by the enemy. Interpretation facilities were established at Labuan so that imagery could be processed and issued with the absolute minimum of delay.

^{††} 11 British and Gurkha battalions, 3 Malaysian and 1 Australian; there were also SAS, SBS, Australian SAS, New Zealand Ranger, mechanised and artillery units, the equivalent of two Field Force battalions and about 1,500 Border Scouts.



Two helicopters landing at another forward outpost in Borneo in 1965



An Armstrong Whitworth Argosy of 215 Squadron executing a low-level supply drop in Borneo



The view from a Belvedere as it approaches a temporary landing pad at a frontier base in Borneo, 1965

The second indispensable task was long-range maritime reconnaissance, which was undertaken by the Shackletons of 205 Squadron, and which played a pivotal part in the broader and highly successful maritime effort to protect some 1,500 miles of coast from Indonesian infiltration by sea. 'Their ability to radar search areas of sea and, particularly during darkness, to home RN vessels on to suspect contacts enabled very limited naval forces to maintain an effective cordon sanitaire in sensitive sea areas.'²⁰⁸

The tendency of historians to look for 'models' governing the successful prosecution of small wars and counter-insurgencies has been noted previously in this study, and Borneo provides a further illustration of the trend. Inevitably,

given the general parameters of the conflict, its timing and its location, some authors have sought to compare the British approach favourably with America's experience in Vietnam.²⁰⁹ And yet, while there is ample justification for much of the praise heaped on the British for their ultimate victory in Borneo, comparisons with other conflicts must be objective if they are to be useful, weighing all of the factors involved rather than the select few that ostensibly support a predetermined thesis. And no account of the Borneo conflict should draw hard and fast conclusions without acknowledging the veritable catalogue of blunders perpetrated by the UK's adversaries, which substantially eased the counter-insurgency and counter-infiltration tasks.

Some of these have already been considered. The initial rebellion in Borneo paid insufficient attention to the capture of airfields, and was poorly co-ordinated. It is equally true, however, that there was a disastrous lack of co-ordination between the insurgents and the Indonesians, who provided no support or reinforcements to the TNKU during their brief and unsuccessful struggle. Furthermore, whereas the TNKU anticipated widespread popular



A Belvedere deploying a Bloodhound surface-to-air missile to Kuching airfield



Supply drop from a 34 Squadron Beverley to the outpost at Pa Main, Borneo, in 1965; the orange drop zone marker and at least one helicopter landing platform are also clearly visible

support for their insurgency, the broader population in the event displayed minimal enthusiasm for their cause. Another key mistake was that, when the Indonesians did begin mounting operations along the border, their approach was incremental, and this allowed British defences to be strengthened and tactics refined before larger and more sophisticated incursions were attempted. Moreover, the infiltrators' poor and sometimes brutal treatment of tribal elements in the frontier area of Sarawak alienated a potentially valuable source of support, and facilitated British efforts to win hearts and minds. Beyond this, the Indonesian government failed to attract significant international support. Their diplomatic and military postures caused most of the more influential



Another of the ubiquitous Shackletons, this time a 205 Squadron aircraft responsible for patrolling the seas off Borneo

states in the region to identify Indonesia as the aggressor, and this impression was then reinforced by the raids on Western Malaysia, which were also counter-productive because they caused the restrictions on cross-border operations by Commonwealth forces in Borneo to be relaxed.

In addition to the various errors made by Indonesia and the rebel groups in Borneo, the cards were in some respects stacked in the UK's favour. Few countries possessed such a substantial reserve of jungle warfare experience and expertise, gained during the Malayan Emergency, the Burma campaign in the Second World War and many years of colonial garrison duty in the Far East.²¹⁰⁵⁵ No less important, however, was the availability of British troops in theatre in considerable numbers at the beginning of the insurgency, and the means to transport them to Borneo within a matter of hours. If the insurgents had been allowed even a little more time to consolidate and expand their influence, with significant cross-border support from Indonesia, the British would have faced an infinitely more complex and challenging task, which might in turn have necessitated very different operational and tactical responses from those actually employed. In

⁵⁵ A British Jungle Warfare School had also been maintained in theatre since the Second World War.

short, if we are to accept Borneo's status as a 'model', we have also to count on multiple enemy mistakes and, for friendly forces, the availability of certain critical advantages. This seems more than a little presumptuous.

Oman: Dhofar

When the British mission visited Oman in 1958 (see above), it was agreed, among other things, that the UK would actively assist in the development of the Omani armed forces. This led directly to the formation of the Sultan of Oman's Air Force (SOAF) 'as an integral part' of those forces in the following year.²¹¹ The RAF provided virtually all the personnel and infrastructure initially required (in the UK), and subsequently seconded personnel to the SOAF in Oman, including the new air force's commanding officer. All pilots were either serving RAF officers on secondment or ex-RAF contract staff. The SOAF's headquarters was established at Bait-Al-Falaj, near Muscat; all their support facilities were generated under RAF guidance, while a leading RAF contractor, Airwork Services Ltd, provided maintenance and industrial support for their first aircraft, which were armed Provosts (for training and subsequently ground attack) and Pioneers (for liaison and transport). The latter were replaced by De Havilland Beavers in 1962.

The SOAF regularly operated out of RAF airfields such as Masirah and Salalah, but also constructed rudimentary landing strips for use as advance bases for rearming and refuelling, so as to improve their potential radius of action. This was, of course, very much in keeping with RAF practice elsewhere. By the mid-1960s the Beavers had developed a wide range of capabilities, including troop transport, freight transport, photo-reconnaissance, visual reconnaissance, casualty evacuation, supply dropping, parachute supply dropping, and mortar and artillery transportation; they also had the capability to function as air observation posts (AOPs).²¹²

Unrest continued in Oman during the early 1960s with the backing of Saudi Arabia, but at such a low level that there was no real scope for SOAF involvement for some time. However, in March 1964, rumours of a possible rebel landing on the Batinah coast provided an opportunity for a limited amount of reconnaissance activity, in co-ordination with patrolling by the Oman Gendarmerie on the ground and the Royal Navy at sea. By the end of the month the threat had been discounted. The second half of the year witnessed a series of mining and shooting incidents in the rugged and mountainous Dhofar region (the far southwest) perpetrated by the nationalist Dhofar Liberation Front, and an Omani Army detachment was therefore sent to Salalah in November, along with SOAF support in the form of one Beaver and two Provosts. The rebels then



Map 10. Middle East in 1974

withdrew to Saudi Arabia but they were again found to be infiltrating Dhofar in considerable numbers by May 1965, and so troops were once more deployed, along with a SOAF detachment of two Beavers and two Provosts. Over the next few months the detachment fulfilled firepower demonstration, ground attack and reconnaissance tasking, but their most important role proved to be aerial re-supply for the ground forces, who had to operate in exceptionally remote and inhospitable terrain. Their job was complicated by the onset of the monsoon in mid-June, which severely curbed flying activity and led to the premature withdrawal of half the detachment.

After a very brief respite in August, two aircraft resumed operations over Dhofar; in early 1966 they conducted their first successful air-to-ground attacks against a rebel convoy. Following an unsuccessful attempt on the Sultan's life in April, he ordered a major offensive against the rebels, to which virtually the whole of the SOAF was for a short time committed, but the Salalah detachment was subsequently scaled down to three aircraft and to all intents and purposes became permanent.²¹³

A relative stalemate later in 1966 and in early 1967 was broken after the Six Day War and the British departure from Aden, soon followed by the creation of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) – immediately adjacent to Dhofar. These developments led to the provision of significantly improved training and supplies for the insurgents, not only from Arab sponsors but from communist China and later the USSR. Further encouragement came from the British government's announcement in January 1968 that it intended to withdraw all UK military forces from the Gulf by 1971. In May, the Sultan's troops suffered a major defeat at Deefa; by September, the rebels were operating under the control of extreme left-wing elements, and had renamed themselves the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG). They made further gains over the next twelve months, consolidating their influence across the Jebel Dhofar and cutting the road that served Salalah from the north.²¹⁴

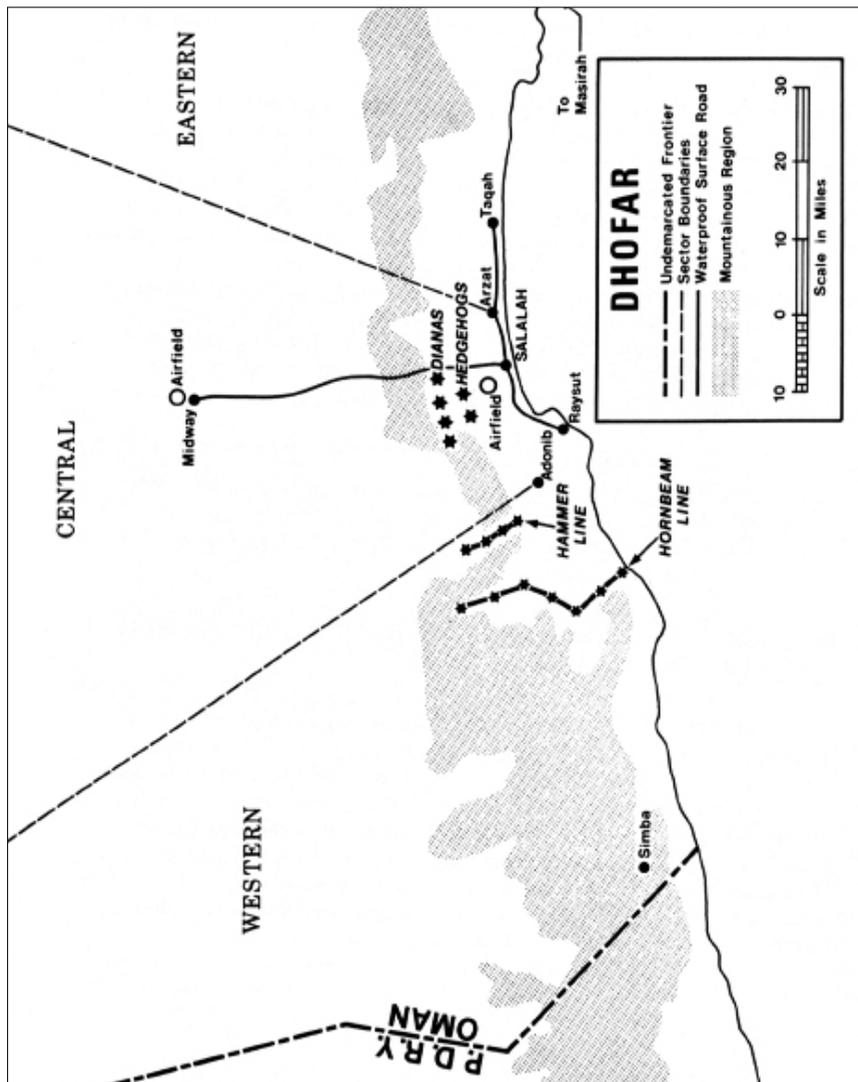
By the end of the decade, the limitations of the 1958 agreement between the UK and Oman were becoming all too obvious. Oman still lacked the capacity to provide for her own defence and security; her armed forces were too small, and they remained critically dependent on British leadership and training. There was even direct British support in the form of 'presence' – i.e., exercises, firepower

demonstrations and so-called 'flag waves'. British transport aircraft assisted with the carriage of both troops and supplies, RAF Regiment units manned two inner defensive strongpoints known as 'Hedgehogs' to protect Salalah and its all-important airfield, while British Army officers commanded Omanis along an outer line of defences known as 'Dianas'.²¹⁵ The SOAF acquired their first combat jet aircraft (BAC Strikemasters) in 1969, and some new equipment was also procured for the Sultan's ground forces, but they were nevertheless unable to contain the threat from PFLOAG and they had by 1970 yielded virtually the whole of Dhofar to the insurgents except for Salalah itself, Taqah and Mirbat. Then, in June 1970, attacks on army posts at Nizwa and Izki by an entirely separate group raised the prospect of a renewed challenge in central Oman.²¹⁶

No improvement in this situation seemed likely while Said bin Taimur remained Sultan. Unless Oman's potential oil wealth^{***} was unlocked and used to fund vigorous economic and social development programmes – with a particular focus on Dhofar – so generating more active popular support for the sultanate, insurgent activity was certain to increase. Oman might then fall to a communist-backed regime, with all that this implied in terms of oil supply and the movement of shipping through the Straits of Hormuz. It is only against this background that the coup of 1970, which brought Said's son Qaboos to power, can be understood.

Qaboos – who had received part of his education in Britain and who had served in the British Army – immediately offered a political amnesty to his father's opponents, governmental reform in Dhofar, and a nationwide programme of economic development. But it was also made clear that the campaign against those who continued to oppose the sultanate would be conducted more effectively, not least via the expansion and re-equipment of the Omani armed forces. Immediately after the coup, an SAS team deployed to Oman and submitted their own recommendations for defeating the insurgency, including civil (as opposed to military) administration in Dhofar, a hearts and minds campaign and improved intelligence gathering and collation.²¹⁷ These events set Oman on course both to pacify Dhofar and to achieve the more general economic, social and governmental modernisation essential to long-term stability.

^{***} Large-scale oil production began in Oman in 1967.



Map 11. The Dhofar region in 1974

From 1970 to 1973, the armed forces went through a five-fold increase in numbers – a process that also necessitated the involvement of many more British military personnel on secondment and ex-military personnel on contract. The SOAF was now completely re-equipped, as the Strikemasters (doubled in number) were joined by Caribou, Skyvan and Viscount transports, and by AB205 and 206 helicopters.²¹⁸ They were to play a key role in the subsequent Dhofar campaign, central to which was the construction of a number of fortified lines of platoon and company-sized outposts extending from the coast into the Jebel. Given the nature of the terrain and the absence of roads, the building and manning of these fortifications relied very largely on airlift, the Skyvans and the helicopters' making an especially vital contribution to the deployment, supply, periodic reinforcement and withdrawal of their garrisons.²¹⁹ Beyond this, it was also essential to isolate the insurgents from their supporters in the PDRY, in so far as this was possible, and air reconnaissance inevitably provided an important means to this end. Salalah-based Beavers were responsible for the main visual and photographic reconnaissance tasks, which included the location of rebel positions and the surveillance of their supply lines, and they also carried out mapping and survey work.

Meanwhile, the Strikemasters flew what were essentially armed reconnaissance and presence sorties – referred to as 'harassing fire and reconnaissance' – along the supply routes. Suspicious targets would be attacked; otherwise aircraft might strike known PFLOAG stores caves or the water holes on which their camel trains depended.²²⁰ They also mounted many pre-planned attacks and provided close air support, most famously during the battle of Mirbat in July 1972, when their intervention prevented a combined SAS and Omani team from being overwhelmed by a large force of guerrillas. This single action is often seen as a key turning point in the Dhofar war.

Additionally, there were deeper strikes against rocket and artillery positions within the PDRY, which regularly targeted outposts, landing zones and airstrips in the border area; cross-border operations would always be assigned to contract rather than seconded RAF pilots. At Salalah, Strikemasters were maintained on at least 'green' readiness states, meaning that they could take off within ten minutes of the scramble bell ringing; during army operations this alert status would be raised to red for one pair of aircraft, which were held at readiness to scramble in just four minutes.²²¹ In 1975, Jordan bequeathed some



A SOAF Strikemaster over Dhofar

31 Hawker Hunters to Oman, which took over the bulk of offensive tasking from the Strikemasters. They were promptly committed to a five-week campaign across the Yemeni border, targeting supply routes and gun positions.²²²

A veritable host of other tasks was executed by the SOAF between 1970 and 1975. Helicopters supported the projection of force by heliborne assault, by the deployment of cordons, and by the movement of patrols into forward areas, from where they could flush out and mop up the enemy. And they were used both to move and supply the so-called *Firqats* – SAS-trained units comprising former Dhofari guerrillas, who had agreed to fight for the Sultan after taking advantage of the amnesty, and who frequently operated in deep locations. They were also employed to move artillery batteries, to direct their fire, to direct air strikes and to provide both casualty and medical evacuation.²²³ The Beavers dropped leaflets and flew what were known as ‘Hawkeye’ operations with bilingual intelligence officers and newly surrendered insurgents who were prepared to betray their former comrades. These helped to pinpoint the whereabouts of hitherto unknown PFLOAG elements, which could then be targeted by offensive platforms. Another tactic involved using Beavers and helicopters to attract fire from the insurgents at night, so inducing them to reveal their positions.²²⁴ The larger transports – primarily the Viscounts – brought troops and supplies into Dhofar from northern Oman.

From 1973, the SOAF's capacity to discharge these many and varied tasks was augmented by the deployment of Imperial Iranian Army AB 205s and 206s, and Iranian Air Force Chinooks, C-130s and Phantoms. In 1974, the RAF also sent a detachment of four 72 Squadron Wessex helicopters to Dhofar, primarily to assist with the construction of the '*Hornbeam*' defensive line. Between April and November they logged a total of 1,487 flying hours and carried 2,750 tons of freight and 15,000 passengers, as well as conducting 16 casualty and 25 medical evacuations, and participating in six artillery moves and six large-scale offensive operations.²²⁵

Dhofar was by no means a hazard-free environment for the SOAF's loan and contract aircrew. Quite apart from the rugged nature of the terrain and the inevitably small and rudimentary landing strips, a feature of the climate was an annual monsoon period extending from June through to September, which was characterised by low cloud, drizzle and poor visibility. The majority of air operations were flown at low altitude, so there was a constant threat from small-arms fire, which was, for example, responsible for the loss of Flight Lieutenant



A 72 Squadron Wessex over Dhofar in 1974, with SOAF colours and markings



A Wessex delivering supplies to a Hornbeam Line position in 1974



The shadow of a Wessex close to a Dhofar landing zone that has been covered by a neoprene membrane to protect the aircraft from dust and sand



Tauri Attair airstrip in Dhofar's eastern sector; a wrecked Skyvan is visible at the upper end of the strip, while the aircraft near the lower end is a Caribou

M.J. Drybanks's Strikemaster in July 1973.²²⁶ The danger increased further in the later months of 1975, when the first Soviet-supplied SAM-7s were launched by the guerrillas. In all, 23 SAM-7 launches resulted in the loss of one Iranian helicopter and two Strikemasters – one in a crash-landing. The helicopter crew were killed but both Strikemaster pilots escaped unhurt.²²⁷ In total, four loan and three contract (and former-RAF) officers lost their lives during the conflict.²²⁸

Via the integration of this extensive air effort with the campaign on the ground, the Sultan's authority was gradually restored across Dhofar. In tandem with the military operations, the region became the focus of a far-reaching civil aid programme implemented at first by the armed services and then by civilian teams under service protection, who worked within the fighting zones while they were being cleared. They distributed food and medical aid from tents and temporary buildings, put up mosques and schools, and dug wells. Gradually,



Helicopters flying in formation near Salalah in 1974, to celebrate the Sultan's birthday

as the insurgents were pushed back, these tasks could be passed on to the civil authorities.²²⁹ Through such means, the territory under rebel control was steadily reduced until, by the end of 1975, hostilities had all but ceased. Over the next few years, SOAF modernisation continued via the acquisition of new aircraft and infrastructure, including an integrated air defence system, but serving or former RAF personnel would continue to play a prominent role – particularly as aircrew – for many years to come.²³⁰

The war in Dhofar has inevitably been the subject of much scholarly interest in recent years. Once again, the British campaign is often held up as an example of 'best practice', which can usefully inform those responsible for prosecuting current and future COIN operations, illustrating how 'a small number of Western officers and Special Forces trainers can lead an indigenous force to victory in counterinsurgency.'²³¹ The low British profile has drawn particular praise. Policy-makers are said to have fully grasped the importance of legitimacy; the PFLOAG had to be defeated, in appearance at least, by the Omanis themselves. The British also successfully identified the underlying political causes of the insurgency, and these were subsequently addressed as part of an integrated



Firqats in Dhofar with captured weapons of Soviet and Chinese origin

COIN strategy; in the process they successfully exploited the antipathy exhibited by much of the Dhofari population towards the insurgents' hard-line Marxism.²³²

On the other hand, it has also been acknowledged that there are difficulties involved in seeking to apply 'the lessons of Dhofar' too rigidly to other conflicts, for this was another COIN campaign that benefited from a number of particular advantages. The media were almost totally excluded; external sponsorship for the insurgency – always intermittent – declined after 1970; there were long-standing political and cultural links between the UK and the host-nation; there were few constraints on the use of heavier firepower, for Dhofar was so sparsely populated that there was minimal scope for inflicting non-combatant casualties; and there was a clear and simple mission – the defeat of the insurgency – whereas COIN operations are often complicated by other agendas, such as state reconstruction or counter-narcotics.²³³ It could perhaps be added

that the PFLAOG was a relatively small organisation – an offensive element of approximately 2,000 guerrillas plus 3,000 militia used for holding ‘liberated areas’. Once the campaign against them was enlarged – through the expansion and modernisation of the Omani armed forces, increasing British support and the arrival of the Iranians – there could only, ultimately, be one outcome.

One interesting aspect of this debate is that air power is not apparently viewed as a central factor in the suppression of the Dhofar insurgency. This is a classic reflection of the extent to which its contribution is so often both underestimated and taken for granted. In reality, the COIN strategy pursued in Dhofar would have been wholly impracticable had the Sultan’s forces and their British and Iranian allies not been able to draw on a broad range of air capabilities. Among other things, the absence of such capabilities would have:

- 1) Compromised the sustainability of the coastal lodgement area
- 2) Rendered impossible the extension of fortified lines into the Jebel, and their subsequent maintenance, with the available manpower and transport resources
- 3) Removed the means of undertaking airborne manoeuvre – a critical advantage which the security forces possessed over the insurgents
- 4) Removed a key source of fire support and the only source that could be rapidly deployed right across the area of operations at very short notice
- 5) Removed a vital source of intelligence, surveillance and observation, which could be similarly deployed
- 6) Removed one of PFLAOG’s critical disadvantages, namely that all their activities had to be shaped by the need to avoid aerial observation and attack
- 7) Seriously impeded post-conflict reconstruction and development activity

Clearly, then, one very obvious lesson from the Dhofar war is that air power may in particular environments have a central role to play in counter-insurgency warfare. Obviously, the fundamental task of the various air forces involved was

to support a broad range of ground activities, but it could still be argued with hindsight that this particular campaign – more than any other so far considered – adds weight to the case for generating a distinct operational air plan for counter-insurgencies similar to the plans normally prepared for conventional operations. When circumstances particularly favour the exploitation of air power, it may well end up being underutilised if (as is so often the case in COIN operations) its use merely takes the form of a series of disparate and ad hoc responses to short-term land requirements.

Conclusion

The starting point for considering the British application of air power in small wars and counter-insurgencies in the period covered by this study should be a clear understanding of the way it was employed before the Second World War. To reiterate, ***the use of air power for offensive and lethal effect was very much the exception rather than the rule***; the reconnaissance role predominated although others, such as troop carrying, re-supply and communications were also important; air and ground operations were often closely integrated. An accurate grasp of air power's use in the interwar years allows post-war developments to be placed in their correct context. It becomes possible to appreciate fully how its utilisation by the UK was moulded by changes in the strategic environment, in doctrine and – perhaps most of all – in capabilities. While the use of offensive air power in small wars and insurgencies might have become increasingly problematic for both political and doctrinal reasons, it also became far less necessary once it was possible to deploy troops into remote locations by air, and to sustain them from the air.

Yet the air transport revolution did not alter some of the less palatable realities associated with counter-insurgency warfare. The elementary question continued to apply: 'What happens next?' The cost of sustaining ground troops in such locations was very high and, while deployed, they inevitably made targets for insurgents and other irregular adversaries. Their very presence sometimes encouraged resistance.

The fact that both advantages and disadvantages remained inherent in any potential course of action only serves to reinforce the central theme of this study, which is the extreme difficulty of generalisation. Too many of the theoretical and doctrinal frameworks supposedly founded upon the lessons of past conflicts actually abuse history, and take insufficient account of the numerous variables that may shape small wars and counter-insurgencies. Yet these can have radical implications for the conduct of hostilities, undermining any scope for applying hard and fast rules. Without question, the most important variables were political: the armed services could only work within constraints imposed from London, and these differed considerably from one conflict to the next. Others included local politics, resource issues, enemy tactics, external support for the insurgents, or the lack

of it, and environmental factors. Needless to say, all of these things affected not only the general application of military capabilities, but also the specific use of air power.

The British response to the Malayan insurgency was underpinned by strong political backing from London, and was constrained neither by local political pressures nor close international scrutiny. When the Emergency began, UK forces were already in theatre in substantial numbers, and the British government was fully prepared to accept the commitment of extensive military resources to Malaya over a protracted period of time; indigenous security forces were also raised and maintained on a very considerable scale. By contrast, the MRLA was numerically weak, and it lacked external support. Any attempt to explain the successful outcome of British counter-insurgency operations in Malaya must, first and foremost, acknowledge these basic truths.

As far as air power was concerned, while air transport clearly emerged as the RAF's predominant role, the environment in Malaya combined with a number of operational and tactical disadvantages to render air reconnaissance and offensive air missions particularly unrewarding. Nevertheless, reconnaissance did play an important part, and the continued employment of bombing for effect was a notable feature of British operations, as was the periodic use of air strikes against areas beyond the reach of the Army. Recent studies have tended to underestimate the contribution of offensive air power in these two capacities.

In Kenya, the political climate was similar in many respects. Again, there was a strong UK commitment to the defeat of the insurgency, again, there were few local political constraints and, again, there was minimal interference by the UN or by other world powers. There was, however, one very obvious difference compared with Malaya, in that British operations had to be conducted from a much smaller resource base, despite the larger scale of the Mau Mau organisation. This was reflected in the repeated demands of the Director of Operations for offensive air support, which he believed could offset his shortage of ground troops to some extent. During 1954, he deliberately used offensive air power to maintain pressure on insurgents around the Aberdares and then Mount Kenya, first to free up troops for other essential tasks, then to ensure the continuity of operations at a time when seasonal

rains restricted the scope for ground activity. Successful as these tactics were, the Mau Mau also made some important mistakes and suffered from several key handicaps, which unquestionably contributed to their ultimate defeat.

Oman differed fundamentally from both Malaya and Kenya. During the 1950s, there may have been a strong desire in London to assist Sultan Said, but political constraints both in the UK and in theatre otherwise ruled out a large-scale military response to the insurgency, or a far-reaching hearts-and-minds initiative, and matters were further complicated by the fact that the insurgents enjoyed the backing of external sponsors who, in turn, possessed the potential to mobilise UN support or draw in other major powers. Yet they were few in number, isolated geographically and confined to a location that lay beyond the visibility of the world's media. Between them, these factors explain the British government's decision to rely far more heavily on air power, working in conjunction with small numbers of British troops and locally-raised forces. No alternative approach was politically acceptable. Ironically, just as an Army officer called for more air support in Kenya, so did an RAF officer ultimately propose mounting a large-scale ground operation in Oman, but the government again balked at the political and financial implications. However, at that point it became apparent that the insurgency was weakening to such an extent that it could be suppressed without a change of strategy extending beyond the deployment of the SAS.

In Cyprus, the political background was, if anything, even more complex. While the UK was ostensibly determined to defeat EOKA, two NATO allies located in the eastern Mediterranean were also embroiled in the politics of the island, and both provided at least some support for rebel groups. The UN also took a close interest, and events in Cyprus could easily be monitored by the media. EOKA may have been a small organisation, but they enjoyed very widespread passive support and succeeded in extending their activities through both rural and urban environments. The directive given to Governor Harding left him with few potential courses of action other than those employed, the military emphasis being on 'boots on the ground' on a very substantial scale, while the RAF provided (primarily rotary wing) air transport, reconnaissance and maritime reconnaissance, and maintained military and civil air communications.

Harding achieved a marked reduction in EOKA terrorism, but there was never likely to be an outright cessation of hostilities until the British government changed direction. Even when this occurred, EOKA at first sought to influence the negotiations over Cyprus's future by intensifying their operations again, albeit on a far more limited and short-term basis. The events leading up to EOKA's final ceasefire suggest that air power might perhaps have played a more prominent role in earlier counter-insurgency operations in Cyprus, especially through the provision of more surveillance and reconnaissance, but the key air lessons of long-term tactical significance concerned the many and varied uses of helicopters.

Aden was in some ways similar to Cyprus, in so far as the course of events was again shaped by rigid political constraints imposed from London. But whereas political concessions ultimately helped to resolve the crisis in Cyprus, such concessions as were granted in Aden came too late and were far too limited. The British misunderstood the true nature of the opposition they were facing; Aden's relative tranquillity between the wars lulled them into a false sense of security, and they were consequently slow to realise in the 1950s that they were confronted by a challenge to their presence in the region that extended far beyond the localised tribal unrest of earlier years. It was generated by a complex interaction between economic, social, political and cultural processes in both Aden and Yemen, which was never likely to be addressed by military measures alone. In the absence of a bold political strategy, the insurgency was allowed to emerge and gain a foothold before it was subjected to any very energetic countermeasures, and the inadequacy of political reform subsequently left the military committed to a series of operations in remote parts of the Western Aden Protectorate while, at the same time, the British position in the strategic nerve-centre of Aden Colony was being fatally undermined. Foreign support for the insurgency – from Yemen and Egypt – accelerated this process.

Air power was employed logically and effectively in successive operations in Aden during the late 1950s and early 60s, with air transport again playing an increasingly prominent role. By the late 50s, offensive air power was chiefly being used to support ground forces, either by shaping the battlespace or by providing direct fire support, and there is no objective basis for arguing that there was an excessive reliance on independent air operations, which somehow fanned the flames of the insurgency. There are more grounds for contending

that, in the absence of political concessions, military action in general tended to be ineffective, or even counterproductive, but this was probably true of the Radfan campaigns more than any others, and they were primarily conceived as ground expeditions.

Borneo was by contrast a success story. However, it must again be recognised that the British were well placed to meet the challenge that confronted them in December 1962, and that their adversaries were guilty of a series of critical blunders. Initial operations against the insurgents were not subject to significant political constraints, and the fact that so many potentially active rebels were rounded up at this time simplified the British task later. The internal security threat was reduced to the point at which it could largely be passed to the indigenous police and paramilitaries, allowing the bulk of the available military effort to be concentrated on the counter-infiltration task along the frontier.

Having said that, the British government was not prepared to sanction a response on the scale previously witnessed in Malaya. Given the nature of the military task, this meant that resources had to be deployed with the utmost care. It was air power that delivered the required (very substantial) economies in manpower utilisation, rotary and fixed-wing air transport sustaining a defence line that, in the past, would have tied up far more ground troops, with all that this implied in terms of logistical support. The counter-infiltration task might have been assisted further via offensive air strikes against insurgent bases on the other side of the frontier, but it was judged that RAF raids against targets on Indonesian soil might produce damaging political fall-out. Combat air power nevertheless played an important role through the provision of deterrent effect, which negated any significant challenge from the Indonesian air force, and presented a serious threat to enemy forces crossing the frontier in any strength.

The final campaign considered in this study – Dhofar – found the British wrestling with many of the same problems that they had confronted in Oman in the previous decade, but with even fewer resources at their disposal, and in a political environment that was, if anything, more restrictive. Again, there could only be a small British footprint; again, it could not be expected that Sultan Said would modernise his antiquated and oppressive regime. Yet, as in Cyprus, there was no prospect of defeating the insurgency without far-reaching political

change. The coup of 1970 – and Qaboos's succession – provided the essential means to this end.

Thereafter, the counter-insurgency campaign in Dhofar was overhauled in terms of both scale and scope, and in a manner that has rightly drawn much praise. However, the task of suppressing the insurgency was once again facilitated by a variety of factors that could by no means be taken for granted in other conflicts, and it was also dependent on the exploitation of air power to an extent that few accounts have previously recognized. Air transport sustained the lodgement area, and enabled ground forces to operate in exceptionally remote, inaccessible and inhospitable terrain, and air reconnaissance kept enemy territory and supply lines under observation. Moreover, via surrogacy – the formation of an entirely separate air force that was in many ways the RAF in everything but name – it was also possible to circumvent some of the restrictions that had governed the use of offensive air power in Borneo, so that it could be exploited in a broad range of operations extending from Dhofar itself into the PDRY.

In summary, then, no two small war/counter-insurgency scenarios are ever likely to be the same, and it is vitally important to be aware of the many potential variables, which inevitably have profound implications for any counter-measures employed. Furthermore, before a successful operation is upheld as an example for the future, we need to acknowledge the extent to which its outcome may have been influenced by exceptional factors – whether advantages for one side, or disadvantages for the other. Historians have not always highlighted these very clearly. This is not to deny that we can learn from the past; on the contrary, history can and should be an important weapon for those responsible for directing campaigns comparable to those examined in this study. But it must be considered objectively if it is to perform this role. If it is manipulated in order to support preconceived notions of 'best practice', its value will be substantially reduced.

Of the various flaws in the published history of British small wars and counter-insurgencies in the post-World War II era, few loom as large as the consistent tendency to underestimate the role of the RAF. All too often, small wars are simply treated as a matter for ground forces. At worst, in recent years, this misconception has sometimes been used as a basis for not integrating air properly into operational command and planning mechanisms. Yet air power was, in fact, a critical element in the succession of peripheral conflicts in

which the UK became involved during the decolonisation period. Without the RAF, their course would have been very different and the Army's task would have been far more difficult and expensive; it is highly unlikely that Aden would have been the only instance of outright failure. The RAF played a fundamentally important part in British operations in Malaya, Oman, Aden, Borneo and Dhofar, and it exerted a significant influence upon the decisive phases of the campaigns in Kenya and Cyprus.

The process by which air power functioned as a force multiplier – already clear between the World Wars – became far more pronounced, as air transport substantially reduced the volume of troops and equipment required for internal and frontier security operations. Air power made ground forces far more flexible and dynamic, allowing much faster and easier deployment, movement, reinforcement and relief, and dramatically easing the many difficulties previously associated with their sustainability in deep or remote locations. Heli-borne insertion provided the basis for new and far more effective counter-insurgent tactics, ranging from airborne assault to cordon-and-search.

Beyond the various developments in air transport, air reconnaissance continued to provide British forces with very valuable intelligence support by helping to monitor insurgent activities and dispositions. Moreover, in forms ranging from surveillance, to photo-reconnaissance, to armed reconnaissance and indeed maritime air reconnaissance, it was also fundamental to the effective isolation of insurgent groups. Where this was achieved, it contributed substantially to their defeat; where it failed, notably in Aden, it was a major factor in their victory. Additionally, extensive aerial survey operations allowed literally thousands of miles of previously uncharted territory to be mapped in detail to provide an elementary enabler to the troops on the ground.

Finally, the RAF's very flexible offensive capabilities could be exploited in a wide variety of ways. Offensive aircraft could bring direct fire support to ground troops in remote locations very rapidly, and they could be used to strike deep targets, beyond the reach of land forces. In certain circumstances, too, they might still be used for 'substitution', if it was considered necessary to maintain pressure on insurgents, and ground troops were either unavailable or unable to deploy into areas where they were active. Potentially, offensive air power could also be used for effect – via shows of force or air presence.

More broadly, in all the operations considered here, air power represented the principal British asymmetric advantage. It provided a means of conducting operations that could not be emulated by the vast majority of the UK's adversaries, while at the same time shaping their tactics by compelling them always to be on guard against the threat of airborne or air attack, aerial surveillance or, in the case of hostile air forces, interception. None of this is meant to suggest that air power in any sense prevailed independently, or obviated the requirement for arduous and often protracted campaigning on the ground; nor is there any intention to belittle the Army's considerable achievements in a series of extremely tough conflicts. But it is vital to understand the importance of the RAF's contribution as well. Ultimately, the lesson of history is that armies and air forces complement one another in small wars, and this in turn underlines the importance of the closest possible integration of air and land command, control and planning from the very outset. It is only upon this basis that committed force elements can be optimally employed to achieve co-ordinated, efficient and mutually reinforcing effects that are properly understood by all concerned.

ANNEX A: RAF Field Intelligence Officers^{†††}

Despite the fact, therefore, that the entire length of the frontier with the Yemen and Saudi Arabia was divided by the Government of Aden into sections, each of which was placed under the supervision of an Assistant Adviser, who was an officer of the British Colonial Service, the Commander of the British Forces, Arabian Peninsula, was not satisfied. What he really needed was an RAF element on the ground at the scene of action. Someone must be there who would compensate for the notorious and grave inaccuracies which abounded in all the existing maps of south Arabia, someone who would work on a 'Royal Air Force frequency'; someone must be on the spot who could be relied upon to subjugate political 'card-sharping' to objective military expediency. So it was that, to fill this need, the RAFIO system was born in 1955 ...

The qualifications and qualities required in those who would fill these appointments were sufficiently unusual to make the Air Ministry despair of ever finding suitable applicants, each of whom would have to be a volunteer, have an excellent working knowledge of Arabic, be willing to spend periods of up to three months living in the frontier area with the possibility of not finding another European to speak with during the whole of that time, be of flight lieutenant rank, combine the attributes and 'know-how' of explorer, mountaineer, surveyor, motor mechanic, diplomat and boy scout, have a stomach of iron and, most important of all, should have an unsinkable sense of humour. Somehow the Air Ministry managed to find three men initially. Meanwhile, it had been agreed that training for prospective RAFIOs should include the long Intelligence course, a two-month introduction to the intricacies of the Arabic language at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and the ten-month course in Arab affairs at the Middle East centre for Arab Studies in the Lebanon ...

The scale to which I was equipped on my return to Aden was as extraordinary as it was useful. It was refreshingly unorthodox. Besides a Landrover fitted with HF and VHF, W/T and R/T radio sets, there was a small mountain of kit ranging from hurricane lamps and Arab coffee cups on the one hand, through a paraffin refrigerator and a palm-frond mat to a hand bearing compass and fully self-

^{†††} From Anon, 'A Man in a Kufiyyah: Some Personal Reflections on the Life of A Royal Air Force (Field) Intelligence Officer', Air Ministry Secret Intelligence Summary, September 1959, Vol. 14, No. 9.

loading camera on the other. I was introduced to my Arab crew (a cook/bearer and a wireless operator, both of the Aden Protectorate Levies), instructed in the use of ciphers, lectured on the diagnosis and treatment of the more obvious medical complaints, shown how to survey a potential landing ground, taught how to mend a broken Landrover. I was briefed on the political situation in my area, advised about quick cures for dysentery, warned by all sorts of improbable people of the general perfidy of the Arab and sent to have my urine tested. It was then, with no ordinary feeling of relief that, carrying a supply of food for three people for three months, we drove to Khormaksar airfield at dawn one day, climbed into our Valetta aircraft, in which our Landrover and trailer and all our gear were already stowed and lashed, and finally escaped to the sanity of the desert.'

Notes

¹ On the RAF's role in the Far East see Air Chief Marshal Sir David Lee, *Eastward: A History of the Royal Air Force in the Far East, 1945-1972* (HMSO, London, 1984); on the Middle East see Lee, *Flight from the Middle East: Being a history of the Royal Air Force in the Arabian Peninsula and adjacent territories, 1945-1972* (Air Historical Branch monograph, Ministry of Defence, 1978); on the Mediterranean theatre see Lee, *Wings in the Sun: A History of the Royal Air Force in the Mediterranean 1945-1986* (HMSO, London, 1989); on the RAF's responsibility for the British nuclear deterrent see Humphrey Wynn, *The RAF Strategic Nuclear Deterrent Forces: their origins, roles and deployment, 1946-1969* (HMSO, London, 1994).

² RAF Air Publication (AP) 1300, *Royal Air Force War Manual Part 1: Operations* (unpublished doctrine manual, Air Ministry, 1950), chapter 11, para 3-4.

³ *Ibid.*, para 16-25.

⁴ *Ibid.*, para 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, para 10, 31-54.

⁶ *Ibid.*, para 5-6, 55-56.

⁷ *Ibid.*, para 13.

⁸ RAF AP 1300, *Royal Air Force War Manual Part 1: Operations* (unpublished doctrine manual, Air Ministry, 1957), chapter 12.

⁹ Air Ministry Pamphlet 375, *Internal Security Air Operations*, issued by the Air Ministry (ACAS (Ops)), March 1961 (AHB Copy).

¹⁰ M. Hughes, 'A Very British Affair? British Armed Forces and the Repression of the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936-39 (Part 1)', <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/handle/2438/3866>, pp. 4-5, accessed 21 April 2010.

¹¹ For a broad introduction to the Emergency, see RAF AP 3410, *The Malayan Emergency* (Ministry of Defence monograph, 1970), Chapter 1; data on the number of incidents perpetrated by the insurgents is at Annex H, p. 163.

¹² B. Hoffman and J. Taw, *Defence Policy and Low-Intensity Conflict: The Development of Britain's 'Small Wars' Doctrine During the 1950s* (RAND, Santa Monica, 1991), p. 23; James S. Corum, 'Air Power and Counter-insurgency: Back to Basics', in Joel Hayward (ed), *Air Power, Insurgency and the "War on Terror"* (RAF Centre for Air Power Studies, Cranwell, 2009), p. 210.

¹³ James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars* (University Press of Kansas (2003), p. 198.

¹⁴ Julian Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning* (Faber and Faber, London, 1967), pp. 75-78.

¹⁵ AP 3410, *The Malayan Emergency*, p. 157, Annex A and Annex B.

¹⁶ Lee, *Eastward*, p. 157.

¹⁷ AP 3410, *The Malayan Emergency*, p. 142; Bruce Hoffman, *British Air Power in Peripheral Conflict, 1919-1976* (Rand, Santa Monica, 1989), p. 57.

¹⁸ AP 3410, *The Malayan Emergency*, p. 160, Annex E; Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning*, p. 66.

¹⁹ AP 3410, *The Malayan Emergency*, p. 163, Annex H; A. Mumford and C. Kennedy-Pipe, 'Unnecessary or Unsung? The Strategic Role of Air Power in Britain's Colonial Counter-Insurgencies', in Joel Hayward (ed), *Air Power, Insurgency and the "War on Terror"*, p. 68.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 70-72.

²³ Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, p. 194.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 199.

²⁵ Calculated from AP 3410, *The Malayan Emergency*, Annex R, pp. 176-177.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-36, 148.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33, 48-49, 148-149.

²⁹ AP 1300 (1928), ch 14, para 17; AP3410, *The Malayan Emergency*, p. 39.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-41.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54, 62.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 149.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 65, 69.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61-62.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 68-70; author's italics.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 69.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁴³ See the first AHB study in this series.

⁴⁴ AP 3410, *The Malayan Emergency*, pp. 176-177, Annex R.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

⁴⁶ Calculated from AP 3410, *The Malayan Emergency*, pp. 176-177, Annex R.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100, 105, 107, 108-113.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 123-134.

⁴⁹ Hoffman and Taw, *Defence Policy and Low-Intensity Conflict*, pp. 23-30.

⁵⁰ Paget records that the 'active' wing of the Mau Mau numbered between 12,000 and 15,000 personnel; no fewer than 11,503 lost their lives during the rebellion. See Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning*, pp. 96, 104.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 90-91, 96.

⁵² AIR 20/9530, Report on RAF Operations in Kenya, 1953-1955, 4-5.

⁵³ Mike Holmes, 'Harvards v Mau Mau', *Flypast*, March 2000, p. 77. Jefferies had been Air Liaison Officer during one of Wingate's long-range penetration missions behind Japanese lines.

⁵⁴ WO 276/333, Royal Air Force Bombing Raids: Emergency Directive No. 6, 3 May 1953.

⁵⁵ Ray Hill, 'Harvards vs the Mau Mau', *Flypast*, June 1998, p. 42.

⁵⁶ Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, p. 68.

⁵⁷ Report by 49 Sqn, Mau Mau Operations in Kenya, Nov 53-Jan 54, Appendix C (AHB copy).

⁵⁸ Alan Rufus Waters, 'The Cost of Air Support in Counter-Insurgency Operations: The Case of the Mau Mau in Kenya', *Military Affairs*, Vol. 37, No.2, October 1973, pp. 96-99. Waters was in fact a former Kenya police officer, and his analysis could thus hardly be considered objective. His critique of air power during the Mau Mau rebellion, and his view that air support should have been subordinated to the police, reflect the tensions that evidently arose over the control of the KPRW, and police resentment following the Wing's ultimate subordination to the theatre air commander. For an interesting recent reassessment of the role of air power during the Mau Mau insurgency, see Wing Commander Steve Chappell, 'Airpower in the Mau Mau Conflict: The Government's Chief Weapon', *Royal Air Force Air Power Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Spring 2011, pp. 75-92. Note, however, the statistical error on p. 84, which states that the Lincolns dropped nearly six million bombs during the campaign; this should read six million pounds (i.e. weight) of bombs.

⁵⁹ Lee, *Flight From the Middle East*, p. 69; Mike Holmes, 'Harvards v Mau Mau', p. 77. The original pilots of 1340 Flight were instructors from the defunct Rhodesian Air Training Group, and at least one augmentee from the UK was a fighter pilot.

⁶⁰ Report by 49 Sqn, Mau Mau Operations in Kenya, Nov 53-Jan 54, Appendix A.

⁶¹ Lee, *Flight From the Middle East*, p. 69; report by 49 Sqn, Mau Mau Operations in Kenya, Nov 53-Jan 54, p. 2.

⁶² Ibid., Appendix D.

⁶³ Statement on RAF and Air Statistics Kenya (AHB copy).

⁶⁴ Report by 49 Sqn, Mau Mau Operations in Kenya, Nov 53-Jan 54, Appendix D.

⁶⁵ 'Unseen Death to the Mau Mau', *Sunday Post*, 31 July 1955 (AHB copy).

⁶⁶ Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 70, 75.

⁶⁷ 'Unseen Death to the Mau Mau', *Sunday Post*, 31 July 1955.

⁶⁸ Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 73-74.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁷¹ Statement on RAF and Air Statistics Kenya.

⁷² Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 65, 68-69.

⁷³ Spencer Mawby, 'From Tribal Rebellions to Revolution: British Counter-Insurgency Operations in Southwest Arabia 1955-67', *Electronic Journal of International History*, Article 5, para 3.

⁷⁴ Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 110-111.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-119.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 120-122.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126.

⁷⁸ See Parliamentary debates on Oman on 22 and 23 July 1957;

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1957/jul/22/central-oman-disturbances#S5CV0574PO_19570722_HOC_224;

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1957/jul/23/central-oman-situation#S5CV0574PO_19570723_HOC_266;

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1957/jul/22/disturbances-in-central-oman#S5LV0205PO_19570722_HOL_90;

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1957/jul/23/disturbances-in-central-oman#S5LV0205PO_19570723_HOL_225; all accessed 15 April 2011, author's italics.

⁷⁹ John B. Meagher, *The Jebel Akhdar War, Oman, 1954-1959*, globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1985/MJB.htm, pp. 5-9, accessed 15 April 2011.

⁸⁰ Colin Richardson, *Masirah: Tales from a Desert Island* (Scotforth, Lancaster, 2003), pp. 192-200.

⁸¹ <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1957/nov/01/her-majestys-most-gracious-speech>, accessed 15 April 2011.

⁸² Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 130-131.

⁸³ http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1958/jun/18/oman-situation, accessed 15 April 2011.

⁸⁴ http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1958/nov/10/oman

situation, accessed 15 April 2011.

⁸⁵ http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1959/feb/11/royal-air-force-operations-muscat-and, accessed 15 April 2011.

⁸⁶ Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 131-132.

⁸⁷ Anon, 'A Man in a Kufiyyah: Some Personal Reflections on the Life of a Royal Air Force (Field) Intelligence officer', *Air Ministry Secret Intelligence Summary*, October 1959, Vol. 14, No. 10, pp. 17-18.

⁸⁸ Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 132-133.

⁸⁹ Mawby, 'From Tribal Rebellions to Revolution', para 23-26.

⁹⁰ Peter Dye, 'The Jebel Akhdar War: The Royal Air Force in Oman', *Royal Air Force Air Power Review*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Winter 2008, p. 29.

⁹¹ Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, p. 133. The RAF's Bristol Sycamore was too vulnerable to small-arms fire from the ground, and too light to provide a sufficiently rapid build-up of ground troops within the Jebel; the use of larger Royal Navy Whirlwinds would have necessitated the deployment of a commando carrier in the Gulf of Oman – an undesirable measure for both political and financial reasons.

⁹² Lee, *Wings in the Sun*, p. 108.

⁹³ See, for example, James S. Corum, *Training Indigenous Forces in Counter-insurgency: A Tale of Two Insurgencies* (US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, March 2006), pp. 32-34. Corum avoids any mention of the reduction of insurgent activity during 1957 – a development that completely undermines the central thesis of his study.

⁹⁴ <http://www.roll-of-honour.com/cgi-bin/cyprus.cgi>; accessed 9 December 2010. The limitations of this roll of honour must be clearly acknowledged. Details of how personnel died were not available in every case (although, for RAF personnel, it is known that the roll provides details for all deaths that resulted from EOKA action). There is of course no information on the roll about personnel wounded but not killed by EOKA, nor about the many Cypriot civilians killed or wounded, nor about other terrorist actions, such as sabotage. The roll nevertheless offers a picture of the insurgency that is both clear and consistent with other sources held by AHB.

⁹⁵ Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning*, pp. 122-125.

⁹⁶ James Corum, 'Air Power and Counter-insurgency: Back to the Basics', pp. 212-213.

⁹⁷ Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning*, pp. 128, 145-147.

⁹⁸ Statement of British Army Personnel in Cyprus, 31 March 1955 – 31 December 1960 (AHB copy).

⁹⁹ The poor general level of preparation is reflected not only in the casualties they sustained through EOKA action, but in the extremely high attrition rate that resulted from other causes. The road-traffic accident rate was exceptionally high, and losses were also sustained from negligent weapons discharges, 'friendly-fire' and similar incidents, and swimming accidents. The British Cyprus Memorial contains the names of some 371 military personnel who died on Cyprus during the insurgency, but the official figures released at the end of the Emergency record that EOKA was responsible for only 105 British service fatalities. The recently prepared Cyprus roll of honour suggests a slightly higher figure of 121. The Cyprus Memorial records the names of 69 RAF personnel who died, but the official British report on the Cyprus Emergency states that EOKA inflicted only 16 of these fatalities. See <http://www.roll-of-honour.com/cgi-bin/cyprus.cgi>, accessed 9 December 2010, <http://britishcyprusmemorial.org/about>, accessed 10 December 2010; TNA WO 106/6020, Report on the Cyprus Emergency, 31 July 1959, Annex C.

¹⁰⁰ TNA AIR 27/2752, 38 Squadron F.540, August 1955, September 1955.

¹⁰¹ David Carter, 'Revealed at Last: The Secret War at Sea', <http://www.britains-smallwars.com/cyprus/Davidcarter/rnsecretwar/secretwar.html>, accessed 10 December 2010.

¹⁰² Lee, *Wings in the Sun*, pp. 109-111.

¹⁰³ Anon, 'Travel Control at Nicosia Airfield', *Air Ministry Secret Intelligence Summary*, April 1957, Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 14-15.

¹⁰⁴ Anon, 'Terrorism in Cyprus: Part I – The Makarios-Grivas Conspiracy', *Air Ministry Secret Intelligence Summary*, October 1957, Vol.12, No. 10, pp. 10, 12.

¹⁰⁵ This claim is made in James Corum, *Training Indigenous Forces in Counter-insurgency*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁶ Anon, 'Terrorism in Cyprus: Part II – Counter-Terrorist Operations', *Air Ministry Secret Intelligence Summary*, December 1957, Vol. 12, No.12, pp. 14-15.

¹⁰⁷ Anon, 'Travel Control at Nicosia Airfield', *Air Ministry Secret Intelligence Summary*, April 1957, Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 14-15.

¹⁰⁸ Anon, 'Terrorism in Cyprus: Part II', pp. 14-15.

¹⁰⁹ J.R. Dowling, *RAF Helicopters: The First Twenty Years, Part 1* (unpublished official narrative, Air Historical Branch, 1987), pp. 141-143.

¹¹⁰ Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning*, p. 135. For a detailed study of intelligence see Panagiotis Dimitrakis, 'British Intelligence and the Cyprus Insurgency', *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2008).

- ¹¹¹ Dowling, *RAF Helicopters: The First Twenty Years, Part 1*, pp. 143, 146.
- ¹¹² Flight Lieutenant (later Squadron Leader) Peter Fahy, 'Sycamores in Cyprus', draft manuscript written for the *Bristol Review* (1958) (AHB copy), p. 11.
- ¹¹³ Dowling, *RAF Helicopters: The First Twenty Years, Part 1*, p. 147.
- ¹¹⁴ Anon, 'Terrorism in Cyprus: Part II', p. 13.
- ¹¹⁵ Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning*, p. 135.
- ¹¹⁶ Anon, 'Terrorism in Cyprus: Part I', p. 12.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12; Lee, *Wings in the Sun*, pp. 116-117.
- ¹¹⁸ Army Department brief on Cyprus, 16 March 1955 to April 1962 (AHB copy). No British civilians were targeted between January 1957 and October 1958; see Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning*, p. 138.
- ¹¹⁹ Lee, *Wings in the Sun*, p. 117.
- ¹²⁰ Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning*, pp. 136-137.
- ¹²¹ Statement of British Army Personnel in Cyprus, 31 March 1955 – 31 December 1960.
- ¹²² Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning*, p. 136.
- ¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 137-138. In November 1956, EOKA mounted 416 attacks, which killed 40 people.
- ¹²⁴ Lee, *Wings in the Sun*, pp. 118-119.
- ¹²⁵ TNA WO 106/6020, Report on the Cyprus Emergency, 31 July 1959.
- ¹²⁶ Lee, *Wings in the Sun*, pp. 115-116, 118-120; P.R. Richardson, 'Whirlwind Operations in Cyprus', *Army Air Corps Association Journal*, Vol. 1, No.1, Spring 1959, pp. 35-37.
- ¹²⁷ Terrorist action accounted for the deaths of 12 security force personnel in October, but 5 in November and only 2 in December, who died in the same mine explosion. See <http://www.roll-of-honour.com/cgi-bin/cyprus.cgi>.
- ¹²⁸ Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning*, p. 139.
- ¹²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹³⁰ Dowling, *RAF Helicopters: The First Twenty Years, Part 1*, p. 148.
- ¹³¹ Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 110-137, 148-162, 204.
- ¹³² The first significant deployment of British Army troops in Aden after the Second World War occurred in 1955, when 1st Battalion Seaforth Highlanders participated in operations along the Wadi Hatib. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Army presence increased considerably. See Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, p. 147.
- ¹³³ Spencer Mawby, 'From Tribal Rebellions to Revolution', para 9.
- ¹³⁴ Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 142-148.

¹³⁵ Anon, 'A Man in a Kufiyyah', pp. 24-26.

¹³⁶ TNA AIR 27/2729, 8 Squadron F.540, January 1958.

¹³⁷ Mawby, 'From Tribal Rebellions to Revolution', paras 11-12.

¹³⁸ Ibid., paras 14-15; Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, p. 201.

¹³⁹ Air Vice-Marshal M.L. Heath, 'Stability in the Arabian Peninsula', *Royal United Services Institution Journal*, May 1960, p. 179; see also 'Yemen: The Imam's Peace', *Time Magazine*, 14 September 1959 and 'Aden: Truce in the Desert', *Time Magazine*, 29 February 1960. The former article records that the decisive factor was the Imam's visit to Rome for medical treatment early in 1959: 'No sooner was the Imam gone than his troops mutinied, his courtiers began to intrigue, and tribal chieftains began to fight out their ancient grudges against each other.'

¹⁴⁰ Heath, 'Stability in the Arabian Peninsula', p. 179.

¹⁴¹ Mawby, 'From Tribal Rebellions to Revolution', paras 16-20; Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, p. 196.

¹⁴² Mawby, 'From Tribal Rebellions to Revolution', Paras 21-28.

¹⁴³ TNA AIR 27/2729, 8 Squadron F.540, August 1959. Although not the only squadron to participate in these operations, 8 Squadron was always the first to be called on, and was by far the most regularly involved.

¹⁴⁴ Mawby, 'From Tribal Rebellions to Revolution', para 26.

¹⁴⁵ TNA AIR 27/2729, 8 Squadron F.540, September 1959-March 1960.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., April-May 1960.

¹⁴⁷ TNA AIR 27/2771, 37 Squadron F.540, August 1959 to May 1960.

¹⁴⁸ The Lower Yafa operations extended from May to August 1961. See TNA AIR 27/2729, 8 Squadron F.540, 1956-1960; Air 27/2900, 8 Squadron F.540, 1961-1965.

¹⁴⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federation_of_South_Arabia, accessed 18 April 2011.

¹⁵⁰ Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, p. 202.

¹⁵¹ The topic of legitimacy has been a major focus for much recent writing on counter-insurgency warfare; most notably, legitimacy is described as 'the main objective' in the current US Army and Marine Corps doctrine on counter-insurgency operations. See Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Headquarters, Department of the Army, December 2006), paras 1-113 to 1-120.

¹⁵² The 8 Squadron and 208 Squadron Operations Record Books present a similar picture in this regard, recorded operational weapon releases being confined to just one month (July 1963) over the two-year period. See TNA AIR 27/2900, 8 Squadron F.540, 1961-1965, <http://www.radfanhunters.co.uk/208-1962.htm>, and <http://www.radfanhunters.co.uk/208-1963.htm>, accessed 15 April 2011.

¹⁵³ Julian Paget, *Last Post: Aden 1964-67* (Faber and Faber, London, 1969), p. 49.

¹⁵⁴ Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 209-211.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 212-216.

¹⁵⁶ Mawby, 'From Tribal Rebellions to Revolution', para 29.

¹⁵⁷ Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, p. 204.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 202; CD 109, Report on the operations carried out from Aden against the Quteibi tribe from the 22nd March to the 21st May 1934, p. 13 (AHB copy).

According to this latter source, the arrival of an RAF armoured car section in the Radfan during the air proscription operation of 1934 was assumed by the tribes to herald the appearance of a substantial ground force. 'As soon as the prospect of a force to which they could offer active resistance was presented to them, an assembly of the whole Jebel Radfan tribal confederacy at once agreed to bring the whole force of all the tribes in the confederacy to the aid of the Quteibis in the event of a land attack.'

¹⁵⁹ Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, p. 217.

¹⁶⁰ Mawby, 'From Tribal Rebellions to Revolution', para 39.

¹⁶¹ Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 220, 227.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 220-229.

¹⁶³ J.R. Dowling, *RAF Helicopters: The First Twenty Years, Part 2* (unpublished official narrative, Air Historical Branch, 1987), pp. 302-303.

¹⁶⁴ Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, Chapter 13.

¹⁶⁵ J.R. Dowling and P.R. Wood, *The RAF Wessex Detachment in Oman* (unpublished official narrative, Air Historical Branch, 1977), p. 5.

¹⁶⁶ Lee, *Eastward*, pp. 193-196.

¹⁶⁷ E.D. Smith, *Counter-Insurgency Operations 1: Malaya and Borneo* (Ian Allan, London, 1985), p. 48.

¹⁶⁸ TNA AIR 27/2992, 209 Squadron Operations Record Book, December 1962.

This sortie has been the subject of much confusion in the published literature; more than one source maintains that it took place on 7 December, before the uprising began. However, the Operations Record Book clearly records the date as the 8th, with the landing at Brunei occurring at 1340 local time. See also Chris Hobson, 'The Brunei Revolt, Part 1', *Air Clues*, July 1996, p. 277.

¹⁶⁹ Lee, *Eastward*, pp. 197-199; TNA AIR 27/2992, 209 Squadron Operations Record Book, December 1962.

¹⁷⁰ Smith, *Malaya and Borneo*, p. 50.

¹⁷¹ TNA AIR 27/2992, 209 Squadron Operations Record Book, December 1962.

¹⁷² Smith, *Malaya and Borneo*, p. 52. Smith states that the runway at Anduki was

not 'obstructed in any way' but this is contradicted by the 209 Squadron diary, which records that 'the airstrip was blocked and occupied by some rebels.'

¹⁷³ TNA AIR 27/2992, 209 Squadron Operations Record Book, December 1962; Lee, *Eastward*, p. 200.

¹⁷⁴ TNA AIR 27/2992, 209 Squadron Operations Record Book, December 1962.

¹⁷⁵ Lee, *Eastward*, p. 200.

¹⁷⁶ TNA AIR 27/2992, 209 Squadron Operations Record Book, December 1962.

¹⁷⁷ Lee, *Eastward*, p. 201.

¹⁷⁸ Smith, *Malaya and Borneo*, p. 52.

¹⁷⁹ Lee, *Eastward*, pp. 198-199; Dowling, *RAF Helicopters: The First Twenty Years, Part 2*, pp. 319-320.

¹⁸⁰ Smith, *Malaya and Borneo*, p. 54.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁸² Dowling, *RAF Helicopters: The First Twenty Years, Part 2*, p. 320.

¹⁸³ Smith, *Malaya and Borneo*, pp. 55-57.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 59, 61.

¹⁸⁵ Dowling, *RAF Helicopters: The First Twenty Years, Part 2*, pp. 320-323.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

¹⁸⁷ Smith, *Malaya and Borneo*, p. 68.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85; Dowling, *RAF Helicopters: The First Twenty Years, Part 2*, pp. 324-326.

¹⁸⁹ Smith, *Malaya and Borneo*, p. 61.

¹⁹⁰ The Joint Report on the Borneo Campaign, 18 November 1966 (AHB copy), p. 40.

¹⁹¹ Lee, *Eastward*, pp. 194, 207-209, 230. Naval air assets were under the operational control of the Air Commander.

¹⁹² The Joint Report on the Borneo Campaign, 18 November 1966, p. 75.

¹⁹³ TNA AIR 27/2992, 209 Squadron Operations Record Book, July 1963.

¹⁹⁴ Lee, *Eastward*, pp. 205, 265.

¹⁹⁵ Roger Annett, *Drop Zone Borneo: The RAF Campaign 1963-65* (Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2006), p. 71.

¹⁹⁶ Smith, *Malaya and Borneo*, pp. 61, 63, 83.

¹⁹⁷ Lee, *Eastward*, p. 210.

¹⁹⁸ Smith, *Malaya and Borneo*, p. 75; Dowling, *RAF Helicopters: The First Twenty Years, Part 2*, pp. 329-330.

¹⁹⁹ Lee, *Eastward*, p. 215.

²⁰⁰ Smith, *Malaya and Borneo*, pp. 72-73.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-80.

- ²⁰² Annett, *Drop Zone Borneo*, pp. 141-142.
- ²⁰³ Dowling, *RAF Helicopters: The First Twenty Years, Part 2*, p. 324.
- ²⁰⁴ Smith, *Malaya and Borneo*, pp. 75-76.
- ²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- ²⁰⁶ Lee, *Eastward*, p. 221.
- ²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 217-218, 228.
- ²⁰⁸ The Joint Report on the Borneo Campaign, 18 November 1966, p. 40.
- ²⁰⁹ Smith, *Malaya and Borneo*, pp. 103-105.
- ²¹⁰ According to Dowling, 'for the helicopter crews, many of whom had operated in the Malayan emergency of the 1950s, the similarity of the operating conditions ... was heightened by the fact that there was often mutual personal recognition between the RAF helicopter pilots and the SAS troops who now met each other again in jungle clearings exactly like those in which they had last met in Malaya ten years before.' See Dowling, *RAF Helicopters: The First Twenty Years, Part 2*, p. 319.
- ²¹¹ Dowling and Wood, *The RAF Wessex Detachment in Oman*, p. 4.
- ²¹² P.A.D. Williams, manuscript entitled *Background History to the Sultan of Oman's Air Force*, 31 May 1966 (AHB copy).
- ²¹³ Williams, *Background History to the Sultan of Oman's Air Force*.
- ²¹⁴ Walter C. Ladwig III, 'Supporting Allies in Counterinsurgency: Britain and the Dhofar Rebellion', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 19, No 1, March 2008, pp. 63, 67.
- ²¹⁵ Brief on Royal Air Force of Oman, AHB 5 file 'Sultan of Oman's Air Force'; 51 Squadron RAF Regiment Operational History, AHB 5 file '51 Squadron RAF Regiment'; Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 263, 265, 267, 280; Dowling and Wood, *The RAF Wessex Detachment in Oman*, p. 6.
- ²¹⁶ Ladwig, 'Supporting Allies in Counterinsurgency', pp. 70-71.
- ²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72; Geraint Hughes, 'A "Model Campaign" Reappraised: The Counter-Insurgency War in Dhofar, Oman, 1965-1975', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 32, No.2, p. 282.
- ²¹⁸ Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, pp. 211-212.
- ²¹⁹ Dowling and Wood, *The RAF Wessex Detachment in Oman*, pp. 5-6.
- ²²⁰ Richardson, *Masirah*, pp. 278, 280.
- ²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 279.
- ²²² Squadron Leader John Clementson, 'Eagles of Oman', *Armed Forces*, March 1989, pp. 137-138.
- ²²³ Dowling and Wood, *The RAF Wessex Detachment in Oman*, pp. 27-36.

²²⁴ Richardson, *Masirah*, p. 278.

²²⁵ Dowling and Wood, *The RAF Wessex Detachment in Oman*, p. 1.

²²⁶ Information supplied by AHB(5).

²²⁷ Richardson, *Masirah*, pp. 281-282.

²²⁸ Colonel B.M. Lees (British Defence Attaché, Muscat) to MOD Principal Personnel Officers' Secretariat, 2 January 1985, AHB 5 file 'RAF in Arabian Gulf: Air Forces Gulf and Dhofar War'.

²²⁹ P. Tremayne, 'Seven Years On: Dhofar', *RUSI Journal*, Vol 127, No 3, September 1982, p. 45.

²³⁰ For two personal accounts by RAF officers who served with the SOAF, see Group Captain Geoff Brindle, 'Loan Service with the Sultan of Oman's Air Force', and Wing Commander Denis Grey, 'A Personal Account of Service with SOAF in the Dhofar War', *Journal of the Royal Air Force Historical Society*, Vol. 49, pp. 117-133.

²³¹ Ladwig, 'Supporting Allies in Counterinsurgency', p. 82.

²³² *Ibid.*, pp. 78-82; Hughes, 'A "Model Campaign" Reappraised', pp. 300-303.

²³³ Hughes, 'A "Model Campaign" Reappraised', pp. 298-299.

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Produced by Air Media Centre, HQ Air Command. 0241_11AJ

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ISBN: 978-0-9552189-9-6